

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

ATLANTA (GEORGIA) POLICE DEPARTMENT



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Introduction

The Atlanta (Georgia) 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

Encompassing 133 square miles, the city of Atlanta is the capital and most populous city of the state of Georgia, with a population of approximately 465,230.¹ The APD has an authorized strength of 2,000 officers.² Since the inauguration of SNPPI, the APD has set in motion numerous strategies to address violent crime and public safety issues, initiate meaningful partnerships, and further enhance the department.

Crime Rates and Trends in Atlanta

Reducing violent crime in Atlanta is the APD's top priority. From 2016 to 2017, the department saw a 29 percent drop in homicides (from 111 to 79) and a 32 percent drop in robberies (from 2,070 to 1,413). Overall, the APD saw an 8 percent decrease in Part 1 crimes for the year.³

Crime Reduction: Promising Strategies

Federal, state, and local partnerships

The APD's Narcotics Unit works closely with its local High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the U.S. Attorney's Office to address and investigate the illicit trafficking and distribution of narcotics, particularly opioids, in the city. This collaborative effort allows for aggressive responses to and investigations of organized nationwide drug trade organizations. The Narcotics Unit meets with partners monthly to share data on opioid overdose deaths and harness this data to arrest and prosecute heroin dealers.

1. American FactFinder, "2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Atlanta city, Georgia," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed April 9, 2019, https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/DP05/1600000US1304000.

2. "About APD," Atlanta Police Department, accessed April 9, 2019, <http://www.atlantapd.org/about-apd>.

3. *FBI Uniform Crime Reporting* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Police Department, 2017), <http://www.atlantapd.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=1774>.

Drug Market Intervention

The APD implemented the Drug Market Intervention (DMI) strategy in the English Avenue neighborhood to combat open-air heroin sales. Overt drug markets bring chaos and violence to communities. DMI targets these drug markets to eliminate them and improve life for residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. In DMI, specific drug markets and street-level dealers are identified, but only violent offenders are immediately arrested. Officers and prosecutors develop prosecutable drug cases for nonviolent dealers and agree to suspend prosecution for individuals who agree to stop dealing. DMI has removed career criminals from many neighborhoods and given other offenders hope by connecting them with community-based social service resources.

Officer Safety and Wellness

The APD values all aspects of officer wellness and safety, including safety in the field, mental health, and leadership development. The APD regularly conducts health and wellness events, including a symposium on Officer Wellness at Morehouse College in partnership with the Atlanta Police Foundation. This one-day event featured free health screenings, health-related programs and workshops, activities for families, games, a marching band, and healthy food market shopping.

The APD requires safety and wellness training both at the recruit level and through its Professional Development Unit. Recruits receive stress management training and instruction on how to access the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). In addition to the two hours of health and wellness lessons taught at the recruit level, the APD offers a 24-hour health and wellness class to all sworn officers. The EAP staff requested a clinician be assigned to the Training Academy to expand health and wellness training and provide anxiety testing and stress inoculation.

In 2017, the city of Atlanta opened a drop-in health care center as a citywide health initiative. The APD is participating in the city's Wellness Wednesdays program, which encourages city employees to engage in healthy behaviors (such as getting flu shots), which the new drop-in health center enables officers to do quickly and conveniently.

Atlanta Police Leadership Institute

Cited by the Atlanta Police Foundation as the most robust law enforcement leadership program in the country, the Atlanta Police Leadership Institute (APLI) is building the leadership capacity of the APD.⁴ The APLI is a groundbreaking program established by the Atlanta Police Foundation in partnership with Georgia State University. As the expectations of police leaders continue to increase, so does the importance of this much-needed program.

The five-tier, leadership-focused curriculum is designed to develop a well-rounded understanding of APD operations. It prepares mid-level leaders to confidently and efficiently manage the challenges facing today's law enforcement community. Officers who participate in the APLI gain valuable skills in policy development, process improvement, and mission critical program design as they work through complicated public safety issues, conduct focused research projects, participate in strategic placements in other city departments, and learn from mentors in the business community.

Establishing Interagency Partnerships

Strategies for Policing Innovation

In the federally supported Strategies for Policing Innovation (SPI) project, the APD partners with Grady Hospital to implement a hospital-based retaliatory violence prevention project. As the locations where many victims of violence seek medical treatment, hospitals and health care systems are uniquely positioned to address violence prevention. The partnership between APD and Grady Hospital focuses on identifying high-risk youth and young adults in targeted ZIP codes injured by violent acts and drug use and providing them with intensive, individualized case-management services. Participants receive risk-reduction assessments through community-based resources. In addition, the partnership engages community members to promote awareness of their roles in stemming

4. "Effective Leadership Initiatives," Atlanta Police Foundation, accessed April 9, 2019, <http://www.atlantapolicfoundation.org/programs/effective-leadership-initiatives/>.

violence within their communities. The hospital implements prevention strategies immediately after the time of injury. The APD has assigned two community officers to the project who serve as a conduit for communication among investigators, victims, and community members.

HOPE Team

The APD's Homeless Outreach Prevention Emergency (HOPE) Team won the 2014 Georgia Crisis Intervention Team Leadership Award for its use of best practices to address homelessness in Atlanta. In partnership with the United Way of Greater Atlanta, Hands-On Atlanta, and the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District, the HOPE Team works with people who are homeless or have mental illnesses. Team members help homeless individuals identify short- or long-term housing options. The team connects homeless individuals to services by partnering with a host of agencies such as Gateway, the Salvation Army, the Veterans Administration, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Georgia chapter. By enhancing information sharing, the HOPE Team and its partners have played a pivotal role in crime reduction for the APD.



Community councils

Each police district has established a community council to address crime problems in its neighborhoods; the councils bring together police and community perspectives. The councils are tasked with identifying resources and strategies for community members to promote public safety, including calling in tips, participating in the Neighborhood Watch program, or walking the beat with officers. Neighborhoods determine how to measure the success of their initiatives. The program has been successful throughout the city in linking citizens with local government agencies to reduce crime through actions such as improved lighting and trash removal.

At-Promise Youth and Community Center

The At-Promise Youth and Community Center opened its doors on August 1, 2017. The center is a state-of-the-art learning and community facility, offering specialized services for youth and a gathering place for residents. It represents a partnership with a multitude of Atlanta resources, including the APD, the Atlanta Police Foundation, Atlanta Public Schools, the Fulton County Juvenile Court, Fulton County Juvenile Probation, and many community members. At-Promise brings police and community partners together to create pathways to success. The center's offerings focus on three major areas: diversion (an alternative to arrest and probation); intervention (strategies to address behavior); and prevention (fostering personal growth and development).

Implementing Innovative Technologies

Operation Shield

Through the expansion of Operation Shield (a citywide network of surveillance cameras and license plate readers, predictive policing platforms, and criminal analytics software), the APD has enhanced situational awareness throughout the city. The network's hub is the Loudermilk Video Integration Center (VIC), a cutting-edge facility that houses a team of analysts who manage the city's surveillance network. Through the system, existing video surveillance cameras owned by private business partners can be integrated and monitored in a centralized location. With more than 10,000 cameras currently, the network is to be expanded over a three-year campaign, providing unprecedented crime deterrence potential and the capacity to solve crimes and take criminals off the streets faster.



Social media

The APD's website and social media presence are important vehicles for providing information to the Atlanta community. In recent years, the department's social media followers have increased significantly, allowing it to engage directly with community members and increase transparency. The APD website features real-time crime data, while APD's Facebook and Twitter pages provide important and timely crime information to the neighborhood residents.

Critical-incident response

The APD provides the public with information immediately following critical incidents. Information is released regularly through various avenues, including press conferences, press releases, social media, and the APD's website. Crime data is shared on the APD's website and updated on a weekly basis.

Conclusion

The APD has fully embraced the principles of the Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative and has made tremendous progress in precision policing through its focus on public safety and crime-reduction initiatives and partnerships, sound policies, and innovative crime-fighting strategies. Over the coming months, CNA will work closely with the APD to continue its implementation efforts.

SNPPI provides necessary resources and technical assistance to departments that seek to implement strategic approaches to crime reduction and community safety. When subject-matter experts and analysts provide the tools, resources, and information to support operational and policy challenges, police agencies have the time and space to focus on reducing crime and increasing public safety.





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