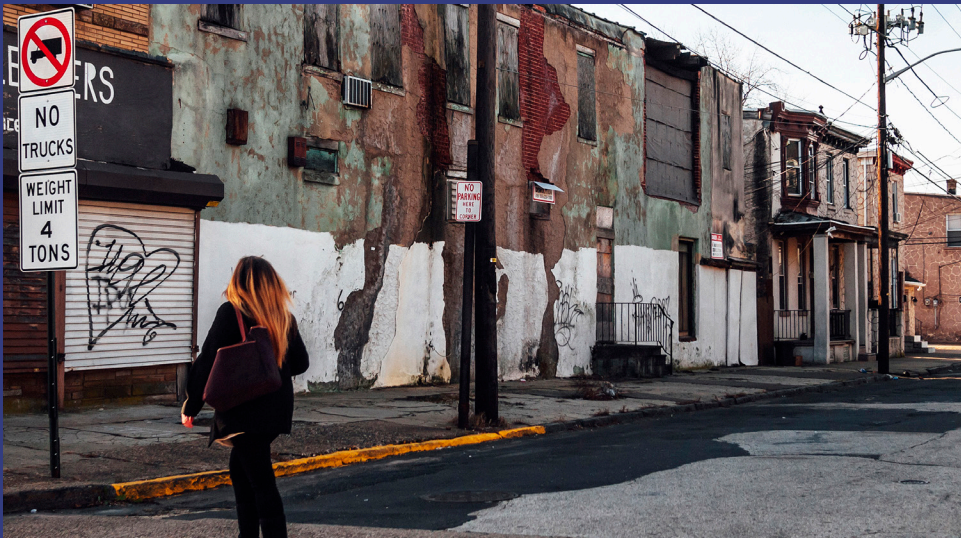


# Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

CAMDEN COUNTY (NEW JERSEY) POLICE DEPARTMENT



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## Introduction

The Camden County (New Jersey) Police Department (CCPD) 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 CCPD 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 CCPD'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 CCPD is a relatively new law enforcement agency. In May 2013, the city of Camden reorganized its municipal police department to create the CCPD. The radical step of forming a new agency was taken in response to the city's mounting crime rates, increasing budget cuts, rising fear of crime, and escalating departmental morale problems.

To address the serious crime problem in Camden, the CCPD developed a new policing strategy that emphasized promoting public safety through strengthened partnerships with the public. Under strong leadership from Chief Scott Thomson, the CCPD adopted the motto “service before self” and the mission to “reduce the number of crime victims and make people feel safe.” Thomson inspired officers to shift from a warrior mentality to a guardian mindset, which prioritizes service and community protection.

To achieve its goals, the department restructured patrol functions by creating Neighborhood Response Teams (NRT) of officers dedicated to improving public safety in high-crime areas. Focusing on high-crime “hot spots” is a research-based approach that has been demonstrated to reduce violent crime and build community support.<sup>1</sup> The CCPD also implemented state-of-the-art technology to bolster its capacity for real-time policing, and it strengthened its partnerships with other law enforcement agencies to improve public safety. These efforts have revitalized the city of Camden, reduced crime rates, and helped minimize community members’ fear. Total Part I crimes<sup>2</sup> have plummeted 56 percent with homicides down 78 percent. According to CCPD Captain Greg Carlin of the Strategic Operations division, this crime reduction has led to an impressive increase in economic investment that has created thousands of new jobs in the city.

Concurrent with the implementation of these strategies, SNPPI has supported the CCPD in providing training and technical assistance (TTA) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). Through site visits and expert training, this TTA has provided the CCPD with the resources, knowledge, and tools to expand the scope of its crime reduction efforts. In turn, the SNPPI project will use the CCPD’s strengths and progress as examples for how other departments can implement a comprehensive and effective approach to improving public safety.

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1. A.A. Braga, D.M. Hureau, and A.V. Papachristos, “An Ex Post Facto Evaluation Framework for Place-Based Police Interventions,” *Evaluation Review* 35, no. 6 (2012), 592–626, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0193841X11433827>.

2. Part I crimes include murder and non-negligent homicide, rape (legacy & revised), robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, larceny-theft, and arson.



## Crime Reduction Data



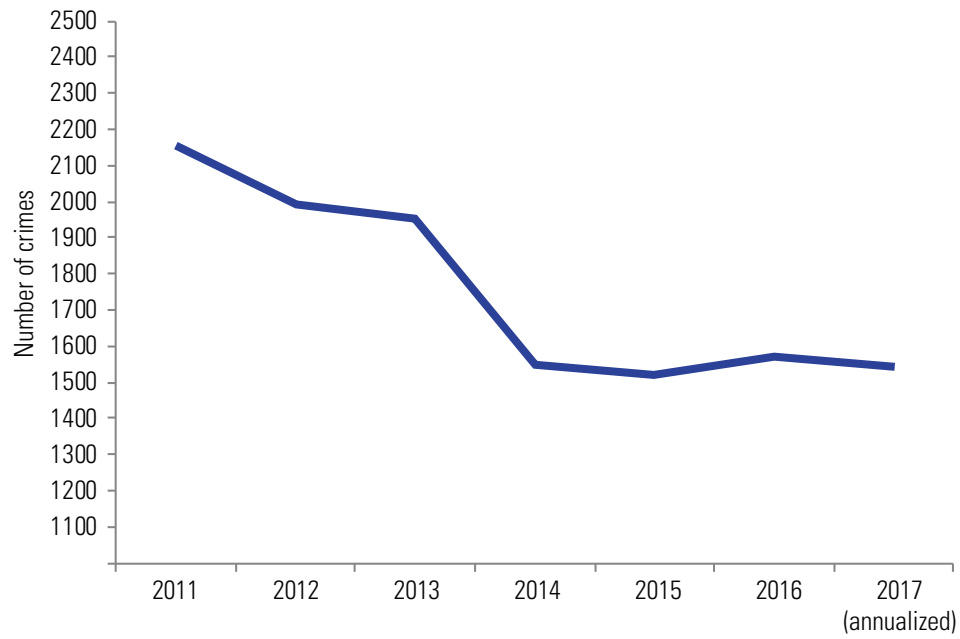
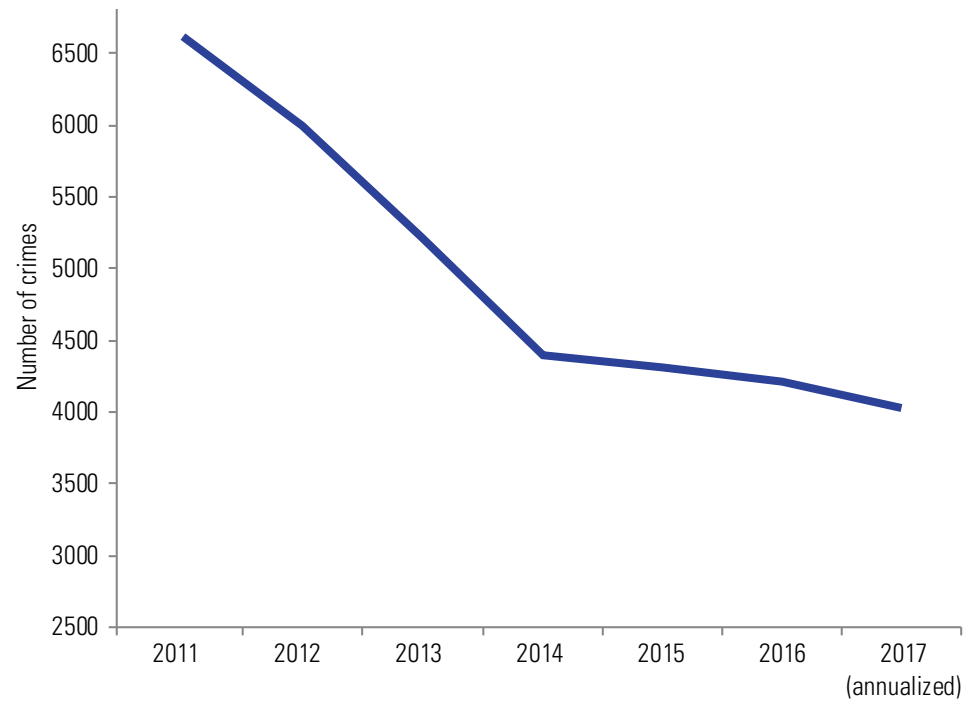
Camden has historically been among American cities with the highest crime rates. When the CCPD was established in 2013, drug crimes that led to acts of gun violence were especially rampant. Fear of violent crimes caused many neighborhood residents to retreat from parks and public spaces, where gang members dealt drugs and defended their territory with violent exchanges of gunfire. Parents kept their children indoors to ensure their safety. High crime rates and public acts of violence created widespread fear and lack of confidence that anything could be done to improve public safety. According to Captain Carlin, prior to the establishment of the CCPD, Camden was widely considered unsafe for the people who lived and worked there and for the officers policing the city.

The new policing principles, implemented after the CCPD's establishment and expanded through the SNPPI, have significantly increased public safety in the city. Crime data from 2017 suggest that the CCPD's approach, which combines community policing, application of technology for public safety, and cross-agency collaboration, has been effective at reducing

crime. Table 1 contrasts crime statistics in 2012 (the year prior to the establishment of the CCPD) and 2017, demonstrating how public safety has improved since the CCPD instituted its new, comprehensive approach. Figures 1 and 2 show the downward trend in overall crime rates that occurred in Camden from 2011 to 2017. The CCPD is using crime data analysis, as well as community perceptions and tangible changes in public safety, to holistically address public safety issues. The City of Camden is now a safer place for the people who live and work there.

**Table 1. Crime in Camden, 2012 versus 2017 (annualized using January–September 2017 data)**

| <b>Violent crime</b>       | <b>2011</b> | <b>2012</b> | <b>2013</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2017 (annualized)</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Homicide                   | 47          | 67          | 57          | 33          | 32          | 44          | 28                       |
| Rape                       | 66          | 73          | 55          | 51          | 75          | 88          | 71                       |
| Robbery                    | 857         | 755         | 732         | 531         | 483         | 427         | 413                      |
| Aggravated assault         | 1182        | 1097        | 1106        | 935         | 930         | 1012        | 1032                     |
| <b>Total violent crime</b> | <b>2152</b> | <b>1992</b> | <b>1950</b> | <b>1550</b> | <b>1520</b> | <b>1571</b> | <b>1544</b>              |
| <b>Property crime</b>      |             |             |             |             |             |             |                          |
| Burglary                   | 1436        | 1089        | 857         | 844         | 674         | 648         | 587                      |
| Larceny-theft              | 2226        | 2214        | 1939        | 1680        | 1781        | 1492        | 1405                     |
| Motor vehicle theft        | 800         | 704         | 464         | 321         | 338         | 504         | 487                      |
| <b>Total crime</b>         | <b>6614</b> | <b>5999</b> | <b>5210</b> | <b>4395</b> | <b>4313</b> | <b>4215</b> | <b>4023</b>              |

**Figure 1. Trends in violent crime in Camden 2011–2017****Figure 2. Trends in total crime in Camden 2011–2017**



### **Community-based evidence of improved public safety**

Community members think of crime and public safety in terms of friends and family murdered or victimized as well as perceptions of their own safety. In Camden, the improvement in residents' perceptions of safety is visible. These sentiments are often voiced at the many CCPD-sponsored community pop-up events designed to strengthen support for officers in the highest crime rate areas. During a SNPPI team site visit, several residents mentioned that the city "just feels calmer now." The residents also told the team they generally feel their children are safer in public spaces (on the streets and in public parks), and they can now relax and socialize with others without fearing open gunfire from rival drug gangs. Pop-up events with the CCPD have helped bring residents back into public spaces with a new sense of comfort and protection.

To demonstrate these changes in public safety, Chief Thomson shows visitors CCTV footage comparing two blocks in North Camden that once experienced some of the heaviest drug traffic in the city. In the first video, cars enter the frame and park and double-park while the passengers conduct quick deals with drug dealers, creating traffic congestion. A school bus drives down the street, and a mother with two young children



dodges through the drug market to safely enter a home on the block. A second video, recorded at the same time of day several months later (after Camden adopted its comprehensive approach to crime reduction), shows the same mother returning home with her children. However, there is no heavy foot or vehicle traffic. The contrast is stark and demonstrates what the numbers cannot—that the CCPD took back these Camden blocks from the violent drug gangs and dealers. This story has been replicated across Camden as this new paradigm in policing strategy has rolled out.

The CCPD describes its mission as “reducing the number of crime victims and making people feel safe.” The focus is on crime prevention and public safety. Public safety is necessary and essential for creating strong communities, supporting economic development, and empowering people. Police cannot achieve this alone; they need to partner with community leaders with shared goals, interests, and values. Such partnerships require open communication, cooperative problem identification, and the community understanding that the police are here to help them, not arrest them or their family members. Camden demonstrates how a police department can strengthen these policing principles, leading to a more vibrant city.

The remainder of this brief outlines how the CCPD has reduced crime and transformed public safety in the city of Camden. The following sections describe the strategies, such as the co-production of public safety, crime reduction, and technology, the CCPD is using to further implement precision policing principles.

## Identify Promising Strategies that Reduce Crime

### **Neighborhood Response Teams**

Removing drug crime from city street corners, parks, and neighborhoods was not enough; the CCPD had to gain the support of Camden residents and increase respect for officers to sustain crime reduction. Camden has used nonenforcement contacts with community members to transform the role of police officers from enforcers and warriors to community guardians.

Chief Thomson completely revised the traditional approach to policing. Most agencies fully staff the patrol sector to respond to 911 calls, even though police research suggests that police rarely prevent violent crimes or

make arrests as a result of rapid responses to calls. Instead, only about 20 percent of all of Camden's officers are assigned to patrol and respond to calls for service. The other 80 percent are assigned to a Neighborhood Response Team (NRT). NRTs are deployed to specific Guardian Zones, which are high-crime areas identified through data analysis (crime hot spots). The Guardian Zone NRT officers, freed from responding to repeated calls for service, are expected to diagnose the root causes of crime and disorder problems occurring in the Guardian Zone and comprehensively address them. In this way, Thomson has created a crime prevention-based system.

NRT officers are expected to know the residents and businesses in their zones and work with them on issues to prevent future 911 calls. This approach significantly reframes uniform officer responsibilities. Officers also engage in community activities such as biweekly community barbeques. The officers have embraced the transition from warrior to the preferred guardian role and interact with the community in positive ways, building relationships based on the shared mission of making the community safer. In this way, Chief Thomson is changing the way policing is done in Camden neighborhoods, demonstrating the role of precision policing in improving communities.

Patrol officers in radio cars are assigned to a sector rather than the traditional beat. They are the rapid response to a call. If an NRT officer happens to arrive at a call first, the call and the paperwork are turned over to the responding patrol car. However, if the call is about a recurring problem such as drug dealing, then the NRT officer is expected to address the issue. The goal is to address the underlying reason for the repeated calls to 911. NRT officers have both the time and support to address recurring problems.

Through the NRTs, the CCPD builds community support by developing partnerships between officers and the people they serve. As resident Eulisis Delgado told a reporter, "Before, they [officers] were just riding around in their patrol cars and collecting paychecks. Now, they let you know they are around."<sup>3</sup> CCPD officers work side by side with community residents to achieve the common goal of improving public safety and security in Camden.

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3. Kevin Shelly, "Camden Resets Relationships between Cops, Communities," *USA Today*, December 12, 2014, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/12/12/camden-countycommunity-policing/20301967/>.



The NRT strategy represents a major shift in the approach to police work by placing human resources in areas where violent crime is occurring. However, the primary focus is not on enforcement (arrest and prosecution) but on problem solving with the community to prevent the conditions that cause crime. Through the NRT strategy, Camden residents have strengthened their own capabilities to prevent crimes through partnerships with the CCPD. NRTs gather intelligence to share with investigators to solve crimes, and they work with the community to solve problems. The model has strengthened the effectiveness of the department and job satisfaction among officers.

## **Establish Productive Interagency Partnerships with Law Enforcement and Community Stakeholders**

The CCPD recognizes that crime reduction and public safety are not solely police responsibilities; instead, they are strengthened through active partnerships with citizens and community organizations. The department partners with other city agencies, social services agencies, and community-based organizations to address the underlying causes of crime

and disorder and to co-produce public safety. NRT members patrol on foot or on bicycles and conduct outreach to local communities through non-enforcement activities (e.g., barbeques, basketball, Mr. Softy ice cream trucks, community meetings, and games for younger children). NRT officers and residents work together in a collaborative context to identify problems and jointly produce public safety solutions and plans. Recent examples of the CCPD efforts to co-produce public safety with Camden residents include the following:

- Camden Community Congress meetings. CCPD officers participate in monthly Camden Community Congress meetings. The congress, an initiative developed by the Camden City mayor's office, meets monthly and allows the CCPD to share department updates and address public safety issues. Through their participation, CCPD officers work with the community to identify violent crime risks and inform the community of the department's plans to address them.
- Homelessness Prevention Program. CCPD officers partner with the Homeless Prevention Program to connect homeless residents with rental assistance, welfare, and other local services. This partnership has helped address the needs of this population by providing support services that permit them to live within the community and become less vulnerable.
- Collaboration with the Mexican Business Owners Association. The CCPD recognized that community members of Mexican descent were being specifically affected by a high volume of crime. To reduce such targeted victimizations, the CCPD worked with the Mexican Business Owners Association to collaboratively address crime problems. Many officers are bilingual, allowing them to provide better communication and services to immigrant communities.
- Addressing high-risk youth. The CCPD organized Project Guardian, a program that targets high-risk youth and links them with available social services. At-risk youth, police officers, counselors, and social workers convene with city residents who have escaped a life of crime. The program is held at the new multimillion dollar Salvation Army Center. At these events, an interpersonal connection is made, and the



teens learn about life skills training, support services, and resources available to help them avoid a life of violence and crime. The Salvation Army offers the youth participants a free visit to the center with the possibility of reduced membership fees. Since its inception in 2016, more than 600 youth have participated in the program.

### **Interactive Community Alert Network**

The CCPD's Interactive Community Alert Network (I-CAN) is a technology-based community watch program that allows residents to anonymously report and monitor crime activity in their neighborhoods. Thus, residents are able to contribute to crime reduction and co-produce public safety in real time. I-CAN is a web-based system. Any member of the public may create an account once they complete the online registration. Through their account, individuals can access 360-degree views from "Eye in the Sky" (EIS) cameras placed throughout the city and orient them toward incidents in progress. The identity of those who report crimes or other issues is strictly confidential to protect community members and officers. CCPD officers continuously monitor I-CAN accounts to address community members' concerns and collect information about ongoing investigations.

### **Camden County Crime Coalition (C4)**

Chief Thomson worked with key stakeholders to create the Camden County Crime Coalition (C4), through which the CCPD collaborates with law enforcement agency partners to fight crime. The goal of the coalition is to bring violent criminals to justice. The C4 focuses on violent criminals, guns, and drug trafficking organizations through targeted deterrence. C4 serves as a force multiplier, which is partially funded by the Philadelphia/Camden HIDTA.

The C4 co-locates local and federal investigative agencies. Participating agencies include the Camden County Police Department, Camden County Prosecutors' Office, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), ATF, U.S. Marshals, FBI, and the U.S. Attorney's Office. Other state and local law enforcement partners, such as the sheriff's department, probation and parole, and suburban police departments, also participate. According to participants, buy-in from the leaders of each participating agency has been a key factor of C4's success.

Four mornings per week, team members review cases, progress, and priorities. All members participate and share information and intelligence freely and divide up tasks. The prosecutors' attendance helps in building a case from the start. Information sharing through C4 has resulted in identifying and locating high-risk serious offenders more efficiently than if the agencies were working in isolation.

Each agency contributes information and intelligence that helps bring criminals to justice and remove them from the streets. Credit for an arrest, seizure, or major investigation or prosecution is shared among the parties. This collaboration and coordination also extends to the NRT officers, who can provide information about issues arising in their Guardian Zones. C4 is an intelligence, investigative, and prosecution-oriented organization that reduces and prevents violent crime by taking key violent criminals and criminal organizations off the street. As a result, the homicide solve rate has increased to a remarkable 76 percent from a low of 15 percent since the implementation of the NRTs and C4.

## **Implement Innovative and Effective Technologies to Assist Police Departments to Safeguard Neighborhoods**

The CCPD has implemented state-of-the-art technological advancements. Inside its real-time tactical operation intelligence center (RTTOIC), analysts monitor surveillance cameras, gunshot detection systems, GPS in every squad car, and automated license plate readers citywide. The EIS camera system spans the neighborhoods and business corridors of the city. The EIS surveillance camera network works in concert with other technology systems monitored in the RTTOIC. It provides virtual police response to suspicious activities related to crimes, and it tracks possible suspects until the NRTs can interact with the persons engaging in possible criminal activities. The EIS system places police eyes on the scene instantly, which can show the suspect's location to the NRT and patrol response. The system also mitigates many nonemergency situations and verifies when an officer is required, reducing 911 dispatches.

The RTTOIC is in operation 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, and it acts as a nerve center for deploying law enforcement resources, responding to emergency calls for service, and monitoring technology systems.

This technology also allows the department to coordinate with field units, increasing intelligence and information sharing. The center is staffed entirely with contract personnel (not sworn police officers), and the project manager is a former deputy chief for Camden who brings experience and understanding to the RTTOIC.

The time that officers spend in the Guardian Zones is monitored via GPS transmitters in the RTTOIC. The zones will show green, yellow, or red based on how much time officers actually spend in the zones compared to the expected amount of time. The color changes from green to red as the actual time falls below expected time. The district commanders and field supervisors can see these maps as well. If the amount of time in a zone should be increased, the watch commander will contact an officer's supervisor. Research indicates that increased police presence and devotion of time necessary to address underlying issues in hot spots can effectively prevent serious crime. GPS in squad cars verifies that officers are dedicating time to the Guardian Zones, which supports crime reduction.

How long it takes to respond to a call for service and return to service is also monitored in the RTTOIC. Standards are set for all types of service calls. If an officer is taking too long on a call, a supervisor is notified. Close monitoring of officer time allows the CCPD to have only 20 percent of its uniform officers responding to 911 calls. This follow-up is also an important officer safety benefit to ensure that officers are well protected.

## Lessons for SNPPI's Targeted TTA

The SNPPI included the development of a targeted TTA action plan for the CCPD. This plan outlines approaches for providing resources and knowledge to strengthen the implementation of precision policing principles. SNPPI team members worked with each site to develop a tailored TTA plan to address remaining challenges and augment effective policing practices. The CCPD focused its TTA action plan on working with CNA experts to develop strategies to strengthen the use of technology and community partnerships through community feedback. CNA worked with the CCPD to identify subject-matter experts who could provide TTA to Camden, as well as other law enforcement agencies throughout the United States that could share lessons learned and best practices with the CCPD.

As part of this assistance, the CCPD wanted to learn more about developing crime-prevention plans for specific geographic areas and further leveraging technology. As a result, CNA connected the CCPD with the Seattle (Washington) Police Department, which has made progress in these areas. The SNPPI lead for the CCPD conducted a peer site visit to the Seattle Police Department to learn more about the specific technological tools they employ, as well as the department's Micro Community Policing Plans (MCP) program. MCP uses community engagement efforts, crime data, and police services to capture community perceptions of public safety. The CCPD identified MCP as an opportunity to further develop ongoing programs, such as youth-run focus groups centered on police-community relationships, as well as continue to develop partnerships that address public safety issues. The CCPD plans to apply lessons-learned around input from the community and MCP.

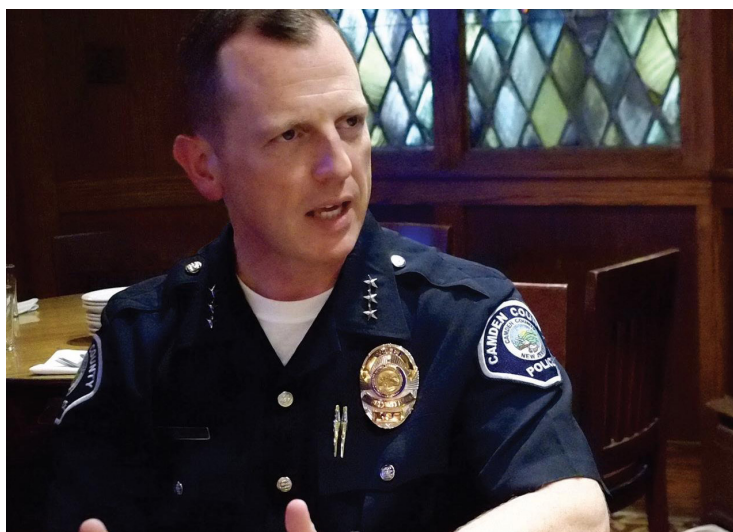
The CCPD learned more about Seattle's Mark 43 and computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems. Like Seattle, the CCPD uses Mark 43. The CCPD was also interested in using its newly-implemented CAD system to solicit feedback from the public and further strengthen public trust. Seattle provided unique examples of how to incorporate community feedback into the CAD system in an effort to promote faster response times and officer and community safety.

The CCPD leadership perceived that policy and practice directives were not reaching line officers effectively. The CCPD worked with an external consultant to develop and implement tools to increase the effectiveness of internal communication. These tools include video blogs or audio messages from the chief, internal social media feeds, or new strategies to communicate with officers using the CCPD's internal intranet. The subject-matter expert provided media relations and crisis communications training to the public information officer, captains, and lieutenants. The CCPD will document the outcomes of SNPPI TTA as lessons-learned for how other departments can address these challenges and strengthen existing practices.



## Economic Development in Camden since the Implementation of Precision Policing Principles

Effective policing that builds community provides the foundation for economic growth. Jobs are among the best crime prevention tools. George Norcross III, Cooper University Hospital Chairman, has helped provide the leadership necessary to make the new police force possible. Norcross told *USA Today* that he knew years ago that public safety



was the “number 1 issue” when it came to attracting investment to the city. The CCPD’s Chief Thomson believes the early, demonstrable progress the new police department has made through precision policing principles and strategies was the spark for the current economic development of Camden.

Today, Camden’s economic growth is outpacing the state of New Jersey. The City of Camden accounts for \$2.5 billion of the \$3 billion in private investment in Camden County.<sup>4</sup> Among the projects are

- a \$320 million Holtec International campus;
- a \$63 million Rutgers University nursing building;
- a \$1 billion Liberty Property Trust waterfront redevelopment;
- an \$88 million Philadelphia 76ers training facility and heliport;
- a new headquarters location for Subaru of America.

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4. Matt Skoufalos, “Brisk Economic Outlook for Camden City, County in 2017, but Statewide Picture Blurrier,” *NJ Pen*, January 10, 2017, <https://www.njpen.com/brisk-economic-outlook-for-camden-city-county-in-2017-but-statewide-picture-blurrier/>.

Because of development in the city of Camden and Camden County, the unemployment rate for the county dropped from 10.6 percent in 2012 to 4.6 percent as of November 2016. This drop corresponds to falling crime rates and represents an impressive turnaround for a city considered to be near bankruptcy.

The promise of the Liberty Property Trust is to push the most economic benefit to the broadest constituency. Recent economic development activities include

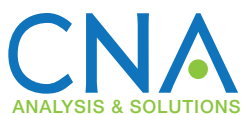
- actively recruiting Camden residents for construction jobs to staff 10 to 20 percent of the workforce with qualified city residents;
- establishing apprenticeships for those workers to continue working in the construction field;
- considering Camden Corps Plus trainees for internships and permanent jobs, and offering paid internships for Camden City students;
- prioritizing goods and service purchases from Camden businesses;
- inviting Camden artists to design temporary murals to screen construction fencing supporting youth sports programs;
- deed-restricting 20 percent of the residential rental units for affordable housing.

The first stop for investors interested in economic opportunities in Camden is the mayor's office, and their second stop is the police headquarters. Chief Thomson stated that investors want to know that the progress in public safety is real and will continue. The chief assured them with great confidence that it will "because the people of Camden will not reverse course."

## Conclusion

Since 2013, the CCPD has transformed into a highly effective model of precision policing. Its new approach to reducing crime and promoting public safety is research based and involves the community. Through the NRTs, the use of technology to reduce crime, sustained police presence in Guardian Zones, and other community initiatives, Camden has fully embraced the principles of the SNPPI. The CCPD is a strong example of how a police department can adopt a culture in which service truly comes before self. The resulting transformation of the community has been remarkable.

The CCPD demonstrates the difference that morally informed law enforcement agency leadership can make. In addition, access to programs such as SNPPI helps provide the necessary resources and technical assistance to departments seeking 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 time to focus on reducing crime and increasing public safety. SNPPI has provided funding for peer site visits, which allow leaders to see new strategies, innovative technologies, and improved training in action at other agencies. Chief Thomson believes the SNPPI project has provided a unique opportunity to learn about other agency's practices. In addition, the initiative has helped the CCPD tailor these practices to the agency's specific circumstances to strengthen existing policing efforts.



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