

# Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

COLUMBIA (SOUTH CAROLINA) POLICE DEPARTMENT



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## Introduction



The Columbia (South Carolina) Police Department (CPD) 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 CPD 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 CPD'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



Chief William H. Holbrook assumed his position in 2014 during a period of low morale, when the department was struggling to recruit and retain officers. Chief Holbrook readily addressed these challenges. As he approaches the five-year anniversary of his appointment, he continues to transform agency culture and strengthen external relations.

Under Chief Holbrook's leadership, the CPD has received its Advanced National Accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), indicating that its policies and procedures meet national standards in policing.

## Identifying Strategies for Crime Reduction

### Operation Real Time

As part of its focused deterrence strategy, CPD launched the Ceasefire Columbia Initiative in partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of South Carolina. The goal of the initiative is to reduce gun violence in particular neighborhoods.

The program has expanded into Operation Real Time, which is a federal case priority adoption program that immediately removes a violent offender from the community at the point of arrest in real time. The CPD has a pre-screened priority offender list for all of the officers to reference in the field.

### **Guardian policing**

The CPD is committed to partnering with its communities to reduce crime and ensure public safety. To achieve these goals, the department regularly assesses its operations and deployment strategies to address areas with the greatest need for law enforcement presence. Following the shooting of a University of South Carolina student, the department adopted a new approach to policing in Columbia's Five Points Entertainment District. The CPD worked with the CNA team to analyze the incident and develop a comprehensive approach to strengthening community relations. As a result of this analysis, CPD officers in the Five Points Entertainment District now employ a guardian policing philosophy, in which the officers foster open, fair, and unbiased interactions with residents. This approach allows the officers to better manage the large influx of university students that frequent the area by proactively maintaining public order and safety.

### **Smartphone initiative expansion**

The CPD's Community Response Teams have spearheaded an initiative to use smartphone technology to improve the CPD's ability to address crime concerns. This initiative is now entering a new phase, in which it will expand to all patrol officers.

Smartphone technology will greatly enhance officers' ability to obtain and process actionable information. Ultimately, officers will be better equipped to serve the people of Columbia by using this technology-driven initiative to provide exceptional customer service.

The CPD issues smartphones to every officer to help solve and prevent crimes with real-time information through connections with community partners.

# Protecting Officer Safety and Wellness

## Fit for Duty

The City of Columbia and the CPD have recently taken steps to reduce the rate of heart disease among their employees. Reflecting nationwide trends, heart disease is the number one cause of death in South Carolina, causing nearly 10,000 deaths annually.<sup>1</sup> To improve the cardiovascular health of its officers, the CPD developed and implemented a comprehensive wellness and fitness program called Fit for Duty. The program incorporates fitness and wellness training, as well as nutritional counseling.

Personal trainer Bertram Bailey has been employed by the City of Columbia since 2005 and was assigned to the CPD full time in 2015 as its fitness coordinator. He developed Fit for Duty with the goal of reducing officers' rate of cardiovascular disease by targeting risk factors such as stress, high blood pressure, and obesity. Officers who join the program receive an initial physical assessment, which is used to develop a customized exercise and nutritional wellness plan. As part of the program, officers also have access to a personal trainer, group fitness classes, and independent workouts at gyms and recreation centers in the area.

## Narcan program

In 2015, new legislation was passed in South Carolina regarding opioid overdose prevention. As a result, all CPD officers have been trained on and equipped with the lifesaving opioid antidote Narcan through a partnership with the Department of Health and Environmental Control. This antidote can be administered to persons experiencing an opioid overdose.

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1. *State of the Heart: Heart Disease in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, 2016), [https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/bitstream/handle/10827/20933/DHEC\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Heart\\_2016-03.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/bitstream/handle/10827/20933/DHEC_State_of_the_Heart_2016-03.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).



## Establishing Productive Partnerships

Members of the CPD understand the importance of positive, nonenforcement community engagement to strengthen public trust. The CPD formed Community Response Teams, which consist of officers who work collaboratively with community stakeholders and other city agencies to address neighborhood-specific public safety and quality-of-life issues. In addition, the CPD has implemented a number of outreach initiatives to strengthen partnerships and consistently build public trust.

### **Citizen Advisory Council**

The most significant step the CPD took to strengthen agencywide transparency and accountability was establishing a Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) in 2015. The 10-member group comprises a cross-section of individuals who reflect the diversity of the city. The group met with the chief six times in 2017 to review a range of topics, including disciplinary actions, revisions to policies and procedures, and body-worn camera and dash camera recordings of potentially high-profile incidents.

Members of the group also raise issues important to the constituents they represent, including incidents of officer misconduct, investigations of community complaints, and community observations of certain police



actions. Finally, Chief Holbrook provides members with updates on significant incidents, pending police initiatives, and noteworthy issues within the CPD.

Members of the CAC attend disciplinary Command Review Boards (CRB) on a rolling basis. CRBs take place when administrative investigations result in a recommendation of officer discipline at a level of written reprimand or higher. In 2017, CAC members attended 13 CRBs, which demonstrated to them and their communities the high level of accountability to which the officers are held at the CPD.

In reference to the impact of the CAC, Chief Holbrook said, "The CAC has provided further validation to our police operations and procedures. Their participation in discipline Command Review Boards has been tremendously helpful in our efforts towards implementing procedural justice. I am also very proud of how our rank and file has accepted the CAC and their participation in our processes, thus furthering trust and legitimacy internally and externally."

## **Beyond the Badge**

The Beyond the Badge program connects newly sworn officers to the communities they help to protect. Following graduation from the South Carolina Justice Academy, new officers complete a one-week program that focuses on community policing, service, and outreach. Eighty-four officers have completed the program and developed a more comprehensive understanding of the various outreach and social services available to city residents.

Recent site visits for Beyond the Badge have included the following:

- Harvest of Hope Food Bank
- Imagine Columbia Leadership Academy & Midlands Reading Consortium
- Washington Street United Methodist Church Soup Kitchen
- Transitions Homeless Shelter
- Palmetto Children's Hospital
- Brookdale Assisted Living & Epworth Children's Home
- CPD retiree meet-and-greet luncheon

During the CNA team's site visits, officers indicated that the Beyond the Badge program allows them to build strong partnerships with the community. Officers have the opportunity to interact with the community they serve in a nonenforcement capacity.

## **Front Porch Roll Call**

Through the Front Porch Roll Call program, implemented in 2017, police squads host pre-shift roll calls at homes in the neighborhoods where the squads patrol. Anyone in the community can request a shift roll call to be held at their residence or business. These interactions have been invaluable for fostering understanding and collaboration between the community and the officers who serve them.

### **Community Command Staff Meetings**

Chief Holbrook instituted Community Command Staff Meetings, which occur in various neighborhoods throughout the city and allow the public to hear about crime trends, police initiatives, and other issues. In turn, CPD staff members hear the concerns of their residents.

### **Citizen satisfaction survey**

CPD officers are required to provide business cards with their name, associated incident number, and a phone number that community members can text to complete a citizen satisfaction survey. Officers hand out these cards to the public during all types of interactions, from criminal investigations and arrests to community meetings and casual encounters.

Since March 2016, officers have distributed more than 64,500 citizen survey cards in English and more than 2,000 in Spanish. Using a 5-point Likert Scale, with 1 indicating dissatisfaction and 5 indicating a high degree of satisfaction, the survey allows community members to rate their interactions with officers in the following categories:

- Officer's willingness and ability to answer questions
- Officer's fairness in problem solving
- Officer's professional appearance
- Overall satisfaction with the treatment experienced
- Overall satisfaction with the CPD

Of the 4,164 responses received to date, the average response is 4.51, indicating that community members who respond to the survey perceive their interactions with CPD officers as generally positive.

### **Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable**

The Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable is an annual series of forums offered to high school students in Columbia. The department invites 10 to 15 high school students to participate in bimonthly meetings to promote mutual respect between law enforcement officers and high school students through engaging dialogue and discussion. Each series of meetings allows the students to directly discuss topics relevant to them



with members of the police department. Most discussions aim to identify issues that either strengthen or damage the students' perceptions of law enforcement. Officers openly share experiences from their own youth and the results of the choices they have made. The underlying goal of these stories is to reduce risky behavior and promote positive youth development.

From 2015 to 2017, 40 students actively participated in the Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable. The ultimate goal of developing the Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable was promoting the legitimacy of the CPD to the young people it serves through transparency and accountability. The students who have completed the program are now partners in the effort to change the culture of policing in Columbia and make progress toward building strong community partnerships.

### **Bigs in Blue**

The CPD has made a concerted effort to reach out to younger youth as well. The agency was one of the first to sign up for the "Bigs in Blue" program, which the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization created to improve relationships between the police and youth. Currently, 16 officers serve as "Bigs" and mentor at-risk youth.

## Implementing Innovative Technologies

### Body-worn cameras

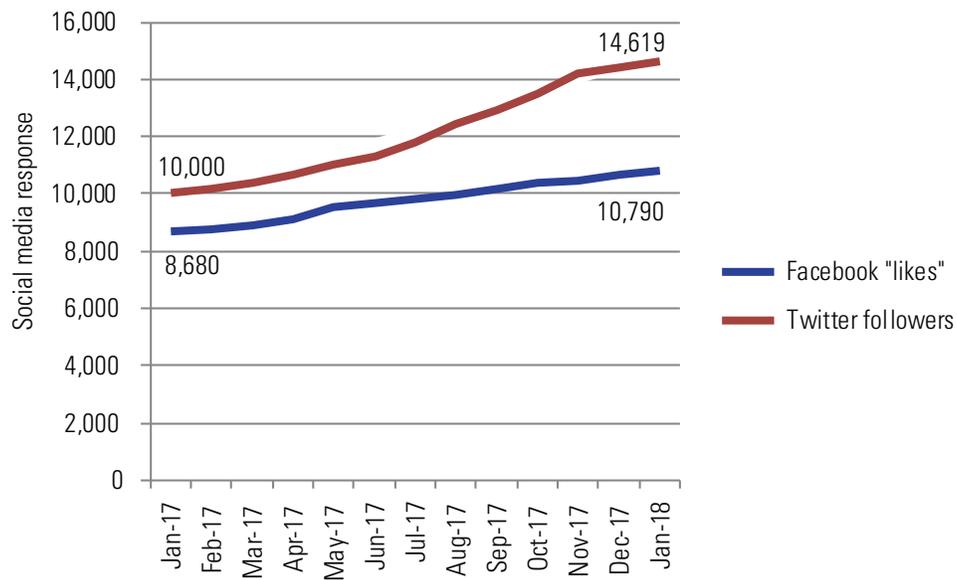
To increase transparency and public trust, all uniformed officers at or below the rank of sergeant are outfitted with body-worn cameras, and the CPD's body-worn camera policy is readily available on its website. In 2016, the CPD received five complaints alleging that CPD officers used excessive force against community members. In two of these cases, the body-worn camera footage exonerated the officers.

### Website and social media

Chief Holbrook recognizes the need to expand community outreach and communications through technology. The CPD's Media Relations Office focuses on the development of results-oriented public relations and outreach strategy. To increase transparency, the department launched a new website in December 2016. Designed to be user-friendly, the site increases access to police services and publications. It features integrated live Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds to provide up-to-date information. The CPD's social media team (SMT), which includes officers representing each bureau, helps to create platform-specific content. Between April 2017 and January 2018, the website had 107,358 page views and 29,428 new users. More than 84 percent of web views during this period came from first-time visitors. Followers of the CPD on social media platforms have also increased significantly.

The SMT spearheaded several social media campaigns to help with public education, recruitment, event marketing, website traffic, and news updates. Hashtags that have resulted in a large social media response include: #9PMRoutine, a reminder to lock vehicles and check the exteriors of residences; #WoofWednesday, a K-9 team fitness video; and #CPDUpdate, a regular news brief from the department. Other popular social media topics include the Front Porch Roll Call program, weekly photo galleries, pedestrian safety, driver safety public service announcements, and a recruiting commercial. Using live streaming via Periscope or Twitter for press conferences and on-scene interviews has further expanded the department's reach for breaking news and updates on high-profile cases.

### CPD social media presence, January 2017–January 2018



### Public Data Initiative

In 2016, the department partnered with the White House for the Public Data Initiative, an open data portal that provides accessible, convenient, and transparent information to the public. Currently housed in the public data portal are datasets including Assaults on Officers, Dispositions, Arrests, and Field Interviews. In addition to the datasets, the department provides information on officer-involved shootings, calls for service, and code violation properties, as well as national data and a community crime map. There will be updates to the portal in the near future, including new datasets. The Public Data Portal can be accessed online at <http://coc-colacitygis.opendata.arcgis.com> or through the department's website. To view the portal, users can create a profile or sign in using Facebook or Google.

## SNPPI Targeted Technical Assistance

Chief Holbrook requested assistance from CNA to support the newly established social media relations team and to provide staff with training for media relations and social media. CNA's Laura McElroy, a subject matter expert in strategic communications, provided training on how to effectively restructure the Media and Public Information Office, as well as training for the social media team on effective outreach. In addition, she provided training about on-camera interview strategies for watch commanders. This training guided the efforts of the social media team and the development and implementation of the department's new social media strategy.

## Conclusion

The initiatives implemented by the CPD around the four core goals of the SNPPI provide a snapshot of the broader agency culture instituted under Holbrook's leadership. The CPD has developed a guardian mindset to reduce crime and improve public safety for the general public throughout the city. In addition, the department has fostered stronger partnerships with the community through initiatives to gather community member feedback, increase the visibility of police in communities, and strengthen relationships through non-enforcement activities. Simultaneously, the CPD implemented a new outreach and social media strategy to keep the community more informed of its work. Chief Holbrook and the CPD are proven law enforcement leaders at the local, state, and national levels.





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