

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

INDIO (CALIFORNIA) POLICE DEPARTMENT



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Introduction

The Indio (California) Police Department (IPD) 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 IPD 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 IPD'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.

Identifying promising practices to reduce crime

The IPD is a stand-out agency that serves as a model for the nation's small to medium-sized police departments. For decades, the IPD has integrated community policing into its operating philosophy and practices through relationship building and positive interactions with community members. In recent years, the department has embraced evidence-based policing, exemplified by its early entry into the Strategies for Policing Innovation program (formerly known as the Smart Policing Initiative) in 2010 and its willingness to work with research partners to assess the impact of programs and continually improve. The IPD has leveraged these promising practices to help address homelessness, a growing local issue.

Collaborative strategies to address homelessness

Homelessness is a serious issue for cities in California. California has one of the largest numbers of people experiencing homelessness of any state. In 2017, 34 in every 10,000 people were homeless in California, a 13.7-percent increase from 2016 (and the largest increase in the country from 2016 to 2017). Moreover, California accounted for nearly half of all unsheltered people (those living in public or private places not designated for shelter, such as vehicles or public parks) in the country in 2017 (49 percent).¹ These individuals increasingly create quality-of-life and public safety concerns for law enforcement. Indio, a part of Riverside County, has been addressing this complex problem. Riverside County is one of the top areas for homeless individuals to congregate in the country.²

1. Office of Community Planning and Development, *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2017), <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

2. According to HUD, Riverside City and County was the ninth largest "smaller city, county, and regional continuum of care" in the United States for number of homeless individuals in 2017. Office of Community Planning and Development, *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report* (see note 1).

Although being homeless is not a crime, it can be a potential catalyst for criminal behavior, including intoxication, loitering, prowling, fighting, trespassing, aggressive panhandling, soliciting, behaving in a threatening manner, and more. As such, the IPD and the city are proactively addressing the problem of homelessness in Indio. Collaboration and action by all community stakeholders are necessary because there is a fine line between homelessness as a social issue and homelessness as a criminal issue. The IPD provided key leadership in developing two initiatives to address homelessness—the Community Outreach Resource Program and Indio Businesses in Action.

Community Outreach Resource Program

In 2012, the IPD received an increasing number of disorder calls in areas with high concentrations of homeless individuals. The IPD responded with a collaborative approach called the Community Outreach Resource Program (CORP). The department brought together an array of community stakeholders, including criminal justice agencies and individuals (courts, prosecutors, probation officers, public defenders); county services (social services, behavioral health, workforce development); and several non-profit agencies. These stakeholders implemented a two-pronged approach:

1. Reintegrating individuals who are chronically homeless
2. Resolving disorder problems

Two full-time quality-of-life police officers target disorder hotspots, identifying individuals eligible to become CORP clients. Clients in CORP receive an individualized treatment program that may include education, job training, drug treatment, and mental health service support; the program must be a minimum of 90 days. Graduating clients have their court fines and charges dismissed. A research partner from Arizona State University collects data to assess the program and suggest improvements. For example, based on surveys of clients, perceptions of the police improved substantially over the course of the program, including trust in police and the belief that police were concerned about their lives.



More than 100 clients have now successfully completed the CORP program, many of whom are now employed full time and have permanent housing. In addition, neighboring cities have expressed interest in potentially using the CORP program to address homelessness in their jurisdictions.

Community outreach and awareness is another critical component of CORP. The IPD encourages businesses to display CORP awareness materials to discourage panhandling and better direct those who may be in need of intervention. The IPD also created a panhandling solutions pocket guide for business owners and interested community members.³

Indio businesses in action

Throughout 2016, the IPD held a series of meetings to discuss the impacts of homelessness on Indio businesses. During these meetings, business owners reported concerns including trespassing, loitering, panhandling, homeless individuals scavenging rear trash containers, and a lack of communication between building managers and business tenants. This engagement was a collaborative problem-solving effort that allowed the IPD to prioritize quality-of-life concerns and particular locations. These discussions led to the formation of the Indio Businesses in Action task force, a coalition of active business operators whose mission is to minimize the impacts of homelessness on Indio businesses.

3. For more information about CORP, visit the IPD website at http://www.indio.org/your_government/police/community_letters/corp.htm.

To support the task force, the IPD increased patrol and enforcement of loitering, trespassing, and other city ordinances in the business district. Officers reach out to business owners to empower them with crime-prevention resources.⁴

A key strategy of this effort is the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach, which helps improve safety by making changes in the environment (such as improved lighting or landscaping) in order to curb criminal activity. IPD officers conduct free security inspections and CPTED surveys. Recommendations from these efforts include advising businesses to lock trash bins and exterior water faucets, posting adequate no trespassing signage, reporting criminal or suspicious activity to the IPD, filing restraining orders against habitual offenders, and identifying eligible clients to partake in CORP.

Through this support from the IPD, Indio businesses have been able to avoid problems with homeless people, resulting in fewer calls for service. In addition, business owners who have excelled at addressing homelessness issues on their respective properties now serve as peer coaches to other businesses.

Protecting Officer Safety and Wellness

Since he joined the IPD in August 2016, a primary focus for Chief Mike Washburn has been investing in and supporting IPD officers and the department. Washburn is achieving this goal through small and large improvements, ranging from training to policy changes to restructured staffing.

Training and resources for officers

The IPD is incorporating procedural justice into its training. In September 2016, IPD commanders attended the California Department of Justice training on “Principled Policing: Procedural Justice and Implicit Bias.” This two-day (16-hour) course provided a “how to” on teaching policy approaches that emphasize respect, listening, neutrality, and trust, while

4. For more information and free resources on the IPD website, visit http://www.indio.org/your_government/police/ipd/support_service/office_community/default.htm.

also addressing the common implicit biases that can be barriers to these approaches. This California Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST)–certified course prepared commanders to teach a one-day (8-hour) course, which the IPD is tailoring to its organization.

In addition, Chief Washburn brought in Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and the VALOR Essentials: Officer Safety, Wellness, and Resiliency training. The CIT training taught officers best practices in managing situations with individuals with mental illness. The VALOR training focused on equipping officers with practical skills to survive and thrive in their jobs, including improving situational awareness, identifying characteristics of weapon concealment, recognizing indicators of potential assault or flight, emphasizing de-escalation techniques, and developing casualty care and rescue tactics. To reinforce ideas from these trainings, the IPD purchased tourniquets for all officers and provided officers training on using them in 2018. In addition, the IPD recently purchased enhanced tactical ballistic vests, field trauma kits, and helmets, which it distributed to officers in 2018—all to enhance officer safety and support.

Improvements in policies and procedures

In 2016, Chief Washburn announced to staff and city leadership his plans to make the community complaint process more accessible and transparent. Leveraging best practices from other police departments, he instituted changes in 2017 with the goal of enabling officers and the department to quickly and efficiently resolve a complaint.

Changes included the following:

- Making the community complaint form easily accessible online and available at the front counter
- Refining and establishing protocols and timely deadlines for the review process
- More clearly defining incidents that do not require disciplinary action

- Identifying appropriate persons responsible for reviewing complaints, such as a sergeant, an assistant chief, the chief, or internal affairs
- Identifying processes for the incorporation of body-worn camera video (when available), and enhancing the use of a BlueTeam tracking system⁵

According to Chief Washburn, “The changes to the citizen complaint process are important to enhance transparency and public accountability, while tightening time frames in which investigations must be completed. Both the named employee and the complainant have a strong desire to have investigations completed in a more timely manner.”

Chief Washburn also overhauled the use of force review process and policy for the department, to include the addition of review boards, protocols, and deadlines for investigations and reviews; new forms for collecting information and data on incidents; and the use of the BlueTeam tracking system. These changes bring the IPD in line with current best practices in four arenas: guidelines for when force is appropriate, how force is reported, how force is investigated, and how force is reviewed.

Department staffing and structure

With only 67 sworn officers, the IPD has one of the lowest officer-to-population ratios in the country—0.67 sworn officers per 1,000 population (compared to a national rate of 2.4) in 2016.⁶ Stagnant pay to officers, who until 2015 had not seen raises in more than five years, compound this issue as the IPD strives to retain the officers it does have. Thus, Chief Washburn has been committed to working with the city to acquire more officers and restructure the organization to provide better oversight and leadership throughout the department. In 2017, with Washburn’s persistence and leadership, the city council approved two assistant chief positions, two lieutenant positions, one records supervisor position, two new code

5. “BlueTeam is software that allows officers and supervisors to enter and manage incidents from the field. A simple, step-by-step, internet-style interface is used, minimizing training requirements. Incidents—including use-of-force, field-level discipline, complaints, vehicle accidents, and pursuits—are entered and can then be routed through the chain-of-command with review and approval at each step.” IAPRO BlueTeam Website, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://www.iapro.com/products/blueteam/>.

6. 2017 Crime in the United States: Police Employee Data (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2017/crime-in-the-u.s.-2017/topic-pages/police-employee-data>.

enforcement technician positions, four new police officers, and one new police officer position as backfill for a quality-of-life officer. These positions will help the department achieve its mission to “safeguard and improve the quality of life in Indio by using traditional and non-traditional policing methods that promote trust and confidence in the Indio Police Department.”⁷

Establishing productive interagency and community relationships

The IPD has a long history and culture of collaborating with the community to reduce crime and address public-safety problems. This history is evidenced by the numerous community outreach and engagement initiatives led by the IPD and its Office of Community Safety (OCS).

Office of Community Safety

Established in June 2014, the IPD’s OCS is responsible for developing public awareness through community education and involvement. The IPD serves an ethnically diverse city with four significant immigrant populations—Latino, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indian. Key to the OCS’ ability to develop productive community relationships are its supervisor and community outreach coordinator, both of whom speak fluent Spanish and are highly respected by residents in these communities.

Youth programs

Through the OCS, community liaisons work with local residents and visitors, particularly youth, to promote crime prevention and provide community services. The OCS engages in a variety of youth intervention programs, described below, which are important to the IPD’s strategy for preventing youth from engaging in crime.

- **Smart Policing Initiative:** The IPD, in partnership with the University of California, Riverside, discovered a link between truancy rates and burglary rates in the city. To address this issue, the IPD partnered with youth-serving agencies and began a program to help parents better address troubled children. As a result of these efforts, as of September

7. Indio Police Department Mission Statement, accessed February 23, 2018, http://www.indio.org/your_government/police/chief_mike/message.htm.



2016 the department reported a 20-percent drop in burglaries compared with the same period in 2015. The success of this initiative led the IPD to develop and sustain a number of prevention- and evidence-based strategies.

- **Parent Project:** This training program is specifically designed for parents with out-of-control adolescents. It gives parents the tools needed to prevent and intervene when faced with destructive adolescent behavior, including drug use, gangs, truancy, poor grades, and running away. Parent Project classes are offered to Indio families year round at the Indio Teen Center, local churches, and other community-based locations. IPD facilitators have trained more than 120 families.
- **Youth Community Events:** These events include “Cops vs. Kids” community games, youth resource fairs, and youth dialogue meetings, allowing IPD officers to effectively maintain open lines of communication with city youth.
- **Indio Youth Court:** The IPD, in conjunction with the Desert Sands Unified School District, the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office, the Riverside County Courts, and the Riverside County Probation Department, formulated and implemented the Youth Offender Court Program, which allows first-time juvenile offenders who have committed low-level offenses to assume accountability for their actions and have their court case tried in front of a jury composed of student peers. School Resource Officers routinely recruit and refer new

youth to the youth court. This program has proven to be extremely effective and has a virtually zero recidivism rate for offenders who have completed the program.

- Youth Advisory Council (YAC): The IPD, community services, and the city council created YAC to educate and engage youth in local government. YAC provides youth leaders with the opportunity to voice their opinions to the city council and serve as liaisons between their schools, communities, and the police department.

Community survey

The IPD and the City of Indio regularly survey local residents to better understand community perspectives and the level of satisfaction with police programs and services.

In early 2016, the City of Indio conducted an online Community Service and Infrastructure Needs Feedback Survey to gather input on issues important to citizens, including police, gang, and drug enforcement programs; 911 emergency response times; and police patrols of neighborhoods, parks, and local schools. The city received responses from more than 900 residents, some of whom noted that “Indio has the best Police Department. Please continue those standards” and “the city needs more patrol officers.”

Following the city’s survey, the IPD conducted a survey in 2017 with support from its research partner at Arizona State University. The survey asked questions on topics such as perceptions of neighborhood safety, physical and social disorder, and neighborhood cohesion. There were also questions about officers’ treatment of residents during encounters and residents’ level of trust in the department. The survey was provided in English and Spanish during a two-month period in 2017 and was advertised through the IPD website, the City of Indio website, social media posts on Facebook and Twitter, local media (including the Spanish language newspaper), and a note included on water bills. Residents were encouraged to take the survey online through a link on the IPD website, and they could also take the survey on paper at Indio City Hall or at IPD headquarters. A total of 315 respondents completed all or part of the survey. In the survey results, residents overall expressed low levels of concern about crime and victimization but were generally satisfied with the IPD and its officers.

Furthermore, open-ended questions revealed residents' public safety concerns related to social disorder, the low number of officers in Indio, and the ability of officers to maintain patrol presence and respond quickly to emergency calls.⁸ In 2018, the IPD plans to work with its research partner to survey the public again in order to reach more Hispanic residents and those who have recently contacted police or called 911.

Citizens Advisory Board

In September 2016, Chief Washburn began to develop a Citizens Advisory Board to provide direct communication with community members regarding their public safety concerns, vision, and ideas and to create an avenue for greater community understanding and input into the IPD's policies, strategies, and priorities. Following a thorough application and vetting process, the board formed in 2017. The board includes a diverse cross-section of members who are active in the community and endeavor to work with the IPD to strengthen police-community relations. The board meets regularly with the chief for dialogue about challenging issues such as racial profiling, use of force, and officer accountability and to provide input on IPD policies, procedures, and programs.

Implementing innovative technologies

The IPD is committed to using technology to better serve the community. One way the department has followed through on this commitment is through increased web and social media presence.

IPD website and social media

In an age of digital information sharing, the IPD recognized the need to modernize its online presence. In 2017, working with the City of Indio, the department developed a new website to provide a more engaging platform for department news, resources, crime reporting, events, and updates. The IPD plans to continue improving the website by adding information on department policies and crime data in the near future. These efforts will be a force multiplier for the department in improving public messaging and transparency, building community relationships, reducing violent crime, and building legitimacy.

8. Cody W. Telep and Joe Bottenna, *Views of Indio, CA, Residents Regarding Crime and the Indio Police Department: Final Report* (Phoenix: Arizona State University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 2017).

In addition, with assistance from SNPPI, the IPD created a social media team including a patrol or public information officer sergeant, a patrol officer, a school resource officer, two major crimes unit detectives, a street crimes unit detective, a crime analyst, a dispatcher, an office assistant, and a Citizen Helping Indio Police volunteer. The team members manage the department's social media accounts on Facebook (indioplicedepartment), Twitter (@indiopd), and Instagram (indioplicedepartment). Through these accounts, the department engages in a variety of messaging and innovative community outreach campaigns, including Trivia Tuesday, Feel Good Friday, videos, event notifications, critical incident updates, and a "typical day" campaign. In the short time the team has been in place, the IPD has seen positive gains and increases in the number of followers, which are tracked on a weekly basis (see table 1).

Table 1. Indio Police Department social media account statuses

Date	Facebook likes	Instagram followers	Instagram following	Twitter followers	Twitter following
September 29, 2017	2,306	234	23	419	94
December 28, 2017	3,113	1,043	414	505	98
January 4, 2018	3,128	1,054	419	509	98
January 11, 2018	3,147	1,077	420	516	99

Lessons learned from SNPPI TTA

A targeted training and technical assistance (TTA) plan was developed during this project to support the IPD's efforts to continually learn and improve in the key areas of precision policing. TTA was provided in three areas: officer safety, social media engagement, and analysis of officer injuries. Following is an overview of the TTA and lessons learned that are applicable to the IPD and also to departments across the nation.

Officer safety training

To support the chief's goal of promoting officer safety and wellness, the IPD received officer safety and wellness training, free of charge, from the Bureau of Justice Assistance's VALOR initiative in 2017. This training



prepares law enforcement officers for duty by introducing and reexamining essential skills that every law enforcement professional should possess. Key concepts covered in the training include the following:

- **Threats and Challenges:** As the threats and challenges faced by law enforcement continue to change on both a national and a local scale, so must each officer and law enforcement training. Current training topics in this evolving category include crisis-intervention techniques, casualty care and rescue concepts, and law enforcement professionalism.
- **Words and Actions:** Detect and decipher visual and verbal cues by subjects and learn how words and actions affect an encounter. Having these skills can help defuse and de-escalate a dangerous situation, detect a hidden weapon, or prevent an attempted assault.
- **Mind and Body:** Prepare both physically and mentally for whatever tomorrow may bring by learning methods to improve long-term wellness and resiliency. Listen to an officer's personal story of survival and recovery from a critical incident.⁹

9. "VALOR Officer Safety and Wellness," training presented at Command Presence, Arlington, TX, November 2–3, 2017, <http://commandpresence.net/register/valor-officer-safety-wellness-2/>.

The IPD considered this training opportunity very beneficial, particularly because it permanently added skills to the department for preventing and de-escalating situations that could otherwise result in a violent encounter. In addition, as a result of the training, the IPD finalized department-wide tourniquet training and purchased 85 field trauma kits, which are carried in an enhanced tactical ballistic vest. Every sworn officer in the department is now outfitted with these kits.

Social media engagement

As part of Chief Washburn's commitment to strengthening community partnerships, the IPD sought assistance from CNA subject matter expert Laura McElroy to refine its social media outreach and presence. By growing social media, Chief Washburn hopes to encourage a healthy exchange of ideas between citizens and officers and to build the relationships needed to create a team approach to making Indio a better place to live, work, and play. Throughout 2017, McElroy assisted the IPD through an onsite visit and regular virtual conversations. She provided the executive team, supervisors, and the public information officer with an overview of the importance of social media engagement as well as strategies to improve the department's social media reach. Using mock scenarios, she assisted the department through practical drills to ensure that participants developed tangible skills that will help the agency in future critical incidents.

As a result of this assistance, the IPD developed a social media plan with goals for each of the department's social media platforms, including protocols and policies that reflect the State of California's public records law for the IPD's newly created social media team. In addition, the social media team developed strategies for increasing community engagement via daily posts and effective video campaigns that showcase the positive work of Indio police officers and employees.



Officer injuries

In line with Chief Washburn's goal of promoting officer safety and wellness, and in response to an analysis suggesting that Indio's officer injury rate is higher than the California state average, the chief requested technical assistance to understand the impact on patrol operations of having officers currently on leave or light duty. While on leave or assigned to light duty, officers normally assigned to patrol are unavailable to perform regular duties such as responding to calls for service, which may leave the department understaffed. In 2018 and in partnership with CNA and the IPD, the Center for Public Safety Management (CPSM), LLC, conducted an analysis of various aspects of the department's patrol operations, including a description of calls for service, an analysis of non-call patrol activities, call response times, and other issues. This analysis will assist with understanding and resolving officer staffing levels and how they are impacted by officer injuries.

Conclusion

The IPD's history of using precision policing principles to understand, respond to, and build positive relationships with the community is a model for police agencies across the nation. While the IPD experiences great successes in these efforts, the department's culture of innovation, self-improvement, strong leadership, and use of data and analysis allows it to identify areas for future growth.

Exemplifying this growth mindset, the department plans to replace its Computer Aided Dispatch system, disseminate and share more information online and through social media, participate in a recent invitation for Chief Washburn to join the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) President's advisory board to discuss current issues related to police trust and legitimacy, and expand on the 2017 community survey to gather more specific data on police-community interactions.

Chief Washburn understands the importance of participating in initiatives like SNPPI that bring together police departments committed to reducing crime and engaging their communities:

"The Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative brought together the most progressive, experienced, and iconic American police leaders to create the recipe for what a modern-day police department should be in our current times. Due to the multiple variants in agencies, cities, and communities, following that recipe requires the chief to prioritize and tap into resources and ideas as he or she moves [his or her] respective agency toward the ideal. Having well-connected researchers and project support staff greatly expands the chief's peer group and resources while helping them avoid the pitfalls others experienced."





3003 Washington Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201

703.824.2000

www.cna.org