

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

SAN ANTONIO (TEXAS) POLICE DEPARTMENT



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Introduction

The San Antonio (Texas) Police Department (SAPD) 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 SAPD 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 SAPD'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.

William P. McManus was first appointed San Antonio Chief of Police in 2006. He has a 40-year history of law enforcement beginning in Washington, D.C., in 1975. He served in a wide range of assignments and worked his way up the ranks to become the assistant chief of the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department in 1998. He later served as the chief of police in Dayton, Ohio, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. After a brief retirement, he returned as chief of police in San Antonio in 2014. During his tenure as chief, he is credited with reinvigorating community outreach efforts, upgrading cadet and in-service training, and institutionalizing a greater focus on reducing violent crime. Nationally, Chief McManus is regarded as one of the most experienced and effective law enforcement leaders.

Background

San Antonio, Texas, was established as a Spanish mission and colonial outpost in 1718, and its Spanish roots are reflected today in its demography, architecture, and culture. Today, the city is the second-largest in Texas and seventh-largest in the United States, with an estimated population of nearly 1.4 million. With approximately 2,000 sworn officers, San Antonio's police department has kept pace with its size. However, the city's sprawling growth during the last half of the 20th century has stretched police resources, ultimately leading to greater reliance on automobiles and reactive policing strategies. To counter this tendency, the SAPD entered the 21st century recommitted to its focus on community policing. Under Chief William McManus, the department has created and expanded community

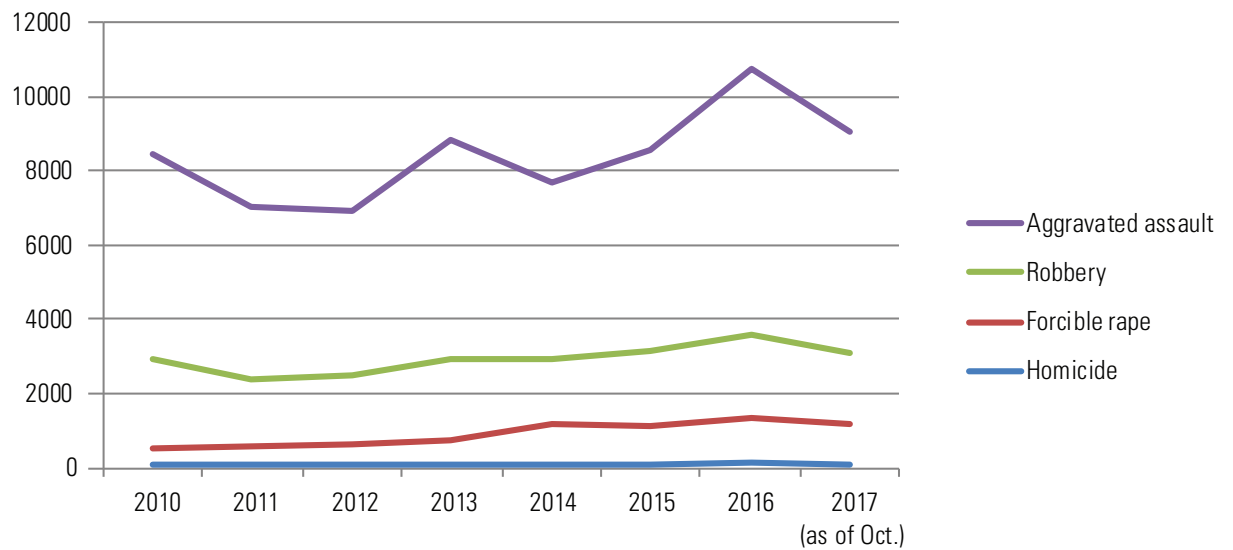
partnerships. It has also leveraged community resources to advance its connection with the public through both innovative new programs and proven practices such as organizing athletic leagues and Police Explorer clubs.

Today, the SAPD enjoys a reputation as one of the nation's leading law enforcement agencies. Its innovative programs, strong connections with its communities, and effective crime-fighting strategies provide invaluable examples and lessons for other law enforcement agencies. The department also strives to recruit and retain a workforce from San Antonio and surrounding regions that reflects the demographics of the city. Most importantly, the SAPD has developed meaningful partnerships with community-based service providers through programs like its HOPE Team, a national model for delivering and coordinating services for the city's homeless and addicted populations, and through armies of volunteers and parents that implement youth-serving programs. The SAPD has been at the forefront of addressing officer safety and wellness. To counter the stresses of 21st-century policing, the SAPD has employed biometric techniques in officer training and embedded clinical psychologists into police early-intervention services and other aspects of police operations. Finally, the department established a Violent Crime Task Force in 2017 in response to increasing violent crime.

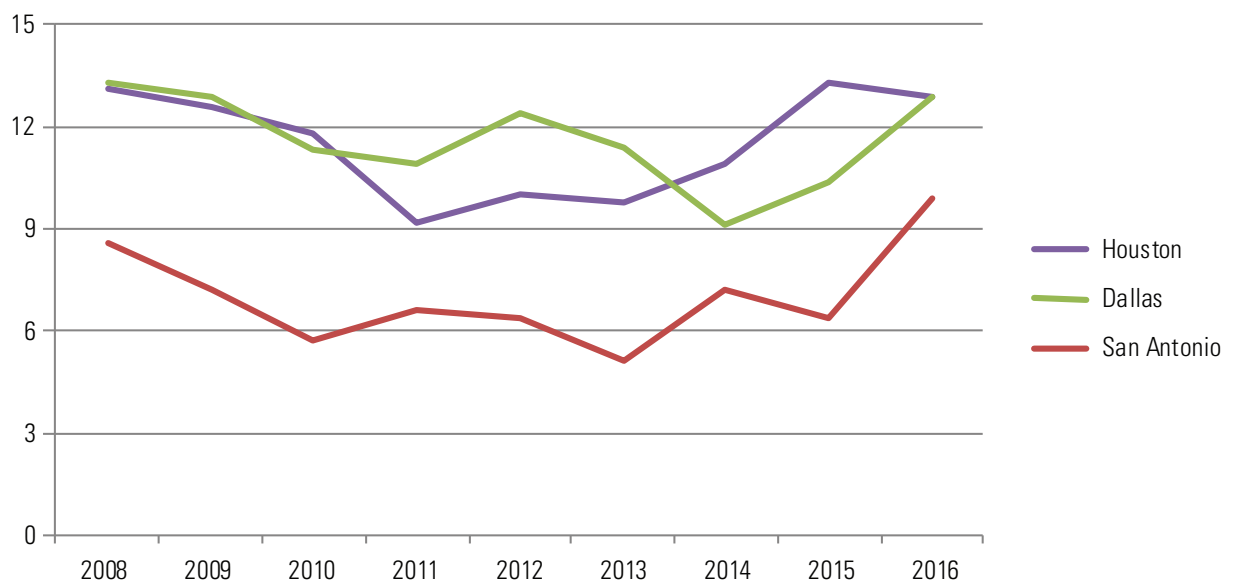
Historical Crime Rates and Trends in San Antonio

The SAPD's strategies to thwart increases in violent crime include the Violent Crime Task Force, the Street Crimes Unit, and an anti-gang initiative. Following the introduction of these efforts, the city saw a reduction in violent crime in 2017 (see figure 1 on page 4).

Although San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas share similar demographics, the violent crime picture is strikingly different (see table 1 on page 4). Murder rates, often taken as a reliable measure of total violent crime, have historically been lower in San Antonio than in its similarly sized counterparts, perhaps as a result of the longstanding strong bonds between San Antonio law enforcement and the communities it serves. Since 2010, however, murder rates in San Antonio have risen only slightly—but other violent crime rates in San Antonio, particularly aggravated assault, have risen sharply (see figure 2 on page 4). The SAPD has addressed this rise through its ongoing community outreach and partnerships.

Figure 1. Violent crime in San Antonio, 2010–2017**Table 1. Demographics for Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, 2016**

	San Antonio	Dallas	Houston
18+ years	71%	73%	73%
65+ years	10%	9%	8%
Family households	69%	60%	64%
Owner occupied housing	58%	43%	46%

Figure 2. Homicide rates per 100,000 for Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, 2008–2016

Identifying Promising Strategies to Reduce Crime

The SAPD's crime-fighting capabilities have the flexibility to strategically surge officers to high-crime areas or address spikes in specific crime categories. The SAPD also operates specialized units that support multidisciplinary approaches to crime reduction, including mental health and crisis response teams. This section highlights the SAPD's strategies and programs for reducing violent crime.

Violent Crime Task Force

The Violent Crime Task Force (VCTF), implemented in 2017, is a proactive, multiagency unit comprising SAPD covert units, including the Street Crimes Unit; SWAT; Fusion Center personnel; and representatives from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. The VCTF is designed to effectively reduce crime throughout San Antonio. The task force, which does not focus on specific geographic regions, relies on crime intelligence to identify and apprehend known criminals who are responsible for a significant share of the illegal activity that ultimately culminates in violent crime.

Participating law enforcement agencies include the SAPD; Bexar County Sheriff's Office; Bexar County District Attorney; U.S. Attorney's Office; Texas Department of Public Safety; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the Drug Enforcement Agency; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Throughout 2017 and 2018, these agencies have met biweekly to discuss overall strategy and enforcement efforts. Since its implementation, the efforts of the VCTF have resulted in the arrest of more than 5,687 criminals, the recovery of 690 handguns, the arrest of 594 gang members, the seizure of over 205,000 grams of marijuana, and the seizure of more than \$1.2 million. The efforts of the VCTF and other initiatives led to a reduction of 6 percent in Part 1 crime from 2016 to 2017. Specifically, the SAPD saw a 16 percent decrease in homicides, from 149 in 2016 to 125 in 2017. They saw an even more impressive decrease in murders attributed to drug and gang violence: a 58 percent decrease in gang-related murders, a 46 percent decrease in narcotics-related murders, and a 73 percent decrease in murders related to both gangs and narcotics.

Street Crimes Unit

The SAPD created a Street Crimes Unit (SCU) to conduct semi-special operations such as executing low-risk warrants. The unit is also a large portion of the SAPD's Mobile Field Force and trains on ways to handle large or antagonistic crowds. The SCU consists of 30 officers, 12 detectives, 6 sergeants, and 1 lieutenant and operates under the Tactical Support Division. The detectives in this unit work covertly and deal with offenses that may be contributing to crime in areas of the city. The unit is flexible in its hours of operation and its locations throughout the city. If crime increases in an area of the city, the SCU will be deployed to that area as needed to conduct proactive policing or community-oriented engagements.

Intelligence-Led Policing

The SAPD has adopted a management philosophy and a policing model rooted in Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP). ILP relies on a process of information gathering and data analysis that results in the development of actionable criminal intelligence. In addition, the traditional hierarchal structure of the department has been replaced with a flattened, cooperative structure to increase the collection of information and more rapidly deliver criminal intelligence to field units. A key element of the ILP process is a commitment to engaging the community as a partner in crime-reduction efforts. The SAPD actively engages in collaborative partnerships with the community to increase information gathering and improve intelligence, building on the philosophy of other models such as Community-Oriented Policing and Problem-Oriented Policing. Furthermore, the SAPD is committed to ensuring the community's trust by adopting legal safeguards to protect the public's privacy and civil liberties. ILP promotes increased information gathering, data analysis, and collaboration to better respond to contemporary crime problems and more accurately predict future crime trends.

To promote the ILP philosophy and increase collaboration among federal, state, and local law enforcement, the SAPD has sponsored the development of a major urban area fusion center, the Southwest Texas Fusion Center (SWTFC). The SWTFC, recognized as a level-two fusion center by

the State of Texas and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, is managed by the SAPD. The mission of the SWTFC is to develop an “all-threats, all-hazards” approach to information and intelligence sharing and public safety, collaborating with regional and national partners in the pursuit of a safer community and nation. This commitment allows the SAPD to maximize its collection and intelligence-sharing capacity within the region and to capitalize on enhanced intelligence to improve the department’s tactical and strategic crime reduction efforts.¹

Protecting Officer Safety and Wellness

San Antonio, a national leader in officer wellness programming, is the focus of much attention from police departments across the country. For example, its Performance and Recovery Optimization™ training and peer-to-peer support teams were recently highlighted in a number of national conference presentations and law enforcement publications. This section overviews some of the SAPD’s most innovative officer safety and wellness initiatives.

Performance and Recovery Optimization™ program

In 2013, the SAPD incorporated Performance and Recovery Optimization™ (PRO) into its training strategy. This unique program is embedded throughout the department, including eight hours of cadet training, six hours of in-service training, and return-to-duty evaluations. Most importantly, a trained psychologist works with instructors to reinforce skills during driving, tactics, and firearms training. The basics of the program are rooted in performance and sports psychology and use the most up-to-date scientific literature on stress and performance optimization. The PRO program and Defender’s Edge (a four-day resiliency and stress-management course) seek to optimize a person’s performance both on the job and at home. The skills taught in these programs include controlled breathing, muscle control, attention management, performance self-talk, and a winning mindset. The PRO Training Team includes tactics and driving staff, three MHU officers, one SWAT operator, one detective, and two officers.

1. More information about the SAPD’s ILP efforts can be found at <http://www.sanantonio.gov/SAPD/Intelligence-Led-Policing>.

The SAPD also has three psychologists on staff, who meet with officers after a critical incident to determine fitness for duty. The psychologists also meet with officers to determine whether they are handling the mental stress of the incident well, or if they need time off, treatment, or counseling to help them cope with traumatic stress.

The PRO Training Team includes tactics and driving staff, three MHU officers, one SWAT operator, one detective, and two officers.

Officer Concern Program and Peer Support Team

The SAPD's Officer Concern Program (OCP) began in 2007 as a nonpunitive initiative to track officer complaints. Under the OCP, a Peer Support Team provides a venue for officers to seek assistance such as financial counseling, stress management, etc. The Peer Support Team has more than 65 volunteers and three psychologists. Depending on need, the Peer Support Team will make referrals to the OCP. Members of the Peer Support Team attend a two-day training session that teaches them how to respond to common mental health issues, emphasizes the importance of confidentiality, and prepares them to serve as peer support members.

Establishing Productive Interagency Partnerships with Law Enforcement and Community Stakeholders

San Antonio has a long history of community involvement in nearly all aspects of civic life. This tradition is reflected in its policing philosophy and in its sponsorship of robust athletic leagues and youth-focused programs, a strong Police Explorers program, and other innovative programming. The SAPD's community partners play an integral role in its ability to provide wraparound security and services for the city. These coalitions and partnerships now serve as a national model for other agencies seeking to reduce crime. This section outlines the extensive array of programs and initiatives the SAPD employs to address crime alongside its many community partners.



SAPD Mental Health Unit

The SAPD Mental Health Unit was established in 2005. The Mental Health Unit is currently six officers, who undergo 14 training sessions totaling 3,020 hours of training before joining the unit. This unit delivers the 40-hour block of SAPD Cadet Crisis Intervention Training and also provides training to other public safety agencies in the region. The unit also partners with local mental health stakeholders to better serve the needs of the community. These partnerships allow the unit to be aware of and promote the resources available to community members dealing with a mental health crisis.

Homeless Outreach Positive Encounters Team

In 2017, the HOPE Team made 1,406 contacts in the San Antonio community. Of those contacts, it worked with 490 clients in ID Recovery, obtaining 160 birth certificates and 250 Texas IDs.

The SAPD's Homeless Outreach Positive Encounters (HOPE) Team is a national model for delivering and coordinating services for the city's homeless and addicted populations. The HOPE team comprises bike patrol officers who have extensive experience with the homeless population in the downtown area. The HOPE team approaches issues (intervention, diversion, and prevention) within the homeless population through less traditional law enforcement methods, without criminalizing and marginalizing this societal demographic. The team focuses on helping individuals and families that are displaced or homeless by listening to them and identifying specific needs. The program then guides them to appropriate services and assists with overcoming the challenges and dysfunction that homelessness creates to track and manage progress and success.

The HOPE team also helps the homeless through what is now called ID Recovery. Because every housing service provider requires a government-issued identification card to access their programs, these individuals must have a form of identification. The HOPE team helps to establish identity by comparing fingerprint records. In 2017, the HOPE Team made 1,406 contacts in the San Antonio community. Of those contacts, it worked with 490 clients in ID Recovery, obtaining 160 birth certificates and 250 Texas IDs. The HOPE team identifies the barriers to homeless individuals and, with the assistance of community partners, tries to mitigate these barriers and provide housing.

Nonenforcement activities

SAPD officers are mentors. They have been leading programs like the Police Athletics League (PAL) and Police Explorers for many years, and new initiatives also encourage officer involvement in non-enforcement activities across the city.

- **Police Athletics League:** The San Antonio Police Athletics League (PAL) has existed since 1990. As PAL evolved, the SAPD partnered with several organizations and school districts. No city funding is used for PAL, which prides itself on being self-sufficient through partnerships, private donations, and private fundraisers. The funds are managed through the San Antonio PAL Board, a 501(c) (3) Non-Profit Organization. All SAPD PAL programs are free to all children and families that participate.

- **SAFFE Units:** The SAPD's San Antonio Fear Free Environment (SAFFE) Unit was established in 1994. The unit is vital to the department's efforts to engage with the community. SAFFE officers are assigned to specific areas or neighborhoods within the city, and work closely with residents and the district patrol officers assigned to those areas. SAFFE officers establish and maintain day-to-day interaction with residents and businesses within their assigned beats in order to prevent crimes before they happen. SAFFE officers also act as liaisons with other city agencies, work closely with schools and youth programs, coordinate graffiti-removal activities, and serve as resources to residents who wish to take back their neighborhoods from crime and decay.
- **Citizen Police Academy:** The SAPD Citizen Police Academy was started in March 1994 to educate San Antonio citizens about the structure and activities of their police department. The Citizen Police Academy, an 11-week course, is designed to build a bond of mutual trust and respect between the SAPD and community members and to teach the importance of community participation in public safety. Academy topics include an overview of the department's structure; information on police recruiting and training; and hands-on workshops about Criminal Investigations, Firearms Training Simulator (FATS), K9 Unit, SAFFE/Cellular on Patrol, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), Vice/Internet Crimes Helicopter Unit, Gang Unit, identity theft, and more.
- **Police Explorers Program:** Since the 1980s, the San Antonio Police Explorers program has served as a gateway to a career in law enforcement for youth in the San Antonio community. Through the program, youth aged 14–21 are introduced to the complexity of law enforcement as well as police operations and procedures. Explorers build character, develop leadership skills, gain appreciation for community service, and develop good citizenship. As of 2017, more than 155 total youth had participated in this program. The SAPD actively recruits police officers from participants in this program.
- **Life Skills Academy:** The Life Skills Academy is one of the programs the SAPD uses to educate local youth about issues they may face throughout their maturation into adulthood. This nine-week program engages youth aged 10–12 and is taught by SAPD training academy instructors in partnership with the San Antonio Boys and Girls Club. The program focuses



on topics such as the consequences of decision-making, self-awareness and character, personal and community relationships, substance awareness and prevention, leadership skills, and healthy lifestyle practices.

- **San Antonio Principled Enforcement and Community Engagement:** The San Antonio Principled Enforcement and Community Engagement program bridges the gap between local youth and the law enforcement community. The SAPD, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas, and the San Antonio Division of the FBI have partnered to host a youth program for high school students. The program teaches local youth how to have a positive encounter with law enforcement and provides youth with an opportunity to discuss their experiences with law enforcement.
- **Success through Respect:** The SAPD developed the Success through Respect program as a conversation-based interactive presentation targeted at youth groups and college, high school, and middle school students. The presentation, which ranges from 50 minutes to two hours, is delivered by SAPD officers and provides students an opportunity to experience a traffic stop from an officer's perspective, encourages them to be respectful when encountering an officer, and encourages them to report unprofessional officers.

Citizen volunteer programs also play an important role in the department's crime-fighting strategies. These include the following:

- **UNIDOS:** In February 2015, the San Antonio Police Chief and the SAPD Public Information Office (PIO) announced a new cultural outreach program geared toward Spanish-speaking San Antonio residents. Periodic meetings (reuniones) present information on topics including programs within the SAPD and other City of San Antonio government agencies, crime prevention tips, crime trends, state and local laws, and much more. Attendees benefit from UNIDOS because it serves as a resource center to address quality-of-life issues and provide valuable information to the city's Spanish-speaking community. The city as a whole also benefits from the rise in public awareness. Crimes are more likely to be reported, trust is increased, and information on ongoing crimes is shared in an open atmosphere, which enables the police department to connect with a significant segment of the population in a positive way.
- **Family Assistance Crisis Team:** The SAPD, in collaboration with the community, established the Family Assistance Crisis Team (FACT) in 1991. Several years later, FACT became part of the Victim's Advocacy Office of the SAPD. FACT consists of volunteers from the community who undergo 17 hours of training. Since its beginning, more than 1,800 FACT volunteers have been trained to offer crisis intervention services to victims and their families.
- **Volunteers in Policing:** The SAPD's Volunteers in Policing program offers the community an opportunity to assist the SAPD with duties ranging from clerical tasks to rooftop surveillance.

Lessons Learned from SNPPI TTA

In addition to the expertise and technical assistance provided by the Strategic Site Coordinator and the analyst through SNPPI, the TTA team also provided the SAPD with tailored technical assistance on several topics. This technical assistance included a review of the department's Officer Concern Program (OCP) policy and training related to its communication and social media processes.

SAPD Twitter followers

- June 11, 2017: 11,542
- February 11, 2018: 15,398
- Increase: 3,856, or 33 percent

To further enhance its OCP policies and procedures, the SAPD requested that Hassan Aden, a subject matter expert on early intervention systems and former chief of police in Greenville, North Carolina, review its policy to ensure it met national best practices. Aden reviewed the SAPD OCP policy and noted that the policy was in fact a model policy for early intervention. He also provided a few recommendations for the department to consider.

In addition to receiving technical assistance from Chief Aden, the SAPD also requested training from Laura McElroy, a former public information officer for the Tampa (Florida) Police Department and now a consultant to the U.S. Department of Justice. McElroy provided the SAPD with a two-day training session on social media and communications strategies. The SAPD command staff, the PIO, and the SAFFE officers attended this training because they are engaged in community-oriented policing and social media. In addition to this training, she also provided the SAPD with a staffing analysis, revealing that the PIO was understaffed based on the city's population, number of officers, and calls for service. As a result, the San Antonio City Administrator approved two new PIO positions.

Although the SAPD's social media presence was already notable, the training has enhanced the department's internal and external communications strategies. As a result of this training, the agency focused on building a Twitter following so they can successfully use the tool during highly publicized, controversial incidents. The department's Twitter following increased by 32 percent in eight months. SAFFE officers now have the responsibility to monitor social media during a critical incident and provide updates to the PIO, ensuring commanders have a more complete picture when making decisions about managing an incident.

Facebook was the agency's primary social media platform, with 183,065 followers. The training helped the PIO team recognize the value of using video to reach a broader audience. The newly created videos have an average of 46,000 views. These videos were also modified and shared on Twitter and Instagram.

The SAPD PIO had established a positive rapport with the local media and grown an impressive following on Facebook despite being understaffed and spending a substantial portion of its time reacting to events, rather than proactively reaching out. The TTA has increased the agency's ability to "tell its own story" by helping expand the office, streamline the workload, and focus its efforts on video and new social media platforms.

Conclusion

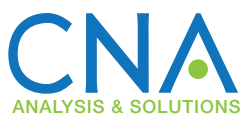
The SAPD represents the best of the past and the promise of a better future in American policing practices. Although other departments have experienced drop-offs in their nonenforcement contacts with youth, San Antonio has maintained and expanded interactions through its robust Police Athletic League and Police Explorer programs. The SAPD exemplifies precision policing applications, innovative partnerships with community-based organizations, and cutting-edge officer safety and wellness programs. In 2017, in response to a violent crime spike and with the urging of the then U.S. Attorney General and the U.S. Department of Justice, the SAPD established a highly successful Violent Crime Task Force that led to significant reductions in homicide and other serious crime. The SAPD provides lessons and promising practices for other policing agencies across the nation.

The SAPD remains committed to working with the community to identify and implement policies, programs, and initiatives to build upon the progress achieved in 2017 to further reduce violent crime throughout the city.

— Chief William P. McManus







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