

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

SOUTH DAKOTA HIGHWAY PATROL



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Introduction

The South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP) 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 SDHP 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 SDHP'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

During a SNPPI team site visit, one trooper reported driving more than 100 miles to back up a fellow officer on a call. Traveling such distances to provide assistance to another officer is not uncommon in South Dakota. This broad geographic reach, beyond that of any municipal police department, affects many important elements of agency management and operations including supervision, officer safety, scheduling, and training.

The SDHP has recognized that success in modern American policing requires two overarching components: (1) maintaining a commitment to the values and traditions that have led to agency success over time and (2) building the agency's capacity to adjust to and eventually to anticipate the changes needed to sustain success in a rapidly changing environment.

The SDHP is the only statewide law enforcement agency participating in the SNPPI and therefore provides a perspective on the challenges and opportunities that may be unique to state agencies. This report focuses on the ways the SDHP is addressing that reality and its successes and lessons learned along the way.

The SDHP, a component of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, was established in 1935 to enhance highway safety and to provide assistance to motorists. It is headquartered in Pierre, the capital of South Dakota. The agency currently employs 189 troopers and 77 civilians. Colonel Craig Price is the 14th superintendent of the SDHP and has held that position since 2011. Although the SNPPI site team collaborated with a number of SDHP personnel during this project, Col. Price was the team's primary point of contact.

South Dakota has more than 1,800 certified state and local law enforcement officers. Together, the two largest cities, Sioux Falls and Rapid City, are home to more than 200,000 residents. Police services in these two communities and many others across the state are provided by local departments. Police services in more rural areas are provided by the state's 66 county sheriffs' offices, many of which have fewer than five deputies. The SDHP routinely provides assistance to local agencies and recognizes the importance of this statewide responsibility. This law enforcement structure enhances the role and influence of the statewide SDHP in many small communities.

The SDHP is responsible for enforcing all criminal and traffic laws in South Dakota. Highway safety and enforcement are priorities for the agency—the state's population of 830,000 is spread across 77,000 square miles and relies on the 7,800-mile state highway system.¹ There is one SDHP officer for every 407 square miles and a ratio of 0.2 officers per 1,000 residents (the national average is 2.4 officers per 1,000 people).² State troopers are stationed in all corners of the state. Many small duty stations have only a single trooper, who may be the only SDHP employee living in the community.



Photo of statewide SDHP employees and Governor Dennis Daugaard on the front steps of the State Capitol.

On average, SDHP state troopers respond to about 150,000 calls for service each year. In 2016, troopers investigated more than 3,600 motor vehicle crashes, made 2,392 arrests for driving while intoxicated, and made 4,230 illegal narcotics arrests.³ Although SDHP troopers account for only 10 percent of the total number of sworn officers in South Dakota, they

1. "Highways," South Dakota Department of Transportation, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://www.sddot.com/transportation/highways/Default.aspx>.

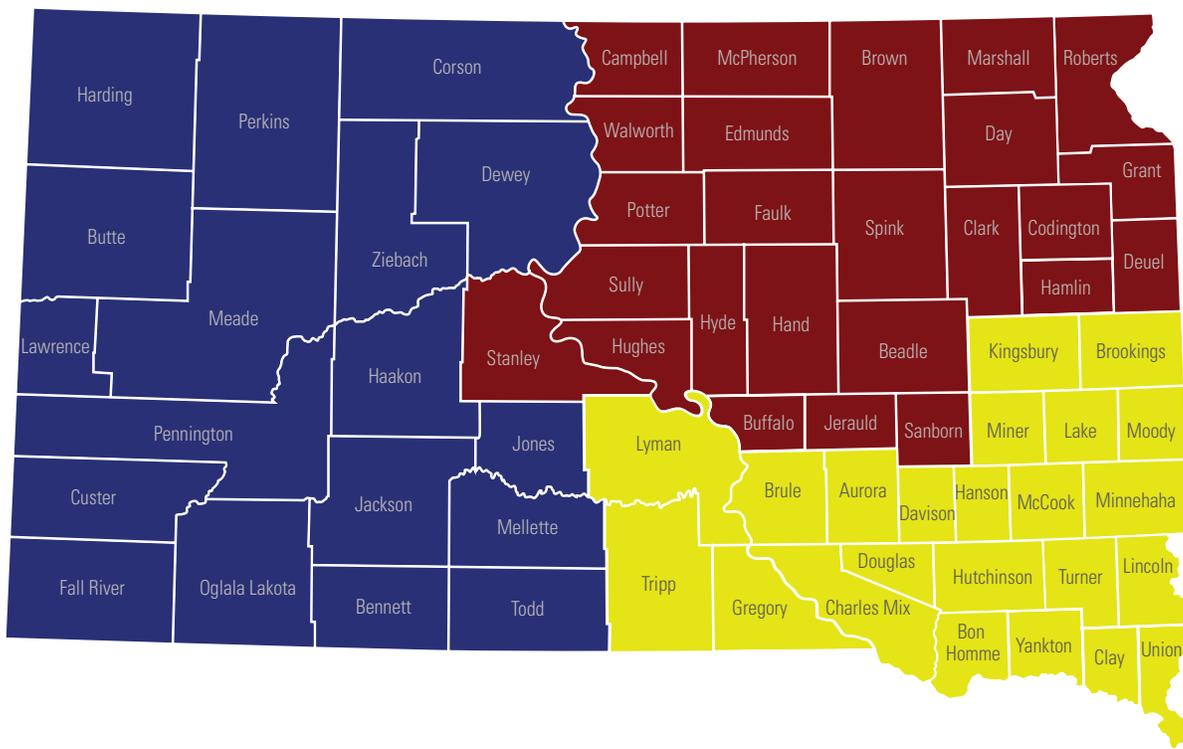
2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Police Employee Data," Crime in the United States 2016 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2017), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/police-employees>.

3. SDHP statistics for calendar year 2016, January 2018.

investigate approximately 21 percent of all motor vehicle crashes and approximately 80 percent of the fatal motor vehicle crashes that occur in South Dakota.⁴

The SDHP community and stakeholders include other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; residents of and visitors to South Dakota; Native American tribes; crime victims; the South Dakota Department of Transportation; and state, local, and federal prosecutors. Figure 1 shows a geographic breakdown of the three SDHP patrol districts.

Figure 1. SDHP patrol districts



The SDHP does not have a designated criminal investigative unit, but SDHP troopers will conduct criminal investigations when the troopers are the sole responders to general service calls and felonies in progress. Troopers routinely partner with the state's Division of Criminal Investigation and members of other agencies in South Dakota to investigate vehicular homicides, drug cases, officer-involved shootings, and other complex criminal cases.

4. SDHP statistics for calendar year 2016 (see note 3).

The SDHP takes seriously its responsibility as the most visible police agency across South Dakota and understands the unique role that it—and all state police and highway patrol organizations—plays. The agency is aggressively seeking new ways to improve public safety service. Col. Price and his staff support and promote the principles of precision policing.

The SDHP is a proud organization that relies heavily on its strong traditions of service and core values to guide the actions of its leadership and employees. Troopers routinely operate with a great deal of independence far from assistance or supervisory oversight. The people of South Dakota respect the organization, as evidenced by unpublished responses to its most recent community survey, but the agency also recognizes that the world is changing and it must adapt. This report highlights some best practices the SDHP has established—and some it intends to implement—for the welfare of the organization and the safety of the communities it serves.

Policy and Planning: The Critical Role of the SDHP Strategic Plan

Organizations working to make systemic improvements are bound to face obstacles. Early in his tenure at the SDHP, Col. Price sought to begin a change process that he knew would require leadership to adapt and focus.

In 2012, the SDHP initiated a partnership with the University of South Dakota's Government Research Bureau to help provide the organization with direction and evidence-based strategies to build a unified sense of purpose and ownership. The research included surveys administered internally to SDHP employees and externally to other stakeholder law enforcement agencies in South Dakota, as well as additional input from both sworn and nonsworn line-level employees and upper management. The data were incorporated into the 2012–2015 Strategic Plan.⁵ The SDHP completed more than 80 percent of its goals and tasks listed in the plan. Because of this success, it was an easy decision to develop and implement another strategic plan in 2016. This time, however, the SDHP added a community survey and incorporated that feedback to its plan development.

5. CNA Site Team, interviews with South Dakota Highway Patrol staff, September 6–8, 2016.

Designing and implementing the 2016–2019 Strategic Plan required coordination between senior SDHP staff and Dr. Shane Nordyke from the University of South Dakota. Data collection was complex, soliciting input from employees and stakeholders.⁶ The SDHP’s longstanding relationship with the university was invaluable in harnessing academic expertise to develop, administer, and analyze both the community and employee surveys. These data indicate a significant level of public satisfaction with service provided by the SDHP and shifts in employee opinion that denote a positive workplace environment.

Community survey results (see figure 2 on page 7) indicate that most South Dakota citizens are satisfied with the SDHP. More than 75 percent of respondents rate their experiences with the SDHP in the past three years as “very positive” or “positive.” Similarly, more than 80 percent of those responding agreed that SDHP troopers “conduct themselves in a professional manner” and “treated me with respect.”

The unpublished 2015 employee (see figure 3 on page 7) survey demonstrated that the organization achieved significant improvements since the original survey in 2011. In 2015, 81 percent of responding employees agreed that communication inside the SDHP was encouraged, compared to 53 percent in 2011. When asked in 2011 whether employee feedback on decisions that affect work was welcomed by the agency, 57 percent of those responding said yes; 73 percent said yes in 2015. In 2011, 56 percent of employees who responded agreed that the SDHP respects employees regardless of their position. That number rose to 75 percent in 2015.

6. CNA Site Team, interview with Dr. Shane Nordyke, September 7, 2016.

Figure 2. Selected results of SDHP community survey, 2015

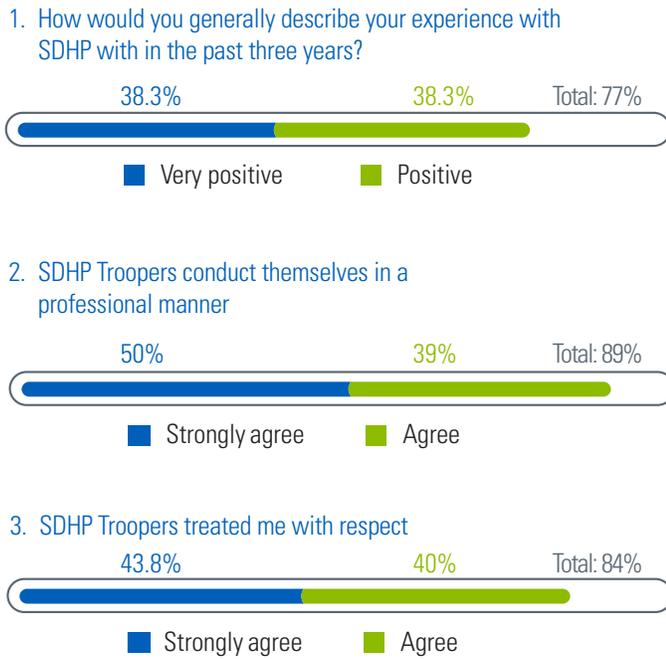


Figure 3. Selected results of SDHP employee surveys, 2011 and 2015



As with any public-sector planning process, accountability is vital. Col. Price has assigned each of the goals and objectives in the 2016–2019 Strategic Plan to key personnel within the agency; meetings to track progress are routine. Decisions about adjustments to the plan, consideration of new information, and reprioritization may be undertaken at these routine evaluations. The agency widely distributes the strategic plan among personnel, providing a framework for making a good organization better. Senior staff use the SDHP Strategic Plan as a working document and frequently refer to it when making administrative decisions—whether they involve policy, procedure, or budget.

Essentially, the SDHP is using the strategic plan as a change management tool. This approach can be especially useful for agencies that strive for improvement across a broad spectrum of line, staff, and information management components. Strategic plans are certainly not unique in American policing, but effective and sustainable implementation can be challenging for many agencies in the face of continuous operational and administrative pressures.

According to the strategic plan, the SDHP operates under six strategic priorities:

1. Leadership
2. DUI/Criminal interdiction
3. Crash prevention and investigation
4. Motor carrier services
5. Community engagement
6. Employee and organizational commitment

Within these six strategic priorities, the 2016–2019 Strategic Plan focuses on seven major goals, with an SDHP executive assigned to each:

1. Continue to encourage employees to maintain high standards of service.
2. Prevent criminal activity and deter DUI behaviors.
3. Reduce the number and severity of crashes.

4. Improve community relations.
5. Develop and maintain positive employee relations.
6. Enhance recruiting practices to increase and diversify manpower.
7. Remain innovative and responsible in our technology use.

Each goal is further divided into objectives and tasks. A total of 97 tasks were derived from the priorities and goals, each with SDHP personnel assigned responsibility for completion.

Examples of SDHP Strategic Plan goals and outcomes

The current SDHP Strategic Plan is a comprehensive document with many goals, objectives, and tasks. The following is a sample of some of the successes SDHP has already achieved:

Goal 1: Continue to encourage employees to maintain high standards of service.

Objective: Ensure availability, quality, and relevance of basic and advanced training.

Task: Appoint a member of the community to the SDHP Training Committee by December 2016.

Result: A qualified community member was appointed to the committee and continues to serve in that capacity, helping the SDHP shape its training goals and objectives.

Goal 2: Prevent criminal activity and deter DUI behaviors.

Objective: Consistently decrease the percentage of total alcohol-related crashes and maintain a negative trend in our five-year average.

Task: Each squad will utilize a saturation patrol aligned with peak travel and crash times at least once every 28 days.

Task: All state troopers must be trained in Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) within three years of employment.

Task: Each squad should develop an annual enforcement plan for the

high crash areas. Each enforcement plan should be a minimum of three months in duration.

Results: Preliminary 2017 crash statistics show an approximate 35-percent decrease in alcohol-related fatalities in 2017 compared to the previous five-year average.

Goal 4: Improve community relations.

Objective: Develop an organized Community-Based Policing Strategy and make it a core principle of the SDHP by 2016.

Task: Require one squad community outreach program per year.

Results: Many community outreach projects have been completed throughout the state of South Dakota by SDHP troopers and inspectors in 2016 and 2017. Many of these projects have gained the interest of local media, and the SDHP has received countless positive comments from South Dakota citizens in support of these projects.

Goal 5: Develop and maintain positive employee relations.

Objective: Improve officer and employee wellness throughout the agency.

Task: Research and implement an agency wellness program that includes peer support, family support, stress resiliency, emotional and physical wellbeing, and the Colonel's Fitness Challenge by 2018.

Results: The SDHP is currently implementing a robust officer and employee wellness program that will be completed by December 2018. This is being done in partnership with the San Antonio Police Department and the Precision Policing Initiative Team.

These examples show tangible results and emphasize the benefits of combining strong leadership and a practical planning strategy. Creating an environment that supports positive, sustainable change—and embedding that environment in agency culture—adds long-term value and sets the stage for sustained success. When merged with the opportunities afforded by SNPPI, paradigms expand and change that benefits the community and the organization is embraced and eventually expected.

Lessons Learned from SNPPI TTA

The SDHP senior staff collaborated with the SNPPI team to identify TTA opportunities that would further advance the agency's goals. As a result of these discussions, the SDHP identified the following priorities: (1) take steps to become more transparent to the public, (2) institute an Organizational Wellness Plan, and (3) formally implement community-based policing. Taken individually, each of these initiatives represents a significant commitment for any agency; taken together, their scope and potential effects reflect the SDHP leadership's confidence in an environment supportive of continuous improvement.

Co-Production of Public Safety and Community Engagement

Transparency is often referenced as a best practice in modern policing. Being open to public inquiry—and forthrightly explaining police departmental policies, actions, priorities, and even problems—helps to better engage the community in public safety. The SDHP recognizes that maintaining and improving the public trust, especially in today's world, calls for reconsideration of some past practices. Col. Price identified the need to place the agency's policy on the internet. Although publicizing policies is increasingly common among metropolitan police departments, state police agencies have tended to keep policy documents more closely held.

To facilitate this process, the SNPPI team arranged for a call between Col. Price and Chief Will Johnson, of the Arlington, Texas, Police Department. Johnson described to the benefits of openly sharing policy information with the public. After much internal discussion and consideration, Price decided to post several key agency policies to the SDHP website in 2018. This is a groundbreaking measure for the SDHP and an important step in maintaining and building on public trust and bolstering the community's engagement in public safety into the future.

Protecting Officer Safety and Wellness

SDHP organizational wellness plan

Officers who work in rural settings, as many state troopers do, are especially vulnerable. “If you’re a state trooper in a marked police unit, your office is in your car,” Price says. “When you’re in your car working, it’s solitary most of the time. You don’t have anyone to talk to, so when something happens you’re usually forced to deal with the aftermath of it by yourself. . . . There’s got to be a better way to help folks deal with the things they experience on the job, and that’s what we’re hoping to find out by developing an officer wellness program.”

The SDHP places a high value on the quality of service its members provide to the public. The agency recognizes the strain and the satisfaction that come from doing the job well; it is determined to provide the support and resources to enable employees and their families to cope effectively with the personal consequences of law enforcement service. At the superintendent’s request, the SNPPI team made arrangements to connect SDHP Major Rick Miller with both the San Antonio (Texas) Police Department (SAPD) and the Washington State Patrol, including a two-day briefing on the specifics of the SAPD’s Performance and Recovery Optimization™ (PRO) program. Based on these peer exchanges and discussions with senior SDHP senior staff, the SDHP will be implementing a comprehensive wellness program that will significantly enhance the resources available to SDHP employees.

Likely components of the SDHP organizational wellness plan

1. Performance and Recovery Optimization™ (PRO)
 - a. Academy training for new recruits
 - b. In-service training
2. Formal peer support
 - a. Officer-involved shooting support team
 - b. Family assistance team
3. Mental health providers on staff

4. Integrated chaplain program
5. Retirement preparation
6. Financial assistance
7. Employee assistance education

These topics were identified as potential components for the program in a series of employee-based and executive-led meetings. The overview plan provides the structure and process for program design and implementation. The department has already undertaken initial steps.

The ultimate goal is to provide a comprehensive, integrated system for employee support and resilience, phased in during 2019.

SDHP Community Policing Strategy

Discussions among the senior staff led to the decision that, to further advance goals included in the Strategic Plan, the organization should formally adopt a community-based policing (CBP) strategy. Working closely with Col. Price, the SNPPI team developed the SDHP CBP strategy. This strategy created a practical, flexible framework for the agency to begin the process of making CBP part of its philosophy and core functions.

The strategy framework stresses the importance of including CBP in the existing planning process. It recognizes the critical role leadership plays in the ultimate success of this effort and highlights the agency and personal commitments necessary to build and sustain external relationships.

The strategy also acknowledges the role that operational tasks play in delivering high-quality service to citizens and visitors to South Dakota. Improvements in crash prevention and investigation, DUI and criminal interdiction, and traffic safety analysis and operations planning are outlined.

Finally, the framework emphasizes the importance of community education, social media messaging, and relationship building as critical to ongoing CBP success. Col. Price introduced the strategy to his entire staff in early 2018. "Developing a community-based policing strategy is a goal in our strategic plan. We recognize the value of enhancing already strong relationships with the citizens of South Dakota," he said. "State troopers

and motor carrier inspectors have always been exceptional at promoting the highway patrol and doing good deeds, but we wanted to create a more formal strategy for statewide consistency and long-term sustainability.”

The acceptance of the strategy enables the SDHP to improve ties with the communities it serves while positioning it to leverage those relationships for success. The implementation of CBP strategies have the potential to enhance public satisfaction, police legitimacy, and public safety, while reducing fear.⁷ However, identifying what ‘community’ means to implement those strategies is generally more challenging for a statewide agency than for municipal or county departments. “State police cover such vast geographic areas that their reliance on automobiles (or, in Alaska, airplanes, boats, and snowmobiles) is nearly inevitable. Foot patrol and bicycle patrol, visible hallmarks of local-level community policing, are simply not practical for most state policing.”⁸

One example of the CBP philosophy already at work at the SDHP is the small community of Sisseton in northeast South Dakota. Each of the 16 field squads of SDHP troopers has been challenged to design and implement a formal community project in its squad area. One squad in particular—the Glacial Lakes Squad in the Aberdeen District—rose to the occasion in 2016.⁹

The idea began with Trooper Ben Pallesen, who encountered an unused and neglected park one evening while responding to a burglary in progress in Sisseton, South Dakota. “There was a small area next to some tribal housing where there was a basketball court and a play area, but in between the park and where folks lived was an area that was full of trash and dead trees. People were afraid to send their kids to play on the playground because this area near it was so downtrodden,” Col. Price recalls. “So [Pallesen] went to the tribal authorities, the city maintenance folks,

7. South Dakota Highway Patrol, 2016–2019 Strategic Plan; Charlotte Gill et al., “Community-Oriented Policing to Reduce Crime, Disorder, and Fear and Increase Satisfaction and Legitimacy among Citizens: A Systematic Review,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 10, no. 4 (2014), 399–428, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-014-9210-y>.

8. Gary Cordner, Mark W. Seifert, and Brian A. Ursino, *State Police and Community Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), 9, <https://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P283>.

9. Conversations with Col. Price, Sgt. Johnson, and Trooper Pallesen during site visit, March 13, 2017.

the sheriff's office, and the police department and said, 'Hey. Maybe one day in a month or two we can all meet up, get some equipment, and clean up that area so people will feel comfortable letting their kids play there.'"



The Sisseton Wahpeton Housing Authority, the Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal Police, the Roberts County Sheriff's Office, the South Dakota Motor Carrier Port of Entry, the City of Sisseton Streets Department, and the Stillson family—a well-known local family who owns the land around the park—all agreed to help out.

Dozens of volunteers showed up to assist in the cleanup, removing dead timber and trash and installing new lighting and basketball nets. Reaction from the local community was encouraging and gratifying. Best of all, the local children had a new, safe place to play.¹⁰

The immediate, tangible benefits such projects create for communities yield long-term, intangible benefits for law enforcement, according to Price, who says non-enforcement activities like community service build trust and legitimacy on which law enforcement agencies can trade in times of crisis.

10. Conversations with Price, Johnson, and Palleson (see note 9).

“You can solve problems a lot safer and a lot faster if you have relationships in place before a crisis hits,” Price says. “For that reason, we need to get to know people from other agencies and make connections with the people we serve . . . outside of the traditional policing environment.”

Conclusion

Policing in the United States is complicated, heavily scrutinized, and very



important, and leading change in response to this reality is rarely a simple proposition. The SDHP has found the formula for creating the capacity to thrive in an increasingly difficult world by harnessing its unique characteristics in new ways. Although some disruption is inevitable, SDHP leadership understands that long-term success is worth the effort—for the agency and for the citizens of South Dakota. The SDHP leadership effectively leverages its deep understanding of agency culture to not just recognize gaps but

fully pursue opportunities to close them by applying data and new ideas. The SDHP’s core values and strong traditions combine with vision and commitment to form a durable foundation for its future success. It serves as a case study in exemplary precision policing practices.





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