



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ASSESSMENT SUMMARY



PUBLIC SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP

Building Safer Communities

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INTRODUCTION

The National Public Safety Partnership (PSP) program provides an innovative framework for the US Department of Justice (DOJ) to enhance its support of state, local, and tribal law enforcement and prosecution authorities as they investigate and prosecute violent criminals, especially those involved in gun crime, drug trafficking, and gang violence. Through the PSP, DOJ provides assistance to American cities of different sizes and needs to support and build their capacity to fight crime. PSP facilitates the development of data-driven, evidence-based strategies tailored to the needs of participating cities to address serious violent crime challenges.

Departments and agencies participating in the PSP program complete a series of assessments to identify a baseline understanding of their challenges and areas for growth. Community engagement assessments help PSP sites evaluate their strategies for engaging with the community and offer best practice recommendations to enhance these efforts. In these community engagement assessments, subject matter experts (SMEs) focus on the following objectives:

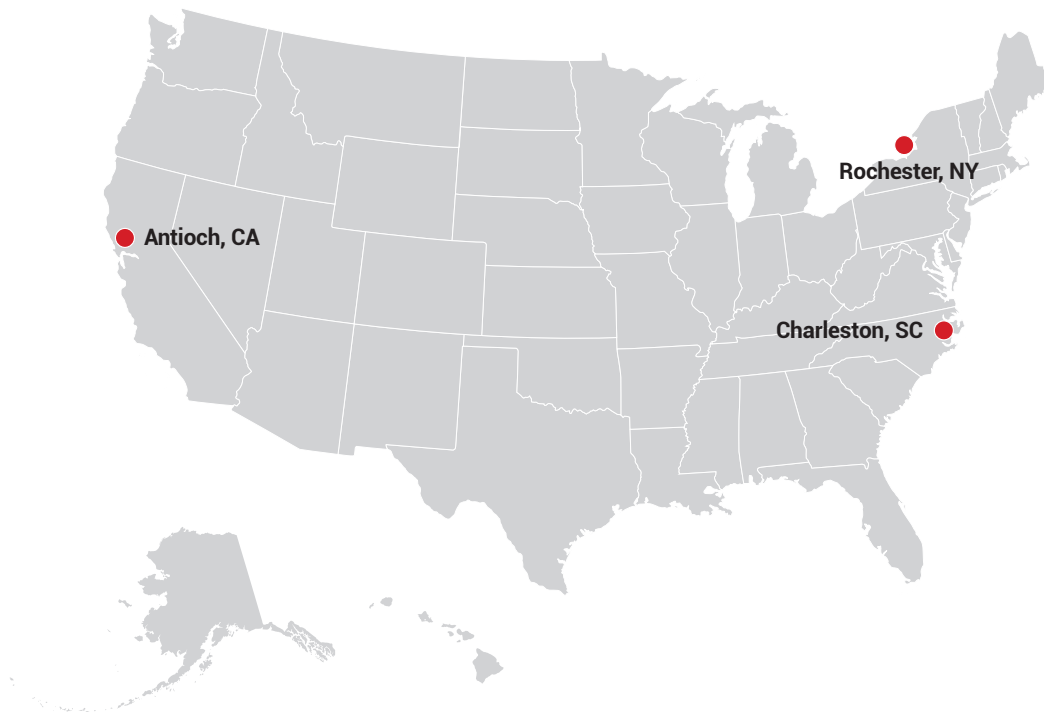
- Assess the agency's current community engagement practices and policies.
- Identify strengths, gaps, opportunities, and areas for improvement.
- Provide recommendations for building on the strengths and addressing the gaps using evidence-based research or best practices from other cities and departments.
- Identify training and technical assistance (TTA) available through PSP to help the agency implement the recommendations.

To review a site's community engagement efforts and strategies, PSP SMEs first review background information provided by the site on the department's community engagement strategies, policies, and practices. Next, the SMEs conduct an on-site visit to assess the site's current community engagement approach by interviewing local personnel, relevant stakeholders, and community members.

The SMEs then write a community engagement report that identifies community engagement strategy gaps, needs, and best practices. The report also recommends ways to advance the site's community engagement approach, identifies future TTA opportunities, and provides best practices for law enforcement and community relations. Finally, the PSP site team helps the site implement and track recommendations from the report, including facilitating specific types of TTA, such as peer exchanges, further SME assistance, guidance on relevant community engagement practices, and examples of policies or procedures from other law enforcement agencies.

In 2024, PSP introduced the community engagement assessment as a new assessment opportunity to sites. As of July 2025, three PSP sites had completed a formal community engagement assessment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. PSP sites that have completed community engagement assessments



In this analysis, we identify common themes, technical gaps, and recommendations from completed community engagement assessments across all PSP sites. To analyze the common themes, we coded the recommendations to predetermined categories that aligned with PSP core outputs. We present our findings in both quantitative and qualitative formats. **We review our analytical methods and subsequent findings in detail in the following sections, in which we reproduce some of the recommendations from earlier reports. This report provides PSP stakeholders with an understanding of the common gaps in community relations and approaches, common practices among PSP sites, types of recommendations made to PSP sites through community engagement assessments, and areas for potential program-wide TTA to strengthen PSP site community engagement and relationship building.**

Some common findings and recommendations include the following:

- Most law enforcement agencies do not sufficiently incorporate community voices into their community engagement training plans, which limits officers' exposure to different cultures within the community.
- Community perceptions of law enforcement suggest that many communities seek more positive contacts with police.
- Law enforcement agencies should revise their mission statements to clearly reflect the core values of community policing, engagement, and collaboration.
- Law enforcement agencies should incorporate guardian mindset training into yearly in-service training.

FINDINGS

Using the three community engagement assessment reports, the PSP evaluation team coded 51 references to 10 theme categories and 84 themes within those categories (Table 1; see Appendix A for further details on the review methodology). The most common themes across the three reports fell into the personnel and community stakeholders categories.

Table 1. Theme categories found in Community Engagement Assessments

Theme Category	Number of Occurrences
Personnel	17
Community stakeholders	15
Interagency partnerships	4
Planning	4
Data and analysis	4
Crime prevention	3
Governance and policy	3
Technology	1
Investigation and prosecution	0
Funding	0
Total	51

As shown in Table 2, [training](#), [culture](#), and [internal communication](#) were the most common individual themes in the personnel category, with 11, 2, and 2 references, respectively. [Strengthen partnerships](#) and [trust](#) were the most common individual themes in the community stakeholders category, with 7 references each. We discuss the most common themes in a later section of this report, in which we analyze specific recommendations from SMEs pertaining to each theme.

Table 2. Most common references at a glance

Theme	Number of References Coded (Cumulative)
PERSONNEL	17
Training	11
Culture	2
Internal communication	2
Departmental organization	1
Schedules and shifts	1
Staffing	1
Civilianization	0
Cross-unit collaboration	0
Organizational awareness	0
Performance review	0

Theme	Number of References Coded (Cumulative)
COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS	15
Strengthen partnerships	7
Trust	7
External communication	2
New meeting	2
New partnerships	1
Outreach	0
Policy and procedures	0
Procedural justice	0
Social media	0
Local media	0
Strengthen partnerships	0

To further capture topics outside of the themes that the reports commonly discussed, we counted words to identify the frequency with which they were used. Figure 2 depicts our findings as a word cloud, in which the larger words are those that appeared the most frequently in the assessments. *Community, engagement, police, training, officers,* and *department* were the most common topical words in the assessment reports.

Figure 2. Most common words and phrases in community engagement assessment reports



The following sections contain examples of recommendations made across community engagement assessments to demonstrate the commonalities.

The SMEs recommended that PSP sites develop a culture of community engagement by clearly communicating the department's vision and inspiring officers to embody the principles of community-focused policing. The SMEs also recommended that the tenets of community policing be ingrained in a comprehensive training plan co-developed by community members and revisited in yearly in-service training.

All three assessment reports detailed approaches to developing a culture of community engagement within all levels of the police department, from police executives to line officers.

RECOMMENDATION: *Ensure [department] leadership is committed to and actively developing an understanding of community needs and strategies to build a policing culture focused on engagement and trust.*

[Department] leadership must have a clear vision that guides strategic planning for community engagement. Communicating this vision and setting clear expectations will align department priorities and inspire officers to embody the principles of community-focused policing. Emphasizing the importance of strong community relationships can foster trust and mutual respect, which are essential for effective policing. By leading with ethical practices and modeling integrity, leadership can set the tone for accountability and establish a foundation for a positive organizational culture.

RECOMMENDATION: *Promote the community engagement ethos as central to the work across the department and internal messaging.*

Responsibility for engaging with the community and increasing opportunities for building positive relationships falls on all members of the department. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement; it requires understanding of cultural and experiential differences to address specific needs. Meaningful community engagement requires department personnel at all levels to view the community as a shared partner and leader.

There are many ways for a police organization to structure and promote a cultural shift to community engagement. The [department] should [ensure] that responsibility for community engagement and positive relationship building falls on all members of the department. Of utmost importance in working toward effective engagement is formalizing expectations, which could include a rotating staff schedule that will ensure all officers participate in engagement with some frequency. Engagement expectations should not only focus on the mandate but also provide guidelines for what constitutes positive engagement and tools to support officer effectiveness.

Some suggestions for creating a culture of engagement include the following:

- Ensure that the police chief and command staff model relationship building for all officers, stressing community engagement as a top department priority.
- Formalize expectations for officer engagement with community members.
- Build in time for officers to proactively engage community members and hold officers accountable for those engagement activities.
- Include engagement work in performance evaluations.

- Develop awards to publicly commend officers who perform exceptionally in areas related to community engagement.
- Develop promotion criteria requiring demonstrated competency in community policing and engagement (e.g., proven knowledge of how to form productive partnerships, the completion of a successful problem-solving project).
- Create a community hiring and promotion panel to help [the department] identify, recruit, and promote candidates with qualities that are aligned with community expectations.

[Department] should also create a way for officers to record their community engagement activities. These data will be helpful for the department to understand opportunities, identify changes in engagement over time, and create ways to measure engagement for award [eligibility] and promotion opportunity.

A good first step in developing an engagement plan and formalizing expectations is to gather suggestions from [department] officers and staff. Focus groups guided by a few conversations should be focused on opportunities; the rules of these discussions should underscore confidentiality and encourage officers to identify suggestions for positive community engagement based on their experiences. An experienced facilitator can steer conversation away from complaints and toward identifying creative ideas that are specific to [city]. Including officers in the development of community engagement planning and program development can ensure buy-in and potentially create department champions for community engagement.

RECOMMENDATION: *Create a culture in which all members of the department understand that service to and engagement with the community is central to the mission.*

There are many ways for a police organization to structure and promote a cultural shift to community policing. These may include the following: (1) encouraging patrol officers to dedicate time during their shifts to meaningful community engagement activities, such as proactively interacting with individuals in patrol areas, including asking them about their priorities and their public safety needs; (2) requiring demonstrated competency in community policing for promotion (such as the ability to form productive partnerships or the completion of a successful problem-solving project); (3) developing awards to commend officers who perform exceptionally in areas related to community engagement; and (4) revising the performance evaluation system to incorporate community engagement performance criteria. Meaningful community engagement requires department personnel at all levels to view the community as a shared partner and shared leader.

All three assessment reports recommended training and professional development in community engagement principles and approaches for law enforcement personnel ranging from line officers to senior managers.

RECOMMENDATION: *Develop a comprehensive training plan that equips officers to implement the community engagement plan with direct involvement from community members as co-authors and trainers.*

To effectively orient officers toward service and integrate engagement into their everyday work, [the department] should implement a diverse range of training programs. Involving community members

in the development and delivery of these training programs is crucial to ensuring they are relevant and effective. During stakeholder interviews, community partners expressed willingness to collaborate with the [the department] to create and administer the necessary training. Involving community members in the development, teaching, and evaluation of training programs will foster a deeper understanding between officers and the communities they serve. This collaborative approach will not only enhance the effectiveness of the training but also build trust and strengthen partnerships with nonprofit organizations and community groups. By bridging the gap between the community and [the department] officers, the department will be better positioned to deliver policing that is responsive, respectful, and rooted in the principles of public service.

Training programs should include problem-solving processes such as Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) or the SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment) model, cultural diversity and sensitivity training, and trauma-informed policing practices.

RECOMMENDATION: *Incorporate a community engagement component into the curriculum of the career enhancement program and the sergeant field training program to develop a stronger belief in the value of community engagement and leadership on community engagement practices from [the department's] command staff.*

[T]he department's command staff must provide leadership on and model good practices in community engagement if [the department] is to successfully shift the police culture. To accomplish this, [the department] should incorporate a community engagement component into the career enhancement program that can incentivize lieutenants and above to be outspoken, strong leaders in community engagement as part of the mission and daily work of all police officers. The POP module, once it is revised as discussed in [previous recommendation], can be used as an evaluation tool for the program because it should track officer involvement in community engagement activities and problem-solving efforts.

RECOMMENDATION: *Provide more opportunities for senior leaders to participate in training and mentorships that focus on community engagement and trust building.*

Because of the many changes in senior [the department] leadership in recent years, new senior leaders need to receive nationally recognized leadership training, such as training from the Senior Management Institute for Police and the FBI National Academy. These leadership trainings will ensure that leaders have a strong foundation in best practices and a foundational understanding of the importance of community engagement and trust building. The Police Executive Research Forum has an exceptional annual training opportunity titled Senior Management Institute for Police. The FBI National Academy and the Southern Police Institute offer senior leadership training that emphasizes building trust through engagement. Numerous other trainings of this type are offered by private, nonprofit, and government organizations. These types of leadership training teach methods and approaches to increase police-community collaboration through engagement and can have a positive effect on employees as well as communities.

RECOMMENDATION: *Incorporate “guardian mindset training” into yearly in-service training.*

A guardian mindset training program was offered to the last [department] recruit class and could be repeated as in-service training. In addition, several organizations can support this type of training, such as Blue Courage. It should be provided to all officers throughout [department], including the command staff. Guardian mindset training focuses on “why” individuals became a police officer and prioritizes community service and the power of short-term encounters as a mechanism to create long-term community relationships. It also informs officers that their interactions with community members should be empowering, fair, respectful, and considerate. In addition, the training is intended to remind senior officers of the mindset that they had when they first became police officers.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

The SMEs formulated several recommendations for PSP sites to modify their approach to community engagement, including viewing the community as a shared partner, incorporating community voices into department mission statements, and establishing community-based advisory groups. These recommendations are intended to strengthen partnerships and increase trust between both stakeholders and the communities served.

All three assessment reports offered recommendations to incorporate the community as a shared partner with law enforcement agencies; two also recommended the implementation of a Chief's Advisory Council/Community Advisory Board.

RECOMMENDATION: *Establish a community advisory board that meets regularly to ensure community perspectives and priorities are part of [department] policy and practice.*

Community advisory boards (CABs) (sometimes called citizen advisory commissions or civilian advisory groups) are groups of community members that meet with police leaders regularly to discuss local policing and engage in proactive joint decision-making about issues that affect local communities. CABs typically include representatives and leaders of the business community, faith-based groups, marginalized groups, local government, youth groups, and community service providers. CABs review, discuss, and provide input regarding policy development, community outreach and engagement, new technology use and deployment protocols, problem-solving, broad-based policing efforts, and training. [CABs] also facilitate two-way communication by helping educate the community on the complexities of modern policing and the department's mission, values, policies, and procedures. Some communities have used private third-party organizations to select CAB members to remove the potential for bias from the selection process.

The Policing Project at New York University's School of Law conducted research on CABs and found that CABs [have four central requirements]:

- [C]lear and realistic roles and goals as well as established procedures and protocols
- [A]ccess to operational resources
- [S]ome community members who have knowledge about policing, issues facing police, and police practices
- [D]iversity among board members

[The department] should consider creating a CAB to participate in developing community engagement strategies. The CAB and [the department] should define an ongoing role for the CAB that is clearly laid out in department policy. TTA, including a peer exchange with an agency already operating a CAB, may be available to support the CAB development.

RECOMMENDATION: Implement a Chief's Advisory Council (CAC) to give the community a voice and input into policies and practices of the department. The CAC should meet regularly to discuss appropriate management and policy decisions.

RECOMMENDATION: Involve community members in the training process for new employees and in-service training to offer perspectives from lived experience, professional expertise, and knowledge and history of [the city], including people from [minority] and immigrant communities.

RECOMMENDATION: *Revise the mission statement to clearly reflect the core values of community policing, engagement, and collaboration.*

Community policing, engagement, and collaboration are fundamental to community safety. [The department] should develop and implement a community-wide effort to revise the current mission statement to include input from as many communities as possible. The [department] should develop a broad-based community working group along with listening sessions and use them as a foundation to revise the mission statement. There are several ways to engage the community in mission statement development; a first step might be a listening session in which the [department] hears from as many community members as possible. Establishing community advisory groups or review boards from open calls and specific invitations can provide targeted suggestions and feedback as the mission statement is being developed.

It is the community's police department, and it should be the community's mission statement. This process should identify a set of core values that lays the groundwork for all that the department does and communicates to its officers and the public.

CONCLUSION

The PSP evaluation team conducted an analysis of all available community engagement assessment reports as of July 2025. This analysis uncovered the two most prevalent themes across all community engagement assessments. First, the SMEs recommended that executive leadership communicate the department's vision for community engagement and inspire officers to embody these principles in their daily interactions with community members. The SMEs also suggested that departments develop a culture of community engagement by incorporating community voices in department mission statements and training plans.

These findings will help PSP execute community engagement assessment reports and provide TTA to PSP sites. The findings in this report suggest potential training and workshop topics and ideas for facilitated discussions on common challenges in PSP sites. The findings also identify potential priorities for program-wide PSP strategy development.

APPENDIX A: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

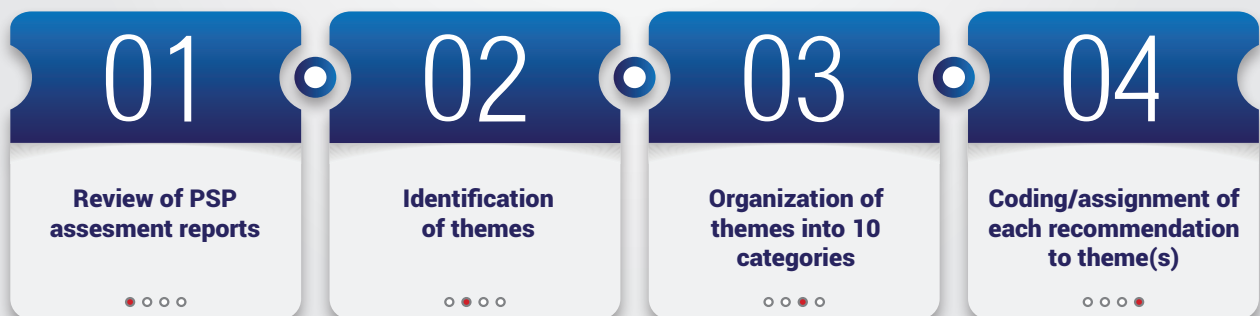
The PSP evaluation team reviewed all PSP assessment reports covering a range of topics to identify common themes, such as records management, data sharing, and peer agencies (see Appendix B for a full list with definitions). We also included themes that we did not find in the reviewed assessment reports but that we deemed relevant to PSP (and considered likely to be present in other PSP assessment reports) based on our background knowledge of PSP processes and TTA. Through this process, we identified 84 individual themes that correspond to assessment recommendations. We organized these themes into 10 categories (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Assessment theme categories



The PSP evaluation team used the qualitative analysis software NVivo to code the recommendations from the community engagement assessment reports against the 94 themes (both the 84 individual themes and the overarching theme categories) at the sentence level or higher, and we coded the recommendations to multiple themes when appropriate (Figure 4). The PSP evaluation team used the same themes for each topical assessment type; therefore, not all themes were present in every assessment.

Figure 4. Recommendation coding process



Each appearance of a coded sentence or group of sentences in the assessment reports created a “reference.” We could then rank the most common of the 84 themes by identifying those that had the greatest number of references.

APPENDIX B: THEME DEFINITIONS

Table 3. Theme definitions

Theme	Definition
Community stakeholders	Interacting with community members and groups
External communication	Establishing formal communication with stakeholders and the community
Local media	Interacting with local media
New meeting	Creating a meeting with community partners
New partnerships	Creating partnerships that did not previously exist with community members or organizations
Outreach	Engaging with the community to share information and promote relationships
Policy and procedure	Policy and procedure related to community engagement and external information sharing
Procedural justice	Maintaining internal and external procedural justice
Social media	The use of social media
Strengthen partnerships	Improving and strengthening relationships between the police agency and its community
Trust	Increasing citizen and community trust in the police agency
Crime prevention	Proactively reducing the incidence of crimes
Drug crime prevention	Proactively reducing the incidence of crimes related to drugs and the drug market
Gang crime prevention	Proactively reducing the incidence of gang-related crimes
Gun violence prevention	Proactively reducing the incidence of gun-related crimes
Policing strategies	Structured approaches or methods used by law enforcement to prevent crime, maintain public order, and build community trust
Treatment and social services	Working with local social service providers to deliver assistance to community members
Youth	Working to address youth-related community issues
Data and analysis	Collecting and using metrics and information
CompStat	Recommendations related to the CompStat process and/or data and accountability
Crime mapping	Documenting and analyzing the geographical representation of crimes
Data dissemination	Methods to ensure data are sent to or consistently available to officers or agency partners
Evaluation and research	Assessing a departmental program
Data sharing	Agreements or methods to view or transfer data between organizations
Interoperability	The ability to access data between organizations or pieces of equipment
More analysis	The addition of specific forms of analysis to existing practices
New metrics	Additional information or data to collect that is not currently being collected or documented
Offender-based strategy	Analysis strategies that focus on the individual or individuals committing a disproportionate number of offenses
Processes and procedures	Analysis practices in a department
Report automation	Creating reports automatically using software rather than analytical personnel
Social network analysis	Analysis strategies that map or explore connections between offenders
Funding	Gathering and using financial resources
Budget	Adding additional line items to the budget; finding money in the budget
Cost benefit analysis	Measuring the costs and benefits of a proposed technology to an agency
Diverse funding sources	Soliciting funding from a variety of sources
Federal funding and grants	Seeking funding and grants from federal organizations
Grant writing process and staff	An agency's grant writing procedures and the staff involved in writing and managing grants
Local funding	Soliciting funding from local sources
More funding	Pursuing and using additional funding beyond an agency's current level
Private and foundation funding	Soliciting funding from private sources, including foundations
Research partnerships	Partnerships with universities or colleges to conduct research
State funding	Soliciting funding from state sources

Theme	Definition
Governance and policy	Agency management, standards, processes, and procedures
Discipline	Disciplinary actions in the department
Leadership	The training, structure, and role of leadership
Morale	Officer morale and departmental cohesion
SOPs	Standard operating procedures or established departmental procedures
Transparency	Being open, honest, and clear about actions, decisions, and processes
Use of force	Use of force policies, procedures, or practices
Wellness	Officer safety and physical and mental health
Interagency partnerships	Creating, strengthening, and sustaining relationships with other agencies
Criminal justice system	Developing partnerships among organizations across the justice system
Federal partnerships	Developing or strengthening partnerships with regional federal partners
Local partnerships	Developing or strengthening partnerships with local partners
New partnerships	Creating partnerships that did not previously exist
Peer agencies	Learning from other law enforcement (peer) agencies
State partnerships	Developing or strengthening partnerships with state partner organizations
Strengthen partnerships	Further developing existing partnerships
Investigations	Conducting and managing investigations, including crime-specific approaches to investigations
Case management	Managing the investigations process and associated materials
Cold cases	Old and challenging cases
Evidence	Evidence practices in investigations
Feedback	Information or responses about performance, actions, or work to guide improvement or reinforce positive behavior
Gangs	Gang-related crimes and activities
Homicide	Investigations of homicides
Procedures and policies	Investigation practices and standards
Social media	Using social media in investigations
Witnesses	Managing witnesses in investigations
Personnel	Staffing management and officer professional development
Civilianization	Assigning non-sworn (civilian) personnel to perform tasks that do not require the authority or training of a sworn police officer
Cross-unit collaboration	Collaboration among groups in a department
Culture	Collective values, norms, attitudes, and behaviors that exist within an agency, shaping how employees interact and make decisions
Departmental organization	Department units, hierarchy, and organizational relationships
Internal communication	Communication within the department
Organizational awareness	Ability of individuals within an agency to understand what is happening across the organization—such as ongoing initiatives, priorities, decisions, challenges, and internal dynamics. It means being informed about who is doing what, why it's being done, and how different teams and functions connect and impact each other.
Performance review	Formal assessment in which an individual's work performance is evaluated
Schedules and shifts	Departmental scheduling and shift practices
Staffing	The need to create and fill a specific position or unit; promotions
Training	Training for department personnel
Planning	Developing and institutionalizing agency changes
Strategic planning	Creating a plan of direction and action for the department
Sustainability	Institutionalizing technology and procedural changes
Working group	Small, focused team of individuals brought together to accomplish a specific goal or address a particular issue

Theme	Definition
Technology	Agency use of technology, including new equipment and procedural changes
Insufficient equipment	The need for additional equipment or replacement or repair of existing equipment
Integration	Combining different systems, software, or technologies so they work together seamlessly
Interoperability	The ability to access or use technology systems between organizations or pieces of equipment
IT support needed	Services or technology changes needed by the agency from the responsible IT organization
Privacy	Maintaining individual privacy as new technology and systems are introduced
Records management	RMS (records management systems) and the agency's ability to collect and store information
Software and hardware	Software or hardware technology needed by the agency
Technology suggestion	Specific new technology or technology change recommended to be implemented
Training needed	Technology training needed or recommended
User interface	The specific dashboard or form of presentation through which end-users (usually officers) engage with a software

APPENDIX C: THEMES CODED BY EVALUATION TEAM

Table 4. Themes coded by category and number

Theme	Total number of times theme was coded across all PSP assessments
Community stakeholders	177
External communication	24
Local media	18
New meeting	3
New partnerships	7
Outreach	36
Policy and procedure	13
Procedural justice	2
Social media	43
Strengthen partnerships	29
Trust	10
Crime prevention	35
Drug crime prevention	2
Gang crime prevention	2
Gun violence prevention	6
Policing strategies	16
Treatment and social services	2
Youth	11
Data and analysis	122
CompStat	9
Crime mapping	10
Data dissemination	5
Evaluation and research	14
Data sharing	16
Interoperability	9
More analysis	42
New metrics	27
Offender-based strategy	3
Processes and procedures	9
Report automation	6
Social network analysis	5
Funding	210
Budget	18
Cost benefit analysis	1
Diverse funding sources	17
Federal funding and grants	10
Grant writing process and staff	54
Local funding	6
More funding	22
Private and foundation funding	34
Research partnerships	25
State funding	13
Governance and policy	35
Discipline	0
Leadership	3

Theme	Total number of times theme was coded across all PSP assessments
Morale	1
SOPs	13
Transparency	1
Use of force	0
Wellness	8
Interagency partnerships	137
Criminal justice system	56
Federal partnerships	10
Local partnerships	61
New partnerships	14
Peer agencies	13
State partnerships	7
Strengthen partnerships	12
Investigations	425
Case management	81
Cold cases	0
Evidence	18
Feedback	2
Gangs	3
Homicide	23
Procedures and policies	283
Social media	0
Witnesses	38
Personnel	435
Civilianization	13
Cross-unit collaboration	32
Culture	3
Departmental organization	83
Internal communication	45
Organizational awareness	5
Performance review	19
Schedules and shifts	18
Staffing	52
Training	169
Planning	91
Strategic planning	56
Sustainability	1
Working group	27
Technology	106
Insufficient equipment	2
Integration	5
Interoperability	17
IT support needed	7
Privacy	0
Records management	25
Software and hardware	30
Technology suggestion	40
Training needed	6
User interface	3



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