



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

ASSESSMENT SUMMARY



PUBLIC SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP

Building Safer Communities

A special thanks to the subject matter experts who contributed the development of strategic communications assessment reports for the National Public Safety Partnership sites: Laura McElroy and Judy Pal

This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-22-GK-03705-JAGP awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART). Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. All rights reserved. Copyright 2025.

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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 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 unique 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. The strategic communications assessments help PSP sites evaluate their current communication processes and offer recommendations to improve internal and external communication. Strategic messaging assessments propose the following objectives:

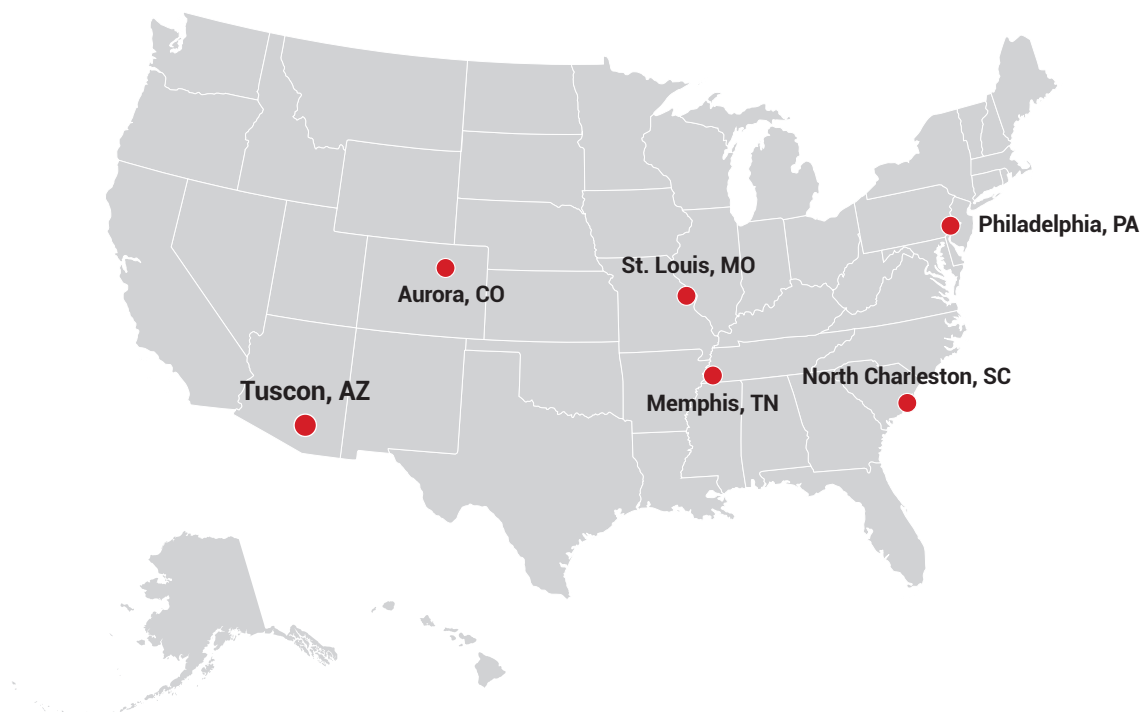
- Assess current communication practices
- Review communication policies such as media relations, social media, and any other policy affecting external communication
- Develop recommendations for strengthening and coordinating external and internal communications to focus on the agency's overarching key messages
- Develop recommendations for establishing a consistent agencywide approach to the district's digital community engagement efforts

To review a site's strategic communication efforts and strategies, a PSP subject matter expert (SME) first reviews background information provided by the site on the department's communication approaches, including social media content, local media news coverage, public information office policies and procedures, and any documents relevant to the site's requests. The SME then conducts an onsite visit to assess the site's current strategic communications approach by interviewing local personnel, relevant stakeholders, public information officers, chief strategy officers, the police chief, and any other relevant partners.

The SME then develops a strategic communications report that identifies communication gaps, needs, and best practices. The report also provides recommendations to advance the site's communications approaches, identifies future training and technical assistance (TTA) opportunities, and identifies best practices for law enforcement and community interactions. 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 strategic communications, or examples of policies or procedures from other law enforcement agencies.

As of July 2025, 6 of the 65 PSP sites have completed a formal strategic communications assessment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. PSP sites with strategic communications assessments



The analysis in this report identifies common themes, technical gaps, and recommendations from completed strategic communications assessments across all PSP sites. In our analysis of 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. **The following sections review our analytical methods and subsequent findings in detail. This report will provide PSP stakeholders with an understanding of the common gaps in messaging approaches, common practices among PSP sites, types of recommendations made to PSP sites through strategic communications assessments, and areas for potential program-wide TTA to strengthen PSP site strategic messaging.**

Some common findings and recommendations include the following:

- Public information office (PIO) strategies tend to be reactive rather than proactive.
- Departments use social media to communicate information about crime and suspects, which can depict a crime-plagued city.
 - The practice of focusing on crime videos should be augmented with additional stories that seek to foster a partnership with social media community members.
 - Agencies should be strategic in creating content that engages the community.
- Agencies should use social media as their own media platform to highlight positive investments in the community and provide detailed context to make the public aware of department initiatives, programs, and investments.
- PIOs should develop department news releases and obtain approval from executive leadership before releasing them to the community and media.
- Swift, organized, and proactive messaging can strengthen community trust during a worst-case scenario incident; slow, disorganized, and reactive release of information can have the opposite effect.

FINDINGS

Using the six strategic messaging assessment reports, the PSP evaluation team coded 120 references to 10 theme categories and 84 themes within those categories (see Appendix A for further details on the review methodology). The most common themes across the three reports were in the community stakeholders and personnel categories.

Table 1. Theme categories found in strategic communications assessments

Theme Category	Number of Occurrences
Community stakeholders	79
Personnel	28
Data and analysis	4
Funding	4
Planning	2
Interagency partnerships	1
Investigation and prosecution	1
Technology	1
Crime prevention	0
Governance and policy	0
Total	120

As shown in Table 2, the most common themes in the community stakeholders category were [social media](#), [local media](#), and [policy and procedures](#), with 43, 18, and 13 references respectively. The most common themes in the personnel category were [internal communication](#) and [department organization](#), with 10 and 9 references respectively. We discuss the most common themes later in this report where we analyze specific recommendations from SMEs pertaining to each theme.

Table 2. Most common references at a glance

Themes and Theme Categories	Number of References Coded (Cumulative)
COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS	79
Social media	43
Local media	18
Policy and procedures	13
External communication	4
Outreach	3
Strengthen partnerships	2
Procedural justice	0
New meeting	0
New partnerships	0
Trust	0

As shown in Table 3, the most common intersection was [personnel](#) and [community stakeholders](#). The intersections of [funding](#) and [community stakeholders](#), [interagency partnerships](#) and [community stakeholders](#), [personnel](#) and [funding](#), and [technology](#) and [community stakeholders](#) were also common, with one reference each respectively. The frequency of cross-references indicates the importance of department personnel and community stakeholders in improving strategic communications across PSP agencies. This report will explore these topics in the following sections, which discuss common themes and recommendations across strategic communications reports.

Table 3. Intersection of themes among all reports

	Community stakeholders	Crime prevention	Data and analysis	Funding	Governance and policy	Interagency partnerships	Investigation and prosecution	Personnel	Planning	Technology
Community stakeholders		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Crime prevention			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Data and analysis				●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Funding					●	●	●	●	●	●
Governance and policy						●	●	●	●	●
Interagency partnerships							●	●	●	●
Investigations								●	●	●
Personnel									●	●
Planning										●
Technology										

The following sections contain examples of recommendations made across strategic communications assessments to demonstrate the commonalities.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Policy, procedures, and strategies emerged as critical themes under the community stakeholders category. Recommendations offered guidance for using social media to facilitate two-way communication between the department and the community, as well as specifics related to the strategic function of a PIO and releasing information to the community. These recommendations aim to strengthen PSP sites' messaging approaches and enhance trust between the departments and communities served.

Four reports offered recommendations to formalize or modify policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) around public messaging.

RECOMMENDATION: *Formalize standard operating procedures and the adoption of proactive approach to public messaging in the Public Information Office.*

The SOPs will be given in a written guide for the newly hired communication professionals, who will need direction as they learn the inner workings of the police department. Including the following recommendations may help to implement the philosophy.

RECOMMENDATION: Include in policy or protocol that as soon as any public records request is received from an official media outlet or unofficial media, such as a blogger, the request should be immediately sent to the Public Information Office to review.

RECOMMENDATION: *Update social media and release of public information policies.*

Both policies require updates as well as the inclusion of more recent best practices, including [body-worn camera] (BWC) footage.

RECOMMENDATION: *Restructure the news release development and dissemination process.*

The PIO should draft basic news releases, obtain approval from the detective's office or the deputy chief, then proactively distribute them to the local media.

Five reports offered recommendations for developing targeted strategies for communicating information with the public.

RECOMMENDATION: *Develop a strategic messaging strategy for the next two years.*

Work with the executive staff to determine the key words, phrases, or sentiments the commissioner would like amplified by all audiences including employees, elected officials, the media, and the myriad community stakeholders in the city. Once the [department] determines those words, they should become part of every strategy and tactic of the [department's] communications plan. These words will become part of social media hashtags, talking points, presentations, and graphics. Without this guidance, communications will remain disjointed.

RECOMMENDATION: *The PIO should meet with its supervisor and the chief of police or their designee to establish a list of key topics and then develop R.E.A.C.T. statements for each of the identified issues. The PIO can quickly customize the prepared statements when an incident takes place for release to the media and community.*

The R.E.A.C.T. blueprint provides organizations with a template for developing key messages to share with the community.

- **R**—Release the facts
- **E**—Express empathy, care, and concern
- **A**—Action the agency is taking to instill confidence
- **C**—Call to action for community members
- **T**—Thank and praise partners who assisted with the situation

During the recent media training, the PIO learned how to develop R.E.A.C.T. statements for addressing media and community concerns. Preparing content in advance helps the agency react swiftly in an organized and proactive fashion when a crisis strikes. This type of response is necessary for affecting the public narrative and maintaining public confidence in the agency.

RECOMMENDATION: *Strategize social media content.*

A third (33 percent) of [department] posts should focus on community engagement to establish officers as friendly, approachable, and compassionate. This includes light-hearted, funny moments and examples of officers going beyond their job description to show their care and concern for the community they serve.

A third (33 percent) of [department] posts should be sharing posts from community and criminal justice partners, including social service organizations, local business groups, community leaders or activists, the Mayor's Office to the US or District Attorney's Office, and fellow law enforcement agencies. This content helps build an inclusive approach to improving the city. These posts help build the team across organizations and community members who are working toward similar goals.

A third (33 percent) of posts should focus on crime to generate tips about unsolved offenses. These posts currently dominate the department's social media feeds but should be only a portion of its messaging. The agency should strive to post videos that are of sufficient quality to generate tips versus posting anything that [department] detectives submit to the PIO.

RECOMMENDATION: *[The department] would benefit from expanding its social media messaging to include a more strategic approach that supplements the online focus on crime and showcases the positive work of officers.*

This type of content would help the department build a more positive rapport with its community members that can lead to a cohesive team approach to the crime fight. This strategy also provides the community with a peek behind the scenes of police operations that not only shows a different side of cops but can also motivate [community members] to get involved with their police department.

PERSONNEL

The personnel theme includes recommendations for the structure and personnel needs of the public information office. PIOs and those working within the PIO office should receive formal training on messaging, allowing other members of the department to effectively communicate with the public and thus alleviating some PIO responsibilities. Doing so also simultaneously strengthens capabilities around messaging within the department. Recommendations also focused on the importance of effective communication with internal departmental personnel.

Three reports suggested that agencies should provide training to a variety of ranks and personnel around strategic messaging.

RECOMMENDATION: Train shift commanders on what is public record and how to effectively conduct media interviews. Once the training is complete, establish a consistent, after-hours system for providing the local media with information about breaking news.

RECOMMENDATION: *Provide basic PIO media training to PIO specialists as well as commanders.* Expanding the PIO specialist's ability to manage traditional news media will help alleviate the pressure on the single PIO. Instead of simply responding to emails or taking messages from traditional news media outlets, the PIO specialist should be able to fully manage incidents on their own and respond on behalf of the department.

Providing basic media training to commanders will allow them to be comfortable with speaking at the scene of incidents to convey important information in a timely manner. Each precinct commander should be seen as the "chief" of their area and should be comfortable speaking with the media to address local issues. However, allowing for more than a single spokesperson requires a coordinated messaging approach so the department's media engagement is not contradictory. This coordination can be accomplished with training and a well-developed and -implemented messaging communications strategy.

Additional training for current staff and commanders could include attending conferences and classes offered by the following:

- National Information Officers Association (NIOA) Conference
- FBI-Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (FBI-LEEDA)
 - Media & public relations course
 - Master PIO course
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
 - Basic PIO
 - Advanced PIO
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
 - PIO sectional meeting
- Social Media Summit for Government conferences
- Social Media in Law Enforcement (SMILE) conferences
- Government Social Media (GSM) conferences

RECOMMENDATION: *Train neighborhood resource officers (NROs) to assist with generating social media content.*

During the assessment, the SME learned that the NROs do not have access to the agency's social media platforms, even though they attend many community functions. This would be a natural way to generate content without the PIO responding to every community event. They should learn the agency's social media protocols and be authorized to highlight community events.

Two assessment reports recommended reviews of the department's communications structure and chain of command within the department.

RECOMMENDATION: Create an organizational hierarchy that blends functionality and civilianize skill-specific jobs such as graphic designers, videographers, and social media assistants.

RECOMMENDATION: A supervisor should be assigned to the PIO to ensure that the office is operating strategically and productively. The supervisor should be co-located with the team in their physical office to manage daily operations and provide the office with a clear strategy. Managing a well-run PIO is a full-time job. The supervisor should be singularly focused on department communications.

Two reports offered recommendations for improving internal departmental messaging.

RECOMMENDATION: *[Department] Chief should consider videotaping messages to his officers and employees to maintain morale and ensure the agency is working toward the same goals.*

The PIO can videotape the messages on a smartphone or tablet to produce them quickly. The only initial investment would be purchasing a smartphone microphone, tripod, and basic editing software to ensure quality videos. These items should not cost more than a few hundred dollars. IT and the PIO should meet with the chief to finalize the details of this project. The group will have to decide where to post these videos. The intranet may be a logical choice. The group should also decide whether officers should watch the videos during roll call with a supervisor, individually on their department-issued computers, or both.

RECOMMENDATION: *Share positive news stories with the officers and employees who are interviewed as well as with their chain of command.*

This will help boost morale and encourage officers to participate in local news stories and social media posts.

CONCLUSION

The PSP evaluation team analyzed all available strategic communications assessment reports as of July 2025. This analysis uncovered the two most prevalent themes across all strategic communications assessments. First, agencies should consider updating their policies around external communication, PIOs, and public release of department information and data. This will help standardize the release of information to the media and community and increase transparency. Second, formal training is important for members of the PIO, or any member of the department who speaks with the media. This practice can help alleviate PIO duties while also engaging other members of the department on information sharing.

These findings will help us execute strategic communications 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

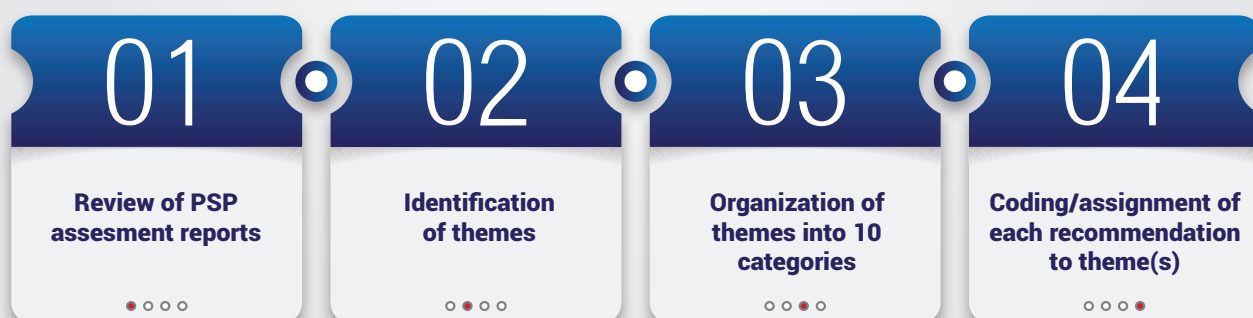
The PSP evaluation team reviewed all PSP assessment reports covering various topics to identify common themes, such as records management, data sharing, and peer agencies (see Appendix B for a full list with definitions). We also included themes that we did not find in the reviewed assessment reports 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 nonfatal shooting and homicide 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. 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 4. 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 5. 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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This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-22-GK-03705-JAGP awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART). Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. All rights reserved. Copyright 2025.