



STARTING WITH WHAT WORKS

Using
Evidence-Based Strategies
to Improve Community
and Police Relations



STARTING WITH WHAT WORKS: USING EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONS

The *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* is an important guiding document for modern law enforcement leaders. Within six categories—building trust and legitimacy, policy and oversight, technology and social media, community policing and crime reduction, training and education, and officer wellness and safety—the Task Force presents recommendations for law enforcement agencies and the federal government with the goal of strengthening democratic policing in a complex and diverse society.



The report lays out practical steps that provide a road map to help law enforcement and communities reduce crime and strengthen relationships. The Task Force Report includes 156 recommendations and action items. For many agencies looking to begin implementation of these recommendations, the obvious question is “where do we start?”

EVIDENCE AS A STARTING POINT

While some of the Task Force recommendations institutionalize established best practices, others highlight innovations and new ideas for law enforcement and communities. As such, some of the recommendations have not yet been researched, but they are consistent with the guiding principles of policing in a democratic society.



A substantial amount of research exists to help law enforcement leaders plan and implement strategies that have demonstrated positive effects. With funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and George Mason University Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (GMU) collaborated to conduct an evidence assessment of the 21st Century Policing Task Force

recommendations and action items. This report and accompanying online dashboard tool outline which of the recommendations are based in research and which may need more research and testing. For the full report and additional resources, visit www.theiacp.org/ICPRGettingStarted.

This brochure allows law enforcement leaders to **start with what works** by outlining the Task Force recommendations with the strongest base of evidence to support their effectiveness.

BUILDING TRUST AND LEGITIMACY

Numerous research studies validate the link among procedural justice, legitimacy, and community trust. While research on how law enforcement can increase procedural justice in practice is limited and, in some instances, inconsistent, a larger body of research exists on how procedural justice in law enforcement workplace practices affects employee legitimacy perceptions. Additionally, it is important for agencies to measure trust and legitimacy to assess perceptions and changes over time.

Building Trust and Legitimacy Evidence-Based Recommendations:

- Engage in strategic planning with personnel to **balance a warrior mind-set with a guardian approach**.
- **Promote procedural justice in daily interactions with citizens.** Perceptions of treatment can affect how citizens view interactions with authority figures.
- Promote examples of procedural justice and legitimacy by practicing these principles internally. This can be achieved, in part, by **giving all ranks of officers a greater voice** and by ensuring the fairness of disciplinary procedures.
- **Whenever possible, recruit staff who represent the diversity of the community** with attention to race, gender, language, life experience, and cultural background.
- Focus on positive, non-enforcement activities during citizen-police interactions such as **problem-solving, situational prevention, and community collaboration**.
- **Implement periodic community surveys** to obtain community feedback. Consider working with research partners to develop surveys and target the surveys to those communities most impacted by crime or police services.

POLICY AND OVERSIGHT

Research knowledge, while scarce, provides important insight about Task Force recommendations on diversity, use of force, oversight, and civil disturbances and demonstrations. For example, while little research exists about the prevalence and nature of bias in policing and how it is connected to actual behavior, studies have shown disparate policing outcomes associated with the race, age, gender, and sexual orientation of those who come in contact with law enforcement.

Policy and Oversight Evidence-Based Recommendations:

- Employ policies, practices, and strategies that recognize and try to **minimize bias and/or disparate outcomes** related to characteristics such as race, gender, age, disabilities, and sexual orientation.
- **Provide training modules to address implicit bias.** Specifically, trainings and exercises should focus on positive interactions and counter-stereotyping.
- **Adopt clear and comprehensive policies on the use of force** and make these policies public. These policies should address the use of de-escalation, less-lethal force, and deadly force and should clearly state the details on the release of use-of-force incident data.
- **Consider adopting external oversight bodies for the review of critical incidents** involving police action. This can help establish a transparent review process and manage public expectations.
- **Establish clear policies for handling civil disturbances and demonstrations** that include guidance on the use and escalation of force. Police should also use after-action reports to review their responses to mass demonstrations.
- **Collect adequate data on critical incidents involving police officers.** At a minimum, agencies should collect information about suspect and officer demographics as well as the location, date, time, and other relevant contextual factors. These data should be analyzed on a recurring basis.

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The technology field continues to develop rapidly with body cameras, less-lethal weapons, online communication platforms, and other new and innovative tools frequently entering the field. Due to this rapid development, research on these topics is preliminary and limited. However, research exists on police technologies more generally that can provide important insights into implementing contemporary technologies. Given the expectations of the public in this age of technology, it is important for law enforcement leaders to consider implementing these tools.

Technology and Social Media Evidence-Based Recommendations:

- Consider the potential benefits, costs, technical requirements, and legal issues surrounding the **adoption of body cameras**.
- **Require officers equipped with body cameras to use the cameras** during their interactions with community members, as consistent with established policy and training. Train officers to notify citizens that their encounters are being recorded.
- **Use the Internet and social media to promote more collaborative and interactive communication with community members** by disseminating important, accurate safety information in real time, sharing positive stories, and encouraging community input.
- **Formulate policies defining acceptable uses of social media** by staff in both official and unofficial capacities.
- **Equip officers with less-lethal weapons** and provide annual training on their use.
- **Consult with the community when adopting, implementing, and evaluating technologies**, particularly those designed for surveillance and the collection of data about citizens.
- **Stay abreast of research on technology**, as many studies in progress will yield further insights and lessons on costs, benefits, unintended consequences, and best practices related to this technology.

COMMUNITY POLICING AND CRIME REDUCTION

Collaborative problem-solving between police and the community is a core tenet of community-oriented policing. While the diversity of strategies deployed within the framework of community policing make it somewhat challenging to conduct scientific research, studies show that community policing can increase community ratings of satisfaction with the police and increase police legitimacy.

Community Policing and Crime Reduction Evidence-Based Recommendations:

- **Examine the agency commitment to community policing**, as well as the tangible strategies used to achieve community policing. Strategic planning can help agencies assess their current community policing capacity and effectiveness and determine goals for moving forward.
- **Engage with the community** through meaningful partnerships and problem-solving, ensuring that all parts of the community are represented, particularly those with differing viewpoints.
- **Enhance training on communication, conflict resolution, and de-escalation** skills in academy and in-service training protocols.
- **Incorporate community collaboration and problem-solving competencies into employee performance evaluations** in order to determine training needs, prioritize community-oriented police work, and reward officers for their efforts.
- **Collaborate with schools, local governments, and communities to implement coordinated, evidence-based behavioral support programs in schools** to limit the use of arrest and other criminal justice sanctions in schools.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Research done on adult learning in other fields provides important insights for law enforcement training. Research that evaluates the impact of law enforcement training on the actual performance of the job is very limited, but evidence exists to support the prioritization of certain training topics.

Training and Education Evidence-Based Recommendations:

- **Deliver training that engages officers to solve problems and learn-by-doing** while making clear the importance and real-world application of the training topic. Agencies should provide follow-up support to ensure that officers are applying training content in practice.
- **Incorporate crisis intervention training into basic recruit and in-service training** to improve officer knowledge and attitude toward interactions with the mentally ill and to encourage the use of de-escalation techniques.
- **Implement diversity training that addresses implicit or unconscious bias** rather than focuses on explicit bias to help individuals manage and minimize their implicit biases.
- **Encourage higher education**, and when resources allow it, incentivize higher education.

OFFICER WELLNESS AND SAFETY

The Task Force notes the important link between officer wellness and safety and the law enforcement agency's capacity to protect and serve its community. A great deal of research confirms that fatigue, poor health, posttraumatic stress, and injury are prevalent in the law enforcement profession. While there is little research on the impact of organizational efforts to address fatigue and stress and improve the health, safety, and wellness of police officers, there are programs and strategies that show promise. Consistently making officers aware of these efforts can improve officer wellness and safety.

Officer Wellness and Safety Evidence-Based Recommendations:

- **Supervisors, leaders, and trainers should discuss police fatigue, stress, posttraumatic stress, health, danger, and injury with officers in neutral ways** during training, roll calls, and within squad discussions. The agency should provide officers with easily accessible information on well-established treatments.
- **Take care in how wellness, health, and stress management programs are presented**, as labels and dissemination approaches can matter in how receptive officers are to these programs. For example, research shows that officers may be more receptive to "wellness" programs than those labeled "stress management."
- **Collect baseline and ongoing data on officer fatigue, health, and stress** in ways that are nonthreatening and respectful of officer privacy. These data can be analyzed to understand the connection between officer health and wellness and behavioral outcomes.
- **Consider shift length**, carefully weighing the benefits and consequences. Ten-hour shifts may allow officers to get more sleep, work less overtime, and improve their work-home life balance. Twelve-hour shifts may increase officer fatigue, which can affect wellness and police work outcomes.
- **Increase data collection about accidents, near misses, and injuries**, and analyze the data regularly, including their links to officer wellness.
- **Encourage officers to use seat belts, ballistic vests, and tactical first aid kits**. Accompany these safety measures with training and clearly written policies, and ensure compliance with these policies through daily supervision and inspection. These proven, tangible actions can immediately increase officer safety.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is important to note that many of the recommendations made by the Task Force were based on new and innovative ideas. As such, researchers have yet to test and validate many of the recommendations. While some of the Task Force recommendations do not yet have a strong research base, they do align with principles of procedural justice and democratic policing and should be considered.

An Evidence-Assessment of the Recommendations of the President's

Task Force on 21st Century Policing identifies many important law enforcement research topics. View the full report for a list of research recommendations relating to each pillar of the Task Force Report.



RESOURCES:

Full Research Report: *An Evidence-Assessment of the Recommendations of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing: Implementation and Research Priorities*

theiacp.org/Portals/0/documents/ICPR/IACP%20GMU%20Evidence%20Assessment%20Report%20FINAL.pdf

Blueprint for 21st Century Policing Online Dashboard

theiacp.org/ICPR

Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf

Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University

cebc.org/

IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center

theiacp.org/Model-Policy

IACP/University of Cincinnati Center for Police Research and Policy

theiacp.org/research

COPS Office, U.S. Department of Justice

cops.usdoj.gov



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