



Violence **Reduction** Network

Strategic Solutions • Focused Action • Reduced Violence

# Strategies to Improve Homicide Investigations and Increase Clearance Rates

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# OBJECTIVES OF THIS WEBINAR



- Learn about proven strategies for investigating homicides and improving clearance rates based on the collective experience of seven law enforcement agencies
- Discuss the relationship of homicide investigators with other law enforcement units and prosecutors
- Identify resources available for homicide investigators and law enforcement executives at the local and state levels
- Examine the critical tasks during the first 48 hours of a homicide investigation

# TODAY'S SPEAKERS



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# CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE HOMICIDE PROCESS MAPPING PROJECT



- Findings from two BJA homicide technical assistance projects at law enforcement agencies showed that each agency had high homicide rates and very low clearance rates
  - With these two projects, we learned what did *not* work
- This prompted BJA to ask: *What are law enforcement agencies with high homicide clearance rates doing to achieve that success?*



# CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE HOMICIDE PROCESS MAPPING PROJECT



- Purpose: Identify best practices in homicide investigations that will result in an increase in quality homicide investigations and homicide clearances
- Identify investigative practices that were consistent across multiple agencies (this adds validity and reliability)
- Identify critical factors in the first 48 hours of the investigation that lead to a clearance

# AGENCY SELECTION CRITERIA

- Geographically representative law enforcement agencies
- Both municipal and county agencies
- Had at least 24 homicides in 2011
- Had a clearance rate of 80 percent or higher



# AGENCIES SELECTED



- Baltimore County, Maryland, Police Department
- Denver, Colorado, Police Department
- Houston, Texas, Police Department
- Jacksonville, Florida, Sheriff's Office
- Richmond, Virginia, Police Department
- Sacramento County, California, Sheriff's Department
- San Diego, California, Police Department



# IMPORTANT OVERARCHING FINDINGS



- Executive buy-in to the approach of homicide investigations and support of resources is essential
  - This ranges from ensuring there is an adequate overtime budget and providing organizational flexibility to support homicide investigation needs
- The fundamental role of the lead homicide investigator is changing—from “individually persistent investigator” to “communicator and information manager”
- A solid foundation of community support is essential
- The effective use of intelligence can be an important factor, particularly when the homicides are tied to criminal enterprises

# IMPORTANT OVERARCHING FINDINGS



- The role of the patrol force in homicide investigations was expanded in agencies with high clearances
  - In these agencies, first-responding patrol officers essentially began the investigation
- Providing attention and support to family members and witnesses not only supports the investigation but is also “the right thing to do”
- Successful homicide clearances can more readily be achieved when different units within the agency work cooperatively with homicide investigators
- An effective public information capability—including social media—not only aids in the investigation but also reduces the fear of crime among community members

# STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES

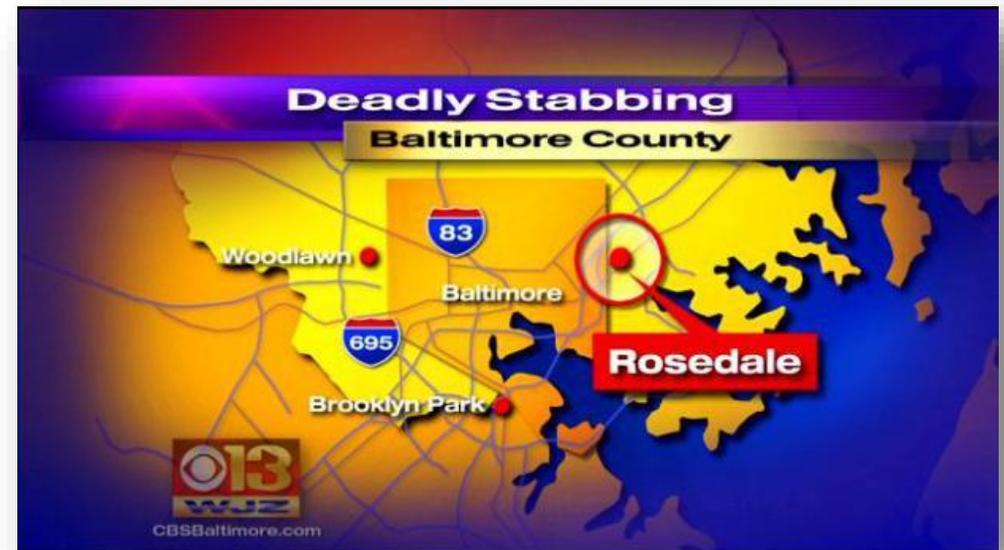
- Selection of homicide investigators
- Staffing
- Staff scheduling
- Training and professional development
- An effective community foundation
- Crime and intelligence analysis capability
- Sufficient equipment and resources



# TACTICAL INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES



- Understanding the character of homicides in the jurisdiction
- Overtime funding
- Ensure that homicide investigators have sufficient committed case time
- Role of patrol/uniformed officers
- Crime scene investigators (CSI)
- Forensics laboratory
- Team approach to investigations
- Working with external agencies



# TACTICAL INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES



- Fugitive squads
- District/prosecuting attorney relations
- Medical examiner
- Victim-witness advocate
- Technology investigations and analysis
- Public information
- Crimestoppers and citizen tips

# VALUABLE TOOLS



- Properly trained patrol officers perform and document a neighborhood canvass as soon as possible after arrival at the crime scene
- First-responding patrol officer's "Homicide Callout Worksheet"

**Homicide Callout Worksheet<sup>42</sup>**  
(To be completed by first-responding patrol officer)

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TOC \_\_\_\_\_ TOA \_\_\_\_\_ REPORT NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
EVENT # \_\_\_\_\_  
# OF SCENE(S) \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION(S):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PRIMARY OFFICER(S):

NAME	BADGE #	UNIT #	CELL
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

ADDITIONAL OFFICER(S):

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

VICTIM(S):

NAME	DOB	ADDRESS	NOTES
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

MEDICAL PERSONNEL:

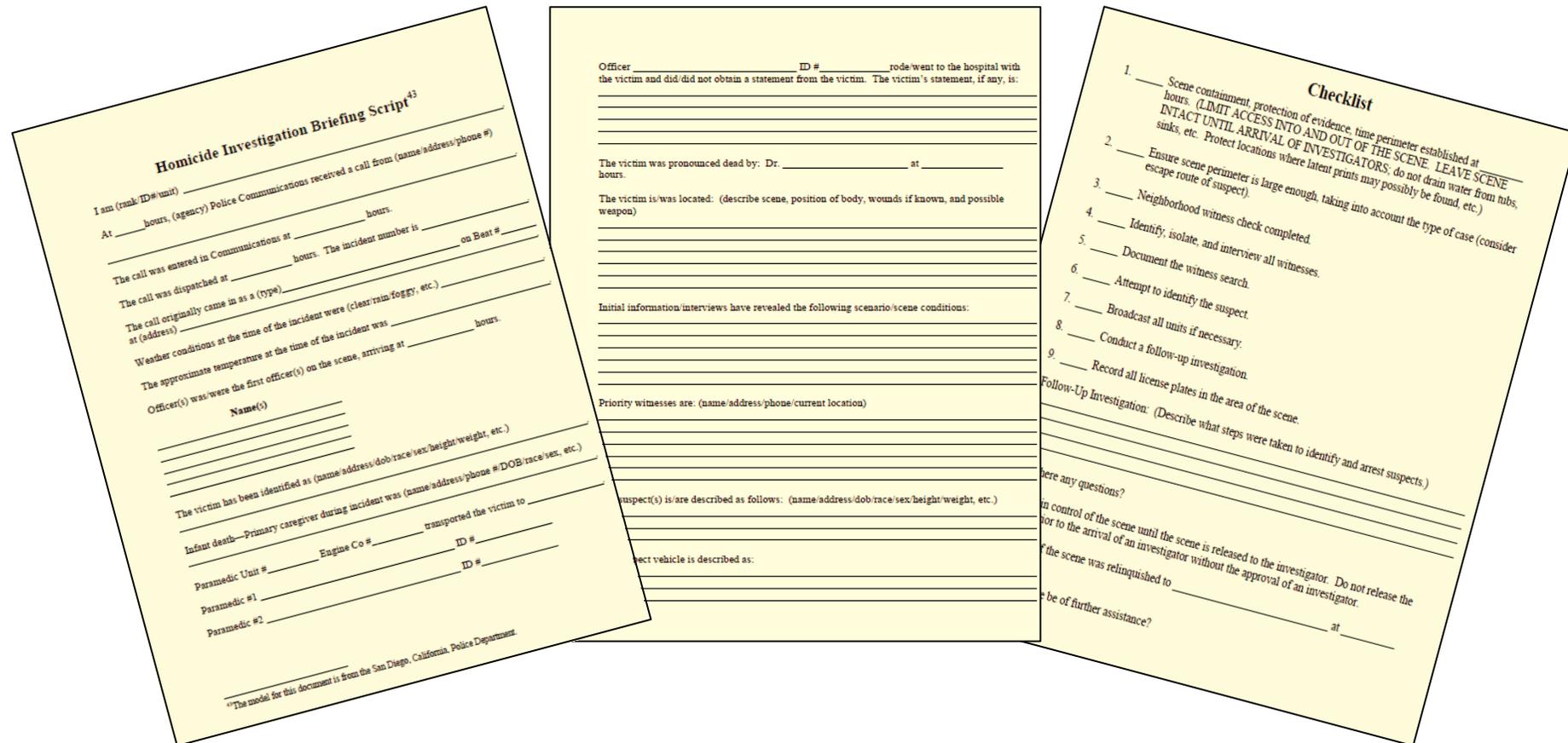
NAME/MEDIC # \_\_\_\_\_  
Time Pronounced (V-1) \_\_\_\_\_ (V-2) \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>42</sup>The model for this document is from the Sacramento County, California, Sheriff's Department.

R/DET \_\_\_\_\_  
R/DET \_\_\_\_\_  
No  
Yes No  
PSR.  
photos  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE (PHONE NUMBER) \_\_\_\_\_

# VALUABLE TOOLS

## ■ Patrol Supervisor “Homicide Investigation Briefing Script”



**Homicide Investigation Briefing Script<sup>43</sup>**

I am (rank/ID#/unit) \_\_\_\_\_

At \_\_\_\_\_ hours, (agency) Police Communications received a call from (name/address/phone #) \_\_\_\_\_

The call was entered in Communications at \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

The call was dispatched at \_\_\_\_\_ hours. The incident number is \_\_\_\_\_ on Beat # \_\_\_\_\_

The call originally came in as a (type) \_\_\_\_\_

Weather conditions at the time of the incident were (clear/rain/foggy, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

The approximate temperature at the time of the incident was \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

Officer(s) were the first officer(s) on the scene, arriving at \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

The victim has been identified as (name/address/dob/race/sex/height/weight, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Infant death—Primary caregiver during incident was (name/address/phone #/DOB/race/sex, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Paramedic Unit # \_\_\_\_\_ Engine Co # \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Paramedic #1 \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Paramedic #2 \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ San Diego, California, Police Department

<sup>43</sup>The model for this document is from the San Diego, California, Police Department.

Officer \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_ rode/went to the hospital with the victim and did/did not obtain a statement from the victim. The victim's statement, if any, is: \_\_\_\_\_

The victim was pronounced dead by: Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

The victim is/was located: (describe scene, position of body, wounds if known, and possible weapon) \_\_\_\_\_

Initial information/interviews have revealed the following scenario/scene conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority witnesses are: (name/address/phone/current location) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ suspect(s) is/are described as follows: (name/address/dob/race/sex/height/weight, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ vehicle is described as: \_\_\_\_\_

**Checklist**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Scene containment, protection of evidence, time perimeter established at \_\_\_\_\_ hours. (LIMIT ACCESS INTO AND OUT OF THE SCENE. LEAVE SCENE INTACT UNTIL ARRIVAL OF INVESTIGATORS; do not drain water from tubs, sinks, etc. Protect locations where latent prints may possibly be found, etc.)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Ensure scene perimeter is large enough, taking into account the type of case (consider escape route of suspect).
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Neighborhood witness check completed.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Identify, isolate, and interview all witnesses.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Document the witness search.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Attempt to identify the suspect.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Broadcast all units if necessary.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Conduct a follow-up investigation.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Record all license plates in the area of the scene.

Follow-Up Investigation: (Describe what steps were taken to identify and arrest suspects.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ here any questions?

\_\_\_\_\_ in control of the scene until the scene is released to the investigator. Do not release the scene until the arrival of an investigator without the approval of an investigator.

\_\_\_\_\_ if the scene was relinquished to \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ be of further assistance?

# VALUABLE TOOLS



- Timely requests for cell tower data download for the towers covering the crime scene
- Working with other relevant units and agencies provides the most productive approach
  - Violent crime units, gang and drug units, regional and federal task forces
- Resources make a difference: adequate staff vehicles, cell phone, digital camera, digital recorder, and laptop with mobile networking

# VALUABLE TOOLS



- Crime analysts and intelligence analysts provide important information
- Digital forensics analysis is as important as a crime lab
- Victim-witness advocate engagement is vital
- Crimestoppers and other methods for anonymous tips can be invaluable

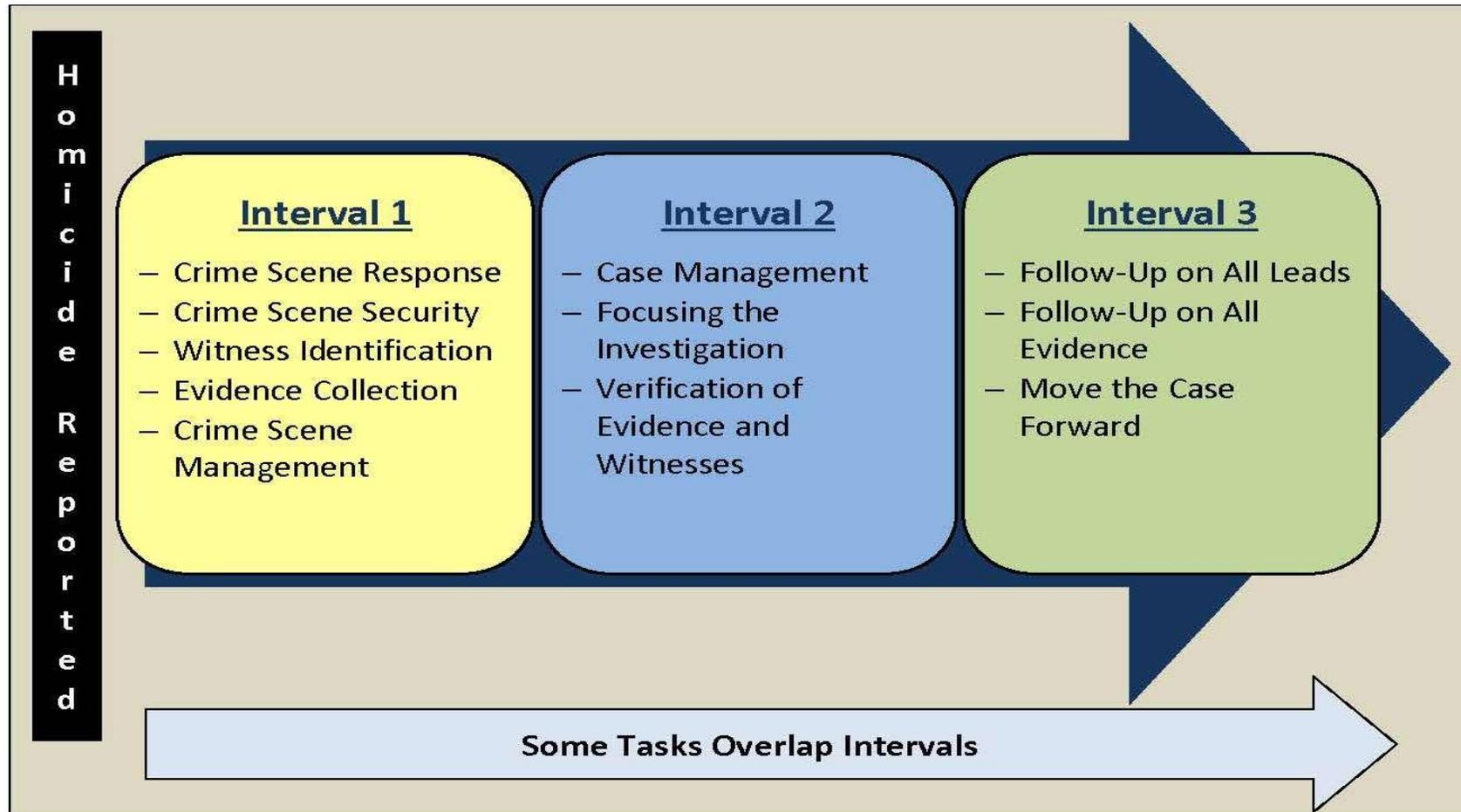


# THE “FIRST 48”



- The first 48 hours after the report of a homicide are critical to clearing the homicide because:
  - Evidence is present and has experienced minimal degradation
  - Witnesses are more easily identified
  - Witness recollections are clearest and less likely to be distorted
  - The suspect is likely to still be within a reasonable proximity
- What can be done in the first 48 hours to maximize the impact of these factors?
- The project identified three distinct time intervals in the first 48 hours that have a somewhat different purpose
  - Tasks in each time interval are directed toward each interval's purpose

# THE “FIRST 48”



# THE “FIRST 48”



- Roughly 90 specific tasks were identified to be performed in the first 48 hours—includes many persons, not just homicide investigators
- Keys are:
  - Timeliness
  - Documentation
  - Communication
  - Coordination of effort

# THE “FIRST 48”



<b>INTERVAL 1</b>	
<b>Hours 0-1</b>	
<b>Patrol Supervisor</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serves as crime scene manager until investigators arrive</li> <li>• Assigns patrol officer as crime scene scribe</li> <li>• Assigns officer(s) for traffic control at scene</li> <li>• Contacts child protection services if child is a witness or abandoned at scene</li> <li>• Establishes a media assembly point staffed by a patrol officer that is safe and does not interfere with the investigation but is convenient (send all media representatives to that point)</li> <li>• Conducts initial assessment at scene to determine whether there is gang or narcotic involvement—if so, notifies those units</li> </ul>	
<b>Patrol Officers</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Render aid if needed</li> <li>• Apprehend suspect if at scene</li> <li>• Assess safety at scene</li> <li>• Confirm death of victim</li> <li>• Determine whether to request homicide to respond</li> <li>• Secure crime scene—officer assigned for security</li> <li>• Evaluate to determine whether possible second scene—if so, locate and secure</li> <li>• Create crime scene access log</li> <li>• Identify suspects and witnesses at scene</li> <li>• Record weather and environmental conditions</li> <li>• Ensure that chain of custody is maintained</li> <li>• Document vehicles in area and check licenses/vehicle identification numbers</li> <li>• Conduct neighborhood canvass</li> <li>• Conduct preliminary interviews of witnesses</li> <li>• Brief investigators on actions and circumstances</li> </ul>	
<b>Homicide Investigators</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrive at scene</li> <li>• Apply for search warrant if required</li> <li>• Contact intelligence analyst for information needs</li> <li>• Receive briefing from patrol supervisor</li> <li>• Receive briefing from first-responding officer</li> </ul>	

# THE “FIRST 48”



INTERVAL 1	
Hours 1-4	Hours 4-8
<p><b>Homicide Investigators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead investigator assigns investigative tasks</li> <li>• Check with communications for related calls around time of homicide call</li> <li>• Establish command post if warranted by facts</li> <li>• Notify and brief command</li> <li>• Establish and confirm identity of victim</li> <li>• Crime scene measurements and sketch</li> <li>• Photograph and video-record crime scene</li> <li>• Temporary witness relocation if warranted</li> <li>• Investigator and family advocate contact victim’s family</li> <li>• Make “all cars” broadcast of suspect as applicable</li> </ul>	<p><b>Homicide Investigators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain cell tower data dump if needed</li> <li>• Database checks of witnesses, addresses, and suspects</li> <li>• Determine whether crime scene can be released</li> <li>• Designate officer or investigator to accompany victim to hospital to recover clothing and evidence</li> <li>• Contact lab if priority analysis is needed</li> <li>• Follow-up interviews of witnesses—videorecorded</li> <li>• Case review briefing for all team members</li> <li>• Lead investigator attends autopsy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Homicide Investigators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigator and family advocate contact victim’s family</li> <li>• Locate security cameras at businesses in area—seize recordings</li> <li>• Debrief with all personnel after scene is processed</li> <li>• Conduct extended crime scene search if warranted</li> <li>• Document victim’s predeath circumstances and facts</li> <li>• Contact personnel from other units within the department who may assist (e.g., gangs)</li> <li>• Contact other federal, state, and local agencies that may assist</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Crime Scene Investigators and District Attorney</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSIs continue to process scene</li> <li>• CSIs confer with investigator after scene has been processed</li> <li>• District Attorney arrives on scene (if appropriate)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Public Information Officer (PIO)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrives at the scene</li> <li>• Briefed by investigators to determine information to be released</li> <li>• Prepares statement for media release</li> <li>• Plans press conference as determined by circumstances</li> <li>• Tweets available suspect information and community safety information</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Crime Scene Investigators and Medical Examiner</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical examiner investigator (MEI) arrives at scene</li> <li>• Briefs CSIs and crime scene “walkthrough”</li> <li>• CSIs process scene with advice from investigators</li> <li>• MEI coordinates/communicates with investigators</li> </ul>	<p><b>Crime Scene Investigators and Medical Examiner</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSIs secure evidence and transport for analysis</li> <li>• Medical examiner’s office removes body from scene</li> <li>• Medical examiner performs autopsy</li> </ul>

# THE “FIRST 48”



INTERVAL 2		INTERVAL 3	
Hours 8-16	Hours 16-24	Hours 24-36	Hours 36-48
<p align="center"><b>Homicide Investigators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop profile/description of suspect—all cars be on the lookout (BOLO)</li> <li>• Notify other agencies, fusion center, and PIO of suspect information</li> <li>• Document decedent’s medical, social, and mental health histories</li> <li>• Consult District Attorney on case status and evidentiary needs</li> <li>• Prepare case report</li> <li>• Notify community stakeholder organizations</li> <li>• Conduct second neighborhood canvass</li> <li>• Confer with analyst on leads</li> <li>• Have strategy meeting with team members to decide next steps</li> </ul>		<p align="center"><b>Homicide Investigators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case review team meeting—identify next steps in investigation and responsibilities</li> <li>• Command briefing update</li> <li>• Temporarily assigned personnel return to unit</li> <li>• Reinterview family for additional information</li> <li>• Meet with lab analysts to discuss evidence</li> <li>• Verify case file is current</li> <li>• Meet with District Attorney and advise of case status</li> <li>• If no clear suspect emerges and/or if the modus operandi is distinctive, compare facts and characteristics to other cases to determine whether this is a possible repeat offender (particularly in gang-related homicides)</li> </ul>	
<p align="center"><b>Public Information Officer (PIO)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News release, information push, press conference</li> </ul>		<p align="center"><b>Public Information Officer (PIO)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up press conference(s) and announcements/bulletins in social media as dictated by facts, suspect status, and public safety</li> </ul>	
<p align="center"><b>Digital Forensics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital forensic analyses of phones, computers, and digital storage media</li> </ul>			
<p align="center"><b>Homicide Investigators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage fugitive/major case squad to search for suspect<sup>14</sup></li> <li>• Follow up on tips from Crime Stoppers and tip lines/Web site</li> <li>• Continued contact with victim’s family by investigators and victim advocate<sup>15</sup></li> <li>• Determine whether surveillance/undercover is needed—follow department procedures, including notification of supervisor since these may require coordination with different units and/or overtime</li> <li>• Work suspect leads, including checking diverse information sources (e.g., phone records, credit histories, civil courts, FBI ViCAP)</li> </ul>			

# CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

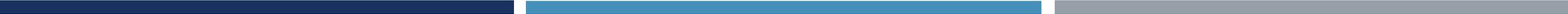


- Higher-quality investigations and increases in homicide clearance rates can be accomplished through policy changes that have little cost associated with them
- The greatest challenge is changing attitudes and behaviors of personnel within the agency regarding their role in homicide investigations

# RESOURCES



- *Homicide Process Mapping*
- *10 Things Law Enforcement Executives Can Do to Positively Impact Homicide Investigation Outcomes*
- *Promoting Effective Homicide Investigations*
- National Institute of Justice: Law Enforcement Investigations Website
- Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission Website
- Peer exchanges with select law enforcement agencies



# QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION



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# Strategies to Improve Homicide Investigations and Increase Clearance Rates

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