5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IMPROVING HOMICIDE & NONFATAL SHOOTING INVESTIGATIONS

In October of 2018, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the National Resource & Technical Assistance Center for Improving Law Enforcement Investigations (NRTAC) held a training with researchers and law enforcement practitioners to identify and discuss new research on promising practices in investigating and improving clearances on homicides and nonfatal shootings (NFS).

Three main areas of research were discussed surrounding the improvement of investigative clearance rates. Research previously conducted by **Charles Wellford**, of the University of Maryland, and Cynthia Lum, of George Mason University, examined departmental homicide clearance rates as they related to five central themes: organizational structure; leadership and resources; selection, training, and performance review; case assignment and the investigative process; and community interaction. **Natalie Hipple**, of Indiana University Bloomington, **and Beth Huebner,** of the University of Missouri–St. Louis, discussed the importance of defining and tracking nonfatal shootings. Finally, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) highlighted a recently published a report detailing **Promising Strategies for Strengthening Homicide Investigations**.

Participants from 13 law enforcement agencies discussed effective policies and practices in the investigation and solvability of homicides and NFS, as well as the internal and external challenges faced during a successful investigation. Peer-to-peer networking between the agencies was designed to enhance and expand effective investigative and prosecutorial processes.

1 ESTABLISH CLEAR ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Participants specifically discussed the need for executive buy-in when establishing priorities surrounding clearances and violent crime reduction. Research has shown that the centralization of command and encouraging information sharing is beneficial to the unit, along with setting clear expectations of overall clearance rates. Leadership can contribute to the success of investigations by making them a priority for the agency, providing more guidance to investigative units, and using workload analysis to allocate necessary resources. Detectives should have very clear expectations of their responsibilities and be held accountable through an evaluation process for conducting an effective investigation.

2 ROUTINE POLICY REVISIONS

One of the most common responses highlighted by law enforcement practitioners was the need for routine policy revisions within their departments. Research has shown that policies, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and processes that govern investigations should reflect evidence-based investigative practices. These policies should be clearly outlined, in an easy to understand format. Policies and protocols should direct case assignment and management; detective staff selection; training requirements; evidence collection and crime scene response; and documentation of investigative steps.

3 DEVELOP TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE METRICS

Some of the most effective procedures in investigator selection include implementing a formal process that clearly outlines qualifications and expectations for personnel. Many high-performing agencies require investigators to have prior experience in investigations, as well specific training. Some agencies also require investigators to have a certain number of years of experience in the department. While these amounts vary by agency, the overall training and years of experience play an important role in investigator selection. Personnel should be held accountable through routine, standardized performance evaluations. Emphasis was placed on the need for training opportunities outside of departmental training.

4 IDENTIFY WAYS TO TRIAGE NONFATAL SHOOTING INVESTIGATIONS

Law enforcement participants were interested in the intersection and investigation of nonfatal shootings. Nonfatal shootings were identified as "unsuccessful homicides." Making use of real-time data supports proactive investigative approaches to prevent and intercept future, crime gun events. Assigning an analyst to the investigative division can assist in the triaging of nonfatal shooting investigations, specifically utilizing social network analysis.

5 ROUTINELY REVIEW ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

Law enforcement participants cited that they found it beneficial to hear from researchers on evidence-based practices, as well as learning innovative, investigative practices utilized in other jurisdictions. Continual best practice review and peer-to-peer networking enhances and expands effective investigative practices.

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