

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative: Columbia, South Carolina, Police Department



CPD Traffic Safety Division vehicle at SC State House for 2017 Target Zero Kick-off press conference



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INTRODUCTION

The Columbia, South Carolina, Police Department (CPD) is 1 of 15 departments selected to participate in the Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative (SNPPI). SNPPI provides policy review, assessments, training, and technical assistance to a cohort of law enforcement agencies across the nation. The four goals of the initiative are to identify promising strategies that **reduce crime, protect officer's safety and wellness, establish productive interagency partnerships** with law enforcement and community stakeholders, and **implement innovative and effective technologies** to help police departments safeguard neighborhoods. ▀

METHODOLOGY

Each of the 15 selected departments is assigned a CNA Strategic Site Coordinator (SSC) and an operations analyst to assist with planning, implementation, coordination, and delivery of technical assistance. CNA worked with the CPD to develop a customized strategy to capitalize on the great work already in progress across the four policing principles. To do this, CNA looked at the CPD's policies and practices related to: crime reduction efforts, policy effectiveness, technological capabilities, training structures and offerings, and officer safety and wellness philosophies. The CNA team then helped identify the training and technical assistance (TTA) opportunities and additional tools and resources to enhance areas related to the principles of precision policing. The team documented these best practices, which will be made available to police departments nationwide as they seek to implement proven practices that promote public safety. ▀

BACKGROUND

Chief William H. Holbrook assumed his position in 2014, during a period of low morale, when the department was struggling to recruit and retain officers. Chief Holbrook readily addressed these challenges, and, as he approaches the four-year anniversary of his appointment, he continues to transform agency culture and strengthen external relations. Under Chief Holbrook's leadership, the CPD has received its Advanced National Accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA®) indicating that its policies and procedures meet national standards in policing. ▀

Columbia Police Department Profile

Leadership: Chief W.H. "Skip" Holbrook
(since 2014)

Population: Approx. 134,309 residents

Area: 134.9 sq. miles

Sworn Officers: 425

Total Crime (2016): 8,490 offenses
- **Violent Crime:** 1,116 offenses
- **Property Crime:** 7,374 offenses

Website: <https://columbiapd.net/>



Beth Drake, interim U.S. Attorney for the District of SC, presents information to individuals responsible for gun violence in Columbia during the 2016 Ceasefire Columbia event. All stakeholders in attendance emphasized the importance of the individuals not reoffending, and the consequences if they chose to commit new crimes.

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES FOR CRIME REDUCTION

Operation Real Time

As part of its focused deterrence strategy, CPD launched the Ceasefire Columbia Initiative in partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of South Carolina. The goal of the initiative is to reduce gun violence in particular neighborhoods.

The program has expanded into Operation Real Time, which is a federal case priority adoption program that immediately removes a violent offender from the community at the point of arrest in real time. CPD has a pre-screened priority offender list for all of the officers to reference it in the field.

Guardian Policing

CPD is committed to partnering with its communities to reduce crime and to ensure public safety. To do this, the department regularly assesses its operations and deployment strategies to address areas with the greatest need for law enforcement presence. Following the shooting of a University of South Carolina student, the department adopted a new approach to policing in its Five Points Entertainment District. The CPD worked with the CNA team to analyze the incident and develop a comprehensive approach to strengthening community relations. As a result of this analysis, CPD officers in the Five Points Entertainment District now employ a guardian policing philosophy where officers are focused on fostering open, fair, and unbiased interactions with residents. This approach allows the officers to better manage the large influx of university students that frequent the area, by proactively maintaining public order and safety.

Smart Phone Initiative Expansion

Community Response Teams have been the spearhead of utilizing smartphone technology to improve the capabilities of CPD to address crime concerns. This initiative is now entering a new phase by expanding to all patrol officers.

This will greatly enhance an officer's ability to obtain and process actionable information. The end result will be that officers will be better equipped to serve the citizens of Columbia by utilizing this technology driven initiative to provide exceptional customer service.

The CPD issues smart phones to every officer to help solve and prevent crimes with real time information through connections with community partners. ▀

PROTECTING OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Fit for Duty

The City of Columbia and the CPD have recently taken steps to reduce the rate of heart disease among their employees. Reflecting nationwide trends, heart disease is the number one cause of death in South Carolina, causing nearly 10,000 deaths annually.¹ To improve the cardiovascular health of its officers, the CPD developed and implemented a comprehensive wellness and fitness program called Fit for Duty. The program incorporates fitness and wellness training, as well as nutritional counseling.

¹ South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (2016). "State of the Heart: Heart Disease in South Carolina." Retrieved from <https://www.scdhec.gov/library/ML-002149.pdf>.



Columbia Police Department's Citizen Advisory Council (L-R) Rev. W. Andrew Waldo, Don Polite, Jr., Kimberly Castell, Jason Reynolds, Captain George Drafts, Rev. Bill Dieckmann, Robert Wynn, Jr. (not pictured) Edward Grimsley, John Martin, Seth Stoughton and Shannon Staley

Personal Trainer Bertram Bailey has been employed by the City of Columbia since 2005 and was assigned to CPD full time in 2015 as its fitness coordinator. Mr. Bailey developed Fit for Duty with the goal of reducing an officer's risk of cardiovascular disease by targeting risk factors such as stress, high blood pressure, and obesity. Officers who join the program receive an initial physical assessment, which is used to develop a customized exercise and nutritional wellness plan. As part of the program, officers also have access to a personal trainer, group fitness classes, and independent workouts at a number of gyms and recreation centers in the local area.

Tactical First Aid Kits & Narcan Program

In 2015, new legislation was passed in South Carolina, regarding opioid prevention. As a result, all CPD officers have been trained and equipped with opioid reversal medication, which can be administered to persons experiencing an opioid overdose, themselves or K9s.

Through a partnership with the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), every officer is equipped with the lifesaving opioid antidote, Narcan. ▀

ESTABLISHING PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Members of the CPD understand the importance of positive, non-enforcement community engagement to strengthen public trust. The CPD formed Community Response Teams, which are composed of officers who work collaboratively with community stakeholders and other city agencies to address neighborhood-specific public safety and quality-of-life issues. In addition, the CPD has implemented a number of outreach initiatives to strengthen partnerships and to consistently build public trust.

Citizen Advisory Council

The most significant step CPD took to strengthen agency-wide transparency and accountability was the establishment of a

Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) in 2015. The ten-member group comprises a cross-section of individuals who reflect the diversity of the city. The group met with the chief six times in 2017 to review a range of topics, including disciplinary actions, revisions to policies and procedures, and body-worn camera and dash cam recordings of potentially high-profile incidents. Members of the group also raise issues that are important to the constituents they represent, including incidents of officer misconduct, investigation of community complaints, and community observations of certain police actions. Finally, Chief Holbrook provides members with updates on significant incidents, pending police initiatives, and noteworthy issues within the CPD.

Members of the CAC attend disciplinary Command Review Boards (CRB) on a rolling basis. CRBs take place when administrative investigations result in a recommendation of officer discipline at a level of written reprimand or higher. In 2017, CAC members attended 13 CRBs, which provided them and their communities with an understanding of the high level of accountability to which the officers are held at CPD.

In reference to the impact of the Citizen's Advisory Council, Chief Holbrook said, "The CAC has provided further validation to our police operations and procedures. Their participation in discipline Command Review Boards has been tremendously helpful in our efforts towards implementing procedural justice. I am also very proud of how our rank and file has accepted the CAC and their participation in our processes, thus furthering trust and legitimacy internally and externally."

Beyond the Badge

Beyond the Badge connects newly sworn officers to the community they help to protect. Following graduation from the South Carolina Justice Academy, new officers complete a one-week-long program that focuses on community policing, service, and outreach. Eighty-four officers have completed the program and developed a more comprehensive understanding of the various outreach and social services available to city residents.

Recent site visits for Beyond the Badge have included:

- Harvest of Hope Food Bank
- Imagine Columbia Leadership Academy & Midlands Reading Consortium
- Washington Street United Methodist Church Soup Kitchen
- Transitions Homeless Shelter
- Palmetto Children's Hospital
- Brookdale Assisted Living & Epworth Children's Home
- CPD Retiree meet and greet luncheon

During the CNA team's site visits, officers indicated that the Beyond the Badge program allows them to build strong partnerships with the community. Officers have the opportunity to interact with the community they serve in a nonenforcement capacity.

Front Porch Roll Calls

Through the Front Porch Roll Call program, implemented in 2017, police squads host pre-shift roll calls at a home in the neighborhoods where the squads patrol. Anyone in the community can request that a shift roll call be held at their residence or business. These interactions have been invaluable for fostering understanding and collaboration between the community and the officers who serve them.

Community Command Staff Meetings

Chief Holbrook instituted Community Command Staff Meetings, holding staff meetings in various neighborhoods throughout the city, allowing the public to hear about crime trends, police initiatives, and other issues. In turn, CPD staff members hear the concerns of their residents.

Citizen Satisfaction Survey

CPD officers are required to provide business cards with their name and associated incident number, along with a phone number that community members can text to complete a citizen satisfaction survey. Officers hand out these cards to the public during all types of interactions, ranging from criminal investigations and arrests to community meetings to casual encounters.

Since March 2016, officers have distributed more than 64,500 Citizen Survey cards in English and more than 2,000 in Spanish. Using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 indicating dissatisfaction and 5 indicating a high degree of satisfaction, the survey allows citizens to rate their interactions with officers related to the following:

- officer's willingness and ability to answer questions
- officer's fairness in problem-solving
- officer's professional appearance
- overall satisfaction with the treatment experienced
- overall satisfaction with the CPD

Of the 4,164 responses received to date, the average response is 4.51, indicating that citizens perceive their interactions with CPD officers as positive.



Young Ambassadors for Justice and Youth Outreach

The Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable is an annual series of forums offered to high school students in Columbia. The department invites 10-15 high school students to participate in bimonthly meetings designed to promote mutual respect between law enforcement officers and high school students through engaging dialogue and discussion. Each series of meetings allows the students to directly discuss topics that are relevant to them with members of the police department. Most discussions aim to identify issues that either strengthen or damage the students' perceptions of law enforcement. Officers openly share experiences from their own youth and the results of the choices they made. The underlying goal of these stories is to reduce risky behavior and to promote positive youth development.

“ The program taught me how to be a better person and a leader.

—Young Ambassador Participant

“ This experience really grew my love for the CPD for allowing me this opportunity. To be able to interact with our communities on a personal and non-enforcement way is truly embracing our ‘Policing Excellence through Community Partnerships’ slogan. I look forward to continuing to enhance these partnerships as I progress in my law enforcement career.

— Beyond the Badge Participant

From 2015 to 2017, a total of 40 students actively participated in Young Ambassadors for Justice. The ultimate goal of developing the Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable was to promote the legitimacy of CPD to the young people it serves through transparency and accountability. The students who have completed the program are now partners in the effort to change the culture of policing in Columbia and make progress toward building strong community partnerships.

Bigs in Blue

The CPD has made a concerted effort to reach out to younger youth as well. The agency was one of the first to sign up for the “Bigs in Blue” program, which the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization created to improve relationships between the police and youth. Currently, 16 officers serve as “Bigs” and mentor at-risk youth. ■



“ CPD added a new vehicle to its fleet in July 2017. Outfitted with free frozen treats and uniformed officers, the truck is used for community engagement efforts by CPD and the Parks and Recreation Department at public events.

IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Body-Worn Cameras

To increase transparency and public trust, all uniformed officers with rank of sergeant and below are outfitted with body-worn cameras, and CPD’s body-worn camera policy is readily available on its website. In 2016, CPD received five complaints alleging that CPD officers used excessive force against community members. In two of these cases, the body-worn camera footage exonerated the officers.

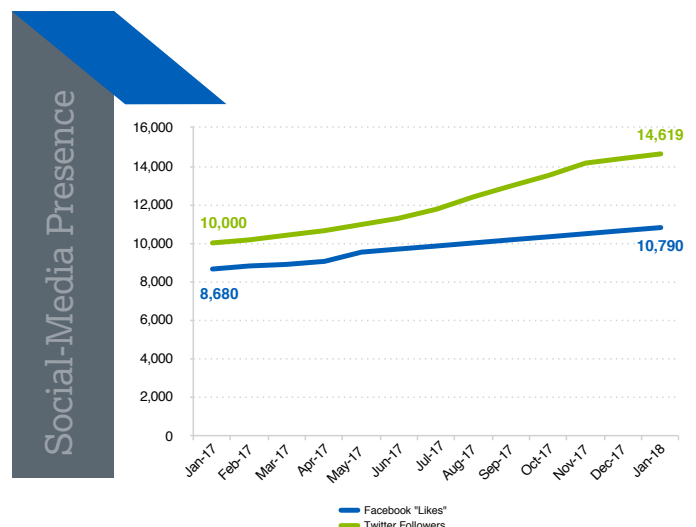
Website and Social Media

Chief Holbrook recognizes the need to expand community outreach and communications through technology. CPD’s Media Relations Office focuses on the development of results-oriented public relations and outreach strategy. To increase transparency, the department launched a new website in December 2016. Designed to be user-friendly, the site increases access to police services and publications, and it features integrated live Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds to provide up-to-date information. The CPD’s social-media team (SMT), which includes officers representing each bureau, helps to create platform-specific content. Between April 2017 and January 2018, the website had 107,358 page views, and 29,428 new users. More than 84 percent of web views during this period came from first-time visitors. Followers of CPD on social media platforms have also increased significantly (see figure 1).

The SMT spearheaded several social-media campaigns to help with public education, recruitment, event marketing, website traffic, and dissemination of news updates. Hashtags that have

resulted in a large social-media response include: #9PMRoutine, a reminder to lock vehicles and check exterior of residences; #WoofWednesday,” a K-9 team fitness video; and #CPDUpdate, a regular news brief from the Department. Other popular social-media topics include the Front Porch Roll Call program, weekly photo galleries, pedestrian safety, driver safety public service announcements, and a recruiting commercial. The addition of live streaming for press conferences and on-scene interviews via Periscope on Twitter have further expanded the department’s reach for breaking news and updates on high-profile cases.

FIGURE 1. CPD SOCIAL-MEDIA PRESENCE, JANUARY 2017–JANUARY 2018

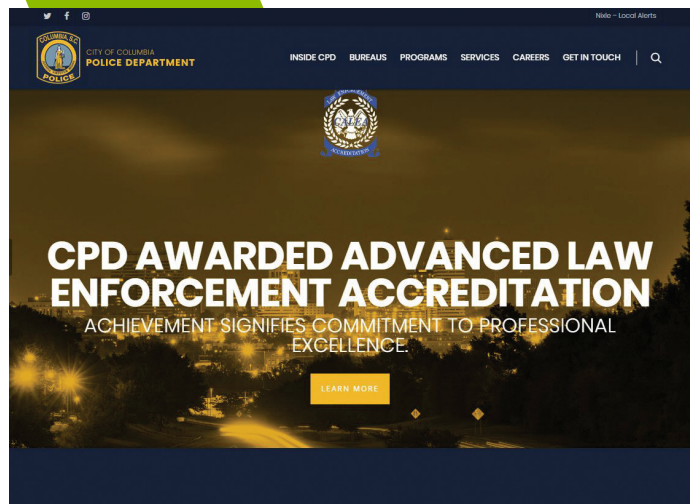


Public Data Initiative

In 2016, the department partnered with the White House for the Public Data Initiative, an open data portal developed to provide accessible, convenient and transparent information to the public. Currently housed in the public data portal are datasets including Assaults on Officers, Dispositions, Arrests and Field Interviews. In addition to the datasets, the department provides information on officer involved shootings, calls for service, code violation properties and national data with a community crime map. There will be updates to the portal in the near future, including new datasets. The Public Data Portal can be accessed online at <http://coc-colacitygis.opendata.arcgis.com> or through the department's website. To view the portal, users can create a profile or sign in using Facebook or Google. ▀

SNPPI TARGETED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To support the newly established social-media relations team and to provide staff with training for media relations and social media, Chief Holbrook requested assistance from CNA. CNA's Laura McElroy, a subject matter expert in strategic communications, provided training on how to effectively restructure the Media and Public Information Office, as well as training for the social-media team on effective outreach. In addition, she provided training for watch commanders and strategies for on-camera interviews. This training guided the efforts of the social-media team and the development and implementation of the department's new social-media strategy. ▀



Chief Holbrook and staff attend 2017 Veteran's Day Parade

CONCLUSION

The initiatives implemented by the Columbia Police Department around the four core goals of the SNPPI provide a snapshot of the broader agency culture instituted under Holbrook’s leadership. The CPD has developed a guardian mindset to reduce crime and improve public safety for the general public throughout the city. In addition, the department has fostered stronger partnerships with the community through initiatives designed to gather community member feedback, increase the visibility of police in communities and in strengthening relationships through non-enforcement activities. Simultaneously, the CPD implemented a new outreach and social-media strategy to keep the community more informed of its work. Chief Holbrook and the CPD are proven law enforcement leaders on the local, state, and national levels. ▀

“ I want to express my sincere appreciation to CNA for their support and assistance with the Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative. I also want to acknowledge the commitment and buy-in from officers to commit to our community policing efforts, crime reduction strategies and the implementation of new technology.

— Chief W.H. “Skip” Holbrook



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