



National Case Closed Project:

Event Summary of the National Case Closed Project's 2025 Convening on Practices for Effectively Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings

On March 25 and 26, 2025, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and RTI International held the second national convening of the National Case Closed Project (NCCP). More than 115 participants from 44 unique organizations representing law enforcement as well as prosecution, crime analysis, forensic science, victim advocacy, and community serving organizations met over a 2-day period at RTI's headquarters in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, to discuss best practices for responding to and investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings.

The NCCP is a national program designed to support law enforcement agencies in improving their violent crime clearance rates, with an emphasis on fatal and nonfatal shooting cases. The project team conducts comprehensive assessments for participating law enforcement agencies to identify effective and sustainable practices related to agency operations, agency resources, investigator capabilities, and community relations that sites can implement to improve their clearance rates. Technical assistance and training resources are provided to support participating agencies and can be used by law enforcement agencies across the nation to improve their investigative practices and clearance rates.

When the first NCCP convening was held in September 2023, the project was at its midway point with 5 of 10 total site assessments completed. As part of the 2023 convening, practitioners discussed key investigative topics, including challenges and strategies for eliminating communication silos, incorporating data and intelligence, leveraging technology, and coordinating with prosecution. At the time of the second NCCP convening in spring 2025, all 10 NCCP assessments had been completed. The additional knowledge and expertise gained from these assessments allowed presenters and attendees to expand on critical topics discussed in 2023 while also diving into more targeted, innovative approaches for solving gun violence cases.

"The opportunity to share what makes our agency successful, learn how other agencies achieve their success, and hear firsthand the trends and challenges our agency could face at any moment are crucial to our organizational success. Even when achieving success, we must think ahead: How do we continue to train, grow, develop, support, and lead agencies related to gun crime? Sustainable practices play a key role in successful outcomes for all involved."

—Curtis Cheeks III, Chief of Police, High Point Police Department (NC)

Findings from NCCP Case File Analysis

A key theme that emerged during the NCCP convening was the importance of taking a data-driven and evidence-based approach to improving responses to fatal and nonfatal shootings. The RTI project team presented findings from analyses conducted on data extracted from 960 fatal and nonfatal shooting case files that were provided by 12 agencies, including the 10 NCCP sites. Findings revealed that while incident characteristics, suspect demographics, and victim-offender relationships are similar across fatal and nonfatal shooting cases, fatal shooting cases are typically cleared at a much higher rate than nonfatal cases. According to their analysis, fatal shootings generally received a more rigorous initial response than nonfatal shootings, including a greater number of officers and detectives responding to the scene, a quicker response from detectives, more evidence collected on-scene, and more victim and witness leads gathered on-scene. Additionally, fatal shooting cases received a more intensive follow-up

investigation, including greater witness and victim follow-up and better use of technology such as the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), vehicle data, and audiovisual data. Given that audiovisual evidence seemed to contribute to case clearance in over half of the cleared fatal shooting cases the NCCP team reviewed, increasing the collection and utilization of this evidence in nonfatal shooting investigations appears to be an important way to improve clearance rates for this crime type. When interpreting these findings, subject matter experts noted that high caseload and limited resources often pressure investigators to prioritize fatal shooting casework over nonfatal shooting casework. Recommendations given for overcoming these barriers included using noninvestigative personnel, such as patrol officers, crime analysts, and crime scene investigators to improve on-scene evidence collection and preliminary investigation efforts; leveraging community partnerships to improve victim and witness cooperation; and increasing supervision of the investigative process to ensure thorough follow-up occurs.

Organizational Change: NCCP Progress in Addressing Shooting Investigations

Attendees heard directly from agency leaders about barriers they faced and progress they made toward implementing NCCP recommendations to improve agency responses to shooting incidents. Chief John Thompson of Greensboro Police Department (PD) (NC) and Assistant Chief Nicole Waldner of Milwaukee PD (WI) shared their experiences participating in the NCCP, highlighting the benefits of having an objective assessment of the agency's investigative processes. Since their NCCP assessments, Greensboro PD and Milwaukee PD have implemented impactful changes, including expanded specialized training opportunities for detectives, increased NIBIN testing, expanded victim advocacy for shooting victims, and new or strengthened partnerships with community organizations. Chief Thompson emphasized that formalizing informal investigative practices with written policies and standardized checklists has been particularly beneficial for ensuring consistency across shooting cases. Assistant Chief Waldner observed that transforming the Milwaukee PD's violent crimes unit into a specialized gun violence unit has resulted in a heightened concentration and vigor toward shooting cases. However, this restructuring has also introduced challenges within the department's newly merged major crimes unit.



Although acknowledging that these transitions are not without obstacles, both leaders agreed that many of the implemented changes have had a positive impact. Since its NCCP assessment, Greensboro PD has seen significant increases in clearance rates for both fatal and nonfatal shooting cases, and Milwaukee PD has experienced similar improvements as well. In 2023, the Greensboro PD reported 66 fatal shootings with a clearance rate of 36%. This is compared to 40 reported fatal shootings in 2024, with a clearance rate of 53%. In 2025 to date, there have been 12 fatal shootings with a clearance rate of 75%. The Milwaukee PD also saw an increase in clearance rates, with rates rising from 59% to 78% for homicides and 37% to 45% for nonfatal shootings from 2023 to 2024.

Use of Technology in Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings

Another major topic discussed during the convening was how investigators can effectively use technology to advance investigations and achieve successful convictions. Commander Kyle Hartsock from Albuquerque PD (NM) emphasized the value of a new unit his agency has created that focuses on digital evidence collection and analysis, including the role the unit plays in submitting search warrants, correlating digital evidence with physical case evidence, and providing expert testimony. Sergeant Josh May of the Chattanooga PD (TN) shared how close collaboration with prosecutors has shaped the Organized Crime Unit's strategic use of tools like geofencing and social media analysis. Michael Vidmar, District Attorney in Santa Clara County (CA), noted that from a prosecutorial perspective, it is essential for law enforcement to collect and submit all available digital evidence during both the initial response and follow-up investigative procedures. The panel concluded with



a summary of recommendations for addressing the ongoing challenges of managing digital evidence, highlighting the need for standardized training and certification in this increasingly critical field.

Supporting Victims of Gun Violence Through Advocacy

Because violent crime investigators often face demanding caseloads, it can be difficult for them to regularly communicate with victims and victims' families throughout a criminal investigation. Hannah Walling from Chattanooga PD (TN) and Nicole Carroll from Louisville Metro PD (KY) discussed how their agencies have expanded services for victims of violent crime, including by increasing advocacy staff for nonfatal shooting victims. Victim advocates offer a range of supports, including safety planning, referrals to community resources, regular case updates, assistance with crime scene cleanup, and education about the justice system. Both leaders emphasized that victim services can provide a pathway to improve victim outcomes, which in turn improves case clearance rates and relieves burden on investigators. Panelist Debra Gillispie, founder of Mothers Against Violence in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, highlighted the vital role of community advocates serving as trusted messengers between law enforcement and community members. Overall, panelists underscored the importance of honest, confidential communication with victims and families while advocating for formal standard operating procedures and targeted training to ensure that victims and their families receive consistent, trauma-informed support.

“Building safe communities requires a strong partnership between police and the public—working together, leveraging technology, and sharing responsibility to reduce gun violence and create lasting change.”

—Sergeant Josh May, Chattanooga Police Department (TN)

Prosecution Strategies and Promising Practices

Panelists highlighted early and consistent communication between law enforcement and prosecutors as a crucial element for successfully prosecuting shooting cases. Participants Ryan Bokoch, Crime Strategies Supervisor with Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office (OH), Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Lang, and retired Lieutenant Kevin Armbruster presented examples of how to establish these formal information-sharing procedures from both a prosecutorial and investigative perspective, including holding weekly coordination meetings to discuss cases early on in an investigation. For example, the Crime Strategy Unit (CSU) in Cuyahoga County focuses on prosecuting violent crime and organized crime. The unit works closely with law enforcement agencies to ensure that cases are strong from the beginning, leading to more successful prosecutions. The CSU engages early in the process to understand what is needed to make the case stronger, rather than finding out later that the case is not strong enough. The unit has regular meetings to discuss top offenders and strategies for prosecution, including creative charging and using lesser charges to build stronger cases.

Panelists acknowledged that reluctant witnesses can be a significant barrier for prosecution on shootings cases and suggested that patrol officers, victim advocates, and social workers receive training on how to engage witnesses at the crime scene and during follow-up in the investigation. Additionally, prosecutors can help reduce the threat of retaliation against witnesses and victims by removing any personally identifying information from documents and offering resources like public housing vouchers and options for temporary relocation. For cases without witness or victim cooperation, alternative evidence, such as body-worn camera and closed-circuit television footage,

can play a crucial role. A key takeaway from the panel was that early collaboration between investigators and prosecutors can help overcome case challenges, implement innovative solutions, and lead to successful prosecution.

Police-Community Engagement, Outreach, and Communication

One consistent theme that emerged throughout the 2-day convening was the need to identify best practices for increasing collaboration between law enforcement and communities, with the goal of improving victim and witness participation in criminal investigations. Panelists Tonya Cuthbertson from Mothers Standing Against Gun Violence (NC), Lloyd Merchant from Roanoke's Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of Trauma (RESET) program (VA), and Public Safety Director Troy Rogers from the City of Chattanooga (TN) shared lessons learned from their experiences and recommendations. Community leaders expressed the need for police officers to actively listen to the needs of community members and gain the buy-in of trusted individuals, such as previous offenders, who can use their status to help discourage and prevent violent crime.

Deputy Chief Mark Salazar from Fresno PD (CA), Chief Curtis Cheeks from High Point PD (NC), and Marcey Patterson from Milwaukee PD (WI) offered additional insight into how their agencies conduct effective outreach with their communities. In Milwaukee, law enforcement often attends or hosts community events, such as barbecues, church events, and youth programs, to make a consistent effort to connect with community members, even during times when they are not trying to gain information about a case. Marcey emphasized that agencies need to promote these types of events using social media. High Point PD has seen success after hiring a specific media point person who develops media content, administers an internal media bootcamp for investigators, interacts directly with media while on-scene, and holds presentations for the community. The agency has elevated this role by ensuring they have a direct line of communication to executive command staff. Panelists concluded these discussions by emphasizing a compassionate and transparent approach to engaging the community, so that victims and witnesses feel safe coming forward.

“Police and communities working together is a remedy for lower crime, healing families, and a better tomorrow.”

—Troy Rogers, City of Chattanooga (TN)

Investigator Onboarding, Training, and Wellness

In response to national challenges in recruiting and retaining homicide and other violent crime investigators, Detective Tony Hinson and Captain Holly Pate from Greensboro PD (NC), and Captain Alma Sweeny from Salt Lake City PD (UT) detailed the steps their agencies have taken to recruit, prepare, and support investigators. These leaders, along with retired Detective John Skaggs, addressed the declining interest among young officers in pursuing careers as violent crime investigators due to the high demands of the assignment and lack of incentives.

To incentivize this career path, panelists and attendees proposed a range of solutions, including implementing pay scale raises, increasing on-call pay, offering specialized training opportunities, reducing caseloads by assigning nonviolent cases to other units, ensuring investigative supervisors have relevant experience and training, and encouraging talented new patrol officers to pursue investigative careers. The panel highlighted the success of Greensboro PD and Salt Lake City PD's detective academy programs—intensive in-house training programs that promote the investigative career path to younger officers.

Finally, the discussion turned to the importance of wellness programs for both sworn and professional staff working in violent crimes, including mandatory wellness check-ins, which should be used and endorsed by executive command. Additionally, fostering a culture of open communication and support from leadership can significantly enhance the overall mental health and job satisfaction of personnel.

VALOR Initiative

The BJA Officer Robert Wilson III Preventing Violence Against Law Enforcement Officers and Ensuring Officer Resilience and Survivability (VALOR) Initiative is dedicated to improving the immediate and long-term safety, wellness, and resilience of law enforcement officers through no-cost training, research, and resources. The program offers free tools and strategies for mental health support, including peer support, post-suicide support, and organizational systems change to help agencies develop customized approaches to prevent officer suicide and strengthen mental health. For more information about this initiative, visit [VALOR for Blue](#).

Common Challenges and Promising Practices in Shooting Cases

Participants summarized the overarching strategies that improve shooting cases. Retired Detective John Skaggs emphasized the importance of thorough, chronological case documentation and case management to ensure that anyone who reviews a case packet can understand what occurred throughout the investigation. Formal case reviews by supervisors can also ensure that all available resources, such as crime analysis, forensic evidence, and digital evidence, are being consistently used during the investigative process. Retired Detective Kevin Armbruster emphasized the benefit of embedding crime analysts within investigations, and attorney advisor John Wilkinson reiterated the benefit of collaborating early with prosecution. Reorganizing the structure of violent crime units to prioritize nonfatal shootings has also been a successful strategy in a number of jurisdictions, including Santa Clara (CA) and San Jose (CA).

Concluding Summary

The 2025 NCCP convening brought together investigators, police leadership, crime and intelligence analysts, prosecutors, community members, and researchers to discuss common

challenges that hinder effective violent crime investigations, as well as innovative strategies for overcoming these barriers and improving case outcomes. The following list below provides links to specific resources across key topic areas discussed during the NCCP convening. Using findings from NCCP agency assessments and progress made by law enforcement agencies in implementing changes to improve their processes, the convening sparked meaningful engagement and discussions that can benefit all jurisdictions in increasing clearance rates and supporting victims and communities.




Resources for NCCP Case File Analysis

- [National Case Closed Project: Self-Assessment Guide for Improving Agency Investigative Outcomes brief](#)
- [National Case Closed Project Response to Fatal and Non-fatal Shootings Assessment Final Report, June 2023](#)
- [National Case Closed Webinar: Core Standards for Fatal and Non-fatal Shooting Investigations, March 27, 2024](#)
- [National Case Closed Project: Crime Scene Response and Coordination in Fatal and Nonfatal Shooting Investigations webinar, November 4, 2024](#)




Resources for Organizational Change: NCCP Progress in Addressing Shooting Investigations

- [National Case Closed Project: Core Standards for Fatal and Non-fatal Shooting Investigations brief](#)
- [National Case Closed Project: Self-Assessment Guide for Improving Agency Investigative Outcomes](#)
- [Flow Model: Agency and Investigative Factors Leading to Case Clearance](#)
- [Just Improving Fatal and Non-fatal Shooting Investigations Podcast, Episode 269, December 1, 2023](#)
- [National Case Closed Webinar: Core Standards for Fatal and Non-fatal Shooting Investigations, March 27, 2024](#)





Resources for Use of Technology in Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings

- [National Case Closed Project: Guidance on the Application of Digital Evidence in Shooting Investigations brief](#) 
- [Just Using Forensic Intelligence to Solve Gun Violence Cases Podcast, Episode 270, December 8, 2023](#) 
- [Crime Gun Intelligence and NIBIN: Best Practices in the Management and Analysis of Crime Gun Evidence in Shooting Investigations webinar, July 30, 2024](#) 
- [The Strategic Use of Crime Gun Tracing and Its Relation to NIBIN factsheet](#) 






Resources for Supporting Victims of Gun Violence through Advocacy

- [National Case Closed Project: The Role of Victim Services in Shooting Investigations brief](#) 
- [RTI 2024 Community Safety and Policing Symposium: Addressing How Law Enforcement and Community Based Organizations Can Work Together to Reduce Community Violence, April 18, 2024](#) 
- [Integrating a Trauma-Informed Response factsheet](#) 

Resources for Prosecution Strategies and Promising Practices

- [Just Collaboration Between Law Enforcement and Prosecutors to Solve Cases podcast, Episode 271, December 15, 2023](#) 
- [NIBIN Toolkit for Prosecutors report](#) 
- [Triage of Forensic Evidence Testing: A Guide for Prosecutors report](#) 
- [Trauma Informed Prosecutorial Strategies to Address Victim and Witness Intimidation and Retaliation webinar](#) 

Resources for Police-Community Engagement, Outreach, and Communication

- [National Case Closed Project: The Role of Victim Services in Shooting Investigations brief](#) 
- [RTI 2023 Community Safety and Policing Symposium: Engaging with Your Community, March 15, 2023](#) 
- [RTI 2023 Community Safety and Policing Symposium: Community Perspectives on Gun Violence Prevention, March 16, 2023](#) 
- [Just Building Trust Between Police and their Communities Podcast, Episode 272, December 22, 2023](#) 
- [National Case Closed Project: Effective Methods for Building Community Trust and Improving Perceptions of Police Legitimacy, May 16, 2024](#) 

Resources for Common Challenges and Promising Practices in Shooting Cases

- [National Case Closed Project: Tracking Nonfatal Shootings and Other Violent Gun Crimes in Your Law Enforcement Agency brief](#) 
- [National Case Closed Project: Top 10 Recommendations for Improving the Investigation of Fatal and Non-fatal Shootings brief](#) 
- [National Case Closed Project: Supporting Small and Rural Law Enforcement Agencies in Fatal and Nonfatal Shooting Investigations webinar, April 16, 2024](#) 

More Information

If you have questions or want more information on the National Case Closed Project, please contact us.

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