




National Case Closed Project:

Top 10 Recommendations for Improving the Investigation of Fatal and Non-fatal Shootings

The National Case Closed Project (NCCP) is a Bureau of Justice Assistance initiative that supports law enforcement agencies nationwide in improving their violent crime clearance rates, especially for fatal and non-fatal shootings cases. Project support to agencies is provided through custom training and technical assistance and tailored recommendations developed from comprehensive site assessments.

This NCCP brief provides a list of the top recommendations that law enforcement agencies can follow to improve their investigations of shootings. These recommendations were drawn from NCCP site assessments and from prior assessments or reviews conducted as part of U.S. Department of Justice-supported initiatives. The adoption of these recommendations by law enforcement agencies and their partners can result in a more effective and consistent response to shootings and improve case outcomes. For additional resources that can support agencies in enhancing their initial response to and investigation of shootings and engagement with agency and community partners, visit <https://www.nationalcaseclosed.org>. 

1. **Agency Policies:** Maintain and regularly update clear, detailed, and comprehensive standard operating procedures (SOPs) that govern shooting investigations.
 - a. Outline the responsibilities of all personnel who respond to a shooting scene or are involved in their investigation and provide specific direction for completing tasks. SOPs should include checklists for guidance to ensure basic tasks are completed.
 - b. Provide each detective in an investigative unit who is assigned to shootings with a copy of the SOPs. Detectives should be trained on and held accountable for adhering to the SOPs.
 - c. Develop formal SOPs for key positions, including victim/witness advocates, patrol, crime scene, and crime and intelligence analysts, to include expectations for how to document contacts and for when and how they should be involved in investigative efforts.
2. **Investigator Guidance and Supervision:** Enhance the supervision of shooting investigators through the following:
 - a. Ensure there is an effective supervisor-to-detective ratio of approximately 1 to 4.
 - b. Maintain periodic, formal case reviews with lead investigators.
 - c. Hold weekly investigative unit meetings to discuss cases and require that support personnel attend. Prosecutors should be invited to these meetings.
 - d. Conduct annual performance reviews designed to assess whether investigators are performing all necessary investigative tasks, solve a relatively high percentage of assigned cases, and meet the needs of victims and their families.
 - e. Fill first-line supervisor positions with personnel who have prior investigative experience and have demonstrated investigative and supervisory competencies and qualities. If a detective supervisor does not have an investigative background, they must be required to attend a basic detective school.
 - f. Ensure that first-line supervisors are spending their time in a supervisor role and not an investigator capacity.

3. **Investigator Caseloads:** Maintain manageable caseloads so that shooting investigators can conduct thorough investigations. Ideally, this equates to no more than 6 new homicide cases each year for homicide investigators and no more than 10 to 12 new non-fatal shooting cases each year for non-fatal shooting investigators. These figures are averages; department characteristics such as the experience of investigators or the number of resources available to them may allow for additional cases per year or require reducing these numbers.
 - a. Use solvability factors and crime severity to prioritize/triage cases for more complete investigations if a labor shortage prohibits manageable caseloads.
 - b. Reduce collateral work so that shooting investigators spend most of their time investigating shootings.
 - c. Provide investigators with support from civilian/professional positions to accomplish key tasks to allow detectives more time to investigate leads.
4. **Training:** Ensure investigators and supervisors receive high-quality training and direct opportunities to apply areas of learning throughout their employment in the unit, including immediately following assignment to the unit.
 - a. Ensure that training includes both basic investigations training and training on specialized topics related to shooting investigations such as interview techniques, forensics, digital evidence, and crime gun intelligence.
 - b. Assign each new shooting investigator to a veteran mentor whenever possible until the new investigator has the experience to handle a case on their own or with limited direction.
 - c. Fill shooting investigator positions with personnel who have prior experience investigating violent crimes and fill homicide investigator positions with personnel who have prior experience investigating non-fatal shootings.
5. **Multidisciplinary Coordination:** Mandate and promote frequent information sharing and coordination between investigative units and other personnel, including related investigative units, patrol, crime and intelligence analysts, crime laboratory, medical examiner, victim advocacy, and others.
 - a. Implement regular meetings, joint trainings, invited speakers, and other methods to improve coordination. Locating different units in close physical proximity can also help increase collaboration.
6. **Leveraging Technology and Data:** Employ technology and data to collect and use intelligence in shooting investigations, including the use of Crime Gun Intelligence Centers, the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, eTrace, digital and audiovisual evidence, social media, and social network intelligence.
 - a. Develop strategy and policy related to the incorporation of crime and intelligence analysts, data, and technology into shooting investigations and crime prevention efforts.
 - b. Consider employing professional/civilian staff to perform many of these activities and working with local universities and colleges to fill positions and complete tasks.
 - c. Ensure crime analysts are performing tasks that support shooting investigations and administrative decision-making about agency responses to gun violence.
 - d. Assign staff to and work with local, state, and federal partners on gun interdiction efforts. Apply knowledge gained through these efforts to shooting investigations.
 - e. Maintain close working relationships with federal law enforcement partners and consider working with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives to launch a crime gun intelligence center.
7. **Prosecutor Partnerships:** Collaborate closely with state and federal prosecution personnel in all aspects of responding to fatal and non-fatal shootings from training on what constitutes a viable case, invitation to/attendance at violent crime/shooting team meetings, and advice on investigation strategies, evidence collection and preservation, charging strategies, and participation in violence reduction campaigns and community outreach efforts.

8. **Community Engagement:** Invest in police–community relationships and rely on partnerships with community-based organizations to support investigative efforts. This could include the following:
 - a. Support and incentivize community-based units and positions (both sworn and non-sworn) within the law enforcement agency as these personnel and units are viewed as the face of the department within many communities.
 - b. Engage trusted community-based groups to support and assist in investigative efforts through participating in formal responses to shooting incidents and vouch for the credibility of anonymous tip lines.
 - c. Encourage dialogue within the community to address the no snitching culture and partner with trusted community groups and leaders to create messaging about speaking out to challenge the no snitching narrative to create a new norm that the community will take back the neighborhood and hold harm doers accountable.
9. **Victim and Witness Support:** Support and protect victims and witnesses so they are willing to participate in investigations. Methods of doing so include the following:
 - a. Ensure that advocates are available to victims, witnesses, and families involved in fatal and non-fatal shooting incidents. These positions are vital in building victim and witness trust with the law enforcement agency, and their services should be available regardless of whether a victim or witness decides to participate in the investigative process or criminal legal process. Advocates should have the resources and authority to relocate witnesses immediately if needed, at least temporarily. When there is turnover in a case’s assigned advocate or detective, departments must ensure continuity in communication and services with victims and other stakeholders and that these individuals are aware of the change in personnel.
10. **Report Documentation:** Improve case file organization and documentation by using the “Murder Book” case file structure and including requirements for proper case documentation in policy manuals.
 - a. Ensure that detectives complete all necessary reports in a consistent manner.
 - b. Mandate that all reports are approved by a supervisor upon completion.
 - c. Discuss report documentation practices with state and federal prosecutors.

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