



National Case Closed Project

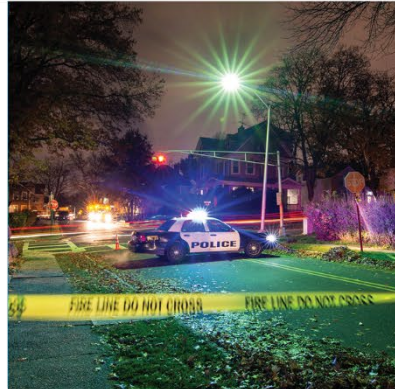
Response to Fatal and Nonfatal
Shootings Assessment

Final Report

March 2025



**Newport News (VA)
Police Department**



Site Assessment Team

John Skaggs, Homicide Detective (ret.), Los Angeles Police Department
George Kucik, Deputy Chief (ret.), Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia
John Grassel, Forensic Science Subject Matter Expert, RTI International
John Wilkinson, Attorney Advisor, AEquitas
Stacy Sechrist, Community Crime Prevention Subject Matter Expert, RTI International

National Case Closed Project Team

Kevin Strom, Project Director, RTI International
Amanda Young, Co-Project Director, RTI International
Tom Scott, Co-Project Director, RTI International
Nicole Horstmann, Project Manager, RTI International
Sarah Laskowitz, Site Coordinator, RTI International
Peyton Attaway, Training and Technical Assistance Lead, RTI International
Elise Kratzer, Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator, RTI International
Julia Brinton, Toolkit Development Lead, RTI International

This project is supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-21-GK-04008-JAGP awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute. RTI and the RTI logo are U.S. registered trademarks of Research Triangle Institute.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Shooting Response Assessment Overview	3
1.1 Introduction.....	3
1.2 Newport News Violent Crime	3
1.3 Newport News Police Department	4
2. Assessment Methods	5
2.1 Policy Review	5
2.2 On-Site Observation of Facilities and Equipment.....	6
2.3 Personnel Interviews	6
2.4 Case File Review.....	7
3. Assessment of Policies and Procedures	7
4. Case File Review Findings	9
5. Findings from Site Visit	15
5.1 Agency Resources and Workload.....	15
5.1.1 Staffing and Organization	15
5.1.2 Physical Work Location and Facilities	17
5.1.3 Personnel Selection and Supervision.....	17
5.2 Detective and Supervisor Training	19
5.3 Case File Documentation.....	21
5.4 Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings.....	22
5.4.1 Initial Crime Scene Response	23
5.4.2 Follow-Up Investigation.....	24
5.4.3 Cold Case Unit.....	24
5.5 Internal Coordination and Collaboration.....	25
5.6 Victim and Family Advocacy	27
5.6.1 NNPD’s Domestic Violence Specialist.....	27
5.6.2 The Role of Officers and Detectives in Victim Advocacy.....	29
5.7 Physical and Digital Evidence	31
5.7.1 Forensic Services Unit.....	31
5.7.2 Firearms and Ballistics Evidence	32
5.7.3 Digital Evidence	32

<u>5.8</u>	<u>Crime Analysis and Real Time Crime Center</u>	<u>33</u>
5.8.1	Crime Analysis.....	33
5.8.2	Real Time Crime Center.....	34
<u>5.9</u>	<u>Case Prosecution</u>	<u>35</u>
5.9.1	Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office.....	35
5.9.2	U.S. Attorney’s Office.....	36
<u>5.10</u>	<u>Community Engagement</u>	<u>37</u>
5.10.1	Community Participation in Investigations.....	38
5.10.2	NNPD’s Community Partnerships.....	40
<u>6.</u>	<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>7.</u>	<u>References</u>	<u>45</u>

Executive Summary

The Newport News Police Department (NNPD) serves the independent city of Newport News, which is in the Hampton Roads region of southeastern Virginia. Detectives in NNPD's Homicide Unit are responsible for investigating homicides (including fatal shootings), while nonfatal shootings are investigated by detectives in the Aggravated Assault Unit. Both the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units are located within the Major Crimes Division (MCD), which is part of NNPD's Investigations Bureau.

In 2024, NNPD was accepted to the National Case Closed Project (NCCP), an initiative led by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and conducted in partnership with RTI International that is designed to support law enforcement agencies in improving their response to fatal and nonfatal shootings. As part of this initiative, a project team comprising criminal investigators, forensic scientists, researchers, prosecutors, and victim services experts assessed NNPD's policies and practices related to its initial response to and follow-up investigations of fatal and nonfatal shootings. The assessment included a review of NNPD policies; on-site observations of facilities, equipment, and personnel interactions; interviews with NNPD personnel and personnel within external partner agencies such as prosecutors and leaders of community organizations; and a review of investigative case files.

Using the assessment procedures described above, the assessment team found NNPD to be an extremely strong department in terms of how it responds to and investigates fatal and nonfatal shootings and found that the department recently implemented evidence-based practices that appear to have improved violent crime clearance rates. Moreover, NNPD personnel were found to work hard and be committed to improving the lives of the residents of Newport News. This report highlights many of the positive steps that NNPD has taken to improve its response to violent crime and its relationship with city residents. In addition to having identified strengths to build on, the assessment team identified potential gaps in protocols and operations, which, if improved upon according to the recommendations in this report, should support the NNPD and its partners in further improving their response to fatal and nonfatal shootings and increasing clearance rates for these offenses.

The following list highlights key findings and recommendations for several topics related to NNPD's response to fatal and nonfatal shootings:

- **Agency Resources and Workload.** Recommendations include exploring incentives to attract experienced personnel to join the Investigations Bureau; maintaining the current Homicide Unit staffing levels; reviewing the case assignment system for the Homicide Unit; ensuring consistency in detective selection, training, and practices among precinct and Investigations Bureau detectives; and requiring supervisors to conduct regularly scheduled formal case reviews with detectives.
- **Investigator Training.** In addition to various recommendations that focus on basic investigator training for all new detectives, this section addresses advanced and targeted training for detectives investigating homicides and nonfatal shootings.
- **Case File Documentation.** Maintaining detailed and consistent case files is important not just for improving investigations but also for helping supervisors conduct case reviews. This report provides recommendations that focus on improving case file documentation, cohesion, and standardization.

- **Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings.** NNPD appears to have an excellent response to homicide and nonfatal shooting scenes, which sets the stage for a strong investigation. Recommendations for further improving the effectiveness of investigations include developing a standard case checklist of investigative tasks.
- **Internal Coordination and Collaboration.** Collaboration and communication between various units within an agency can be critical to an effective homicide or nonfatal shooting investigation. Recommendations for strengthening internal coordination include holding a weekly violent crime meeting, strengthening formal information-sharing protocols, and ensuring that leaders facilitate the flow of communication among all agency departments.
- **Victim and Family Advocacy.** NNPD's in-house victim advocacy services are currently provided by its domestic violence specialist (DVS), who focuses solely on victims of domestic violence (including domestic-related homicides and nonfatal shootings). This report discusses the DVS's role and provides recommendations for expanding NNPD's victim advocacy services to shootings not related to domestic violence.
- **Physical and Digital Evidence.** The assessment team learned of many positive practices when it comes to NNPD's physical and digital evidence services, including a quick turnaround time for processing ballistics evidence, a capable Forensic Services Unit, and a dedicated unit for processing and analyzing digital evidence. Recommendations for building upon this work include exploring additional training opportunities for forensics personnel and considering assigning a supervisor to the Technical Investigations Unit.
- **Crime Analysis and the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC).** NNPD has crime analysts embedded within the investigative units, including the Homicide Unit and the Aggravated Assault Unit. The agency also maintains an RTCC that has access to multiple camera systems from NNPD and the City of Newport News. Recommendations for strengthening these functions include providing additional training opportunities for crime analysts and RTCC personnel, requiring crime analysts from the MCD to attend weekly detective meetings, considering expanding RTCC staffing, and collaborating with other local jurisdictions that are developing RTCCs.
- **Case Prosecution.** The assessment team learned that NNPD enjoys strong working relationships with both the Newport News Commonwealth's Attorney's Office (NNCAO) and the U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO). The report provides several recommendations for maintaining and building on these partnerships.
- **Community Engagement.** Community leaders believe that NNPD's Chief of Police has been instrumental in leading by example in community engagement and has fostered closer relationships with community organizations. The report provides recommendations for building upon these efforts to further improve community engagement and resident participation in the legal system.

1. Shooting Response Assessment Overview

1.1 Introduction

In 2024, the NNPD was accepted into the NCCP, an initiative led by the BJA and conducted in partnership with RTI International that is designed to support law enforcement agencies in improving their response to fatal and nonfatal shootings. This NCCP report describes the methods used to assess NNPD’s response to shootings and the findings of our assessment and provides recommendations for agency changes aimed at improving NNPD’s shooting clearance rates, which are based on the findings from the assessment and evidence-informed best practices. The NCCP is funding training and technical assistance for each participating site to support the implementation and evaluation of project recommendations.

Notably, NNPD is also participating in Project CLEARs (Community-Law Enforcement Alignment to Resolve Shootings), an initiative led by RTI International and supported by the philanthropy Arnold Ventures. Project CLEARs, which is intended to complement the NCCP assessment, allows for a deeper dive into NNPD’s community engagement activities. Specifically, the Project CLEARs team collects additional input from community-based organizations (CBOs) and residents to develop recommendations to improve community partnerships and increase community participation in violent crime investigations. Findings and recommendations will be included in the separate Project CLEARs report.

1.2 Newport News Violent Crime

Newport News is an independent city in the Hampton Roads region of southeastern Virginia. The city currently has a population of about 185,000 residents (41% White, 41% Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian), is around 120 square miles, and has a median household income of \$63,000. Newport News has seen an increase in homicides in recent years, with the number of homicides increasing from 25 in 2019 to 47 in 2023 (see **Table 1.1**). Along with homicides, the city saw an increase in nonfatal shootings between 2019 and 2022. NNPD typically clears around two-thirds of their homicides each year, but that figure decreased to 44% in 2023, representing the lowest rate in recent years.¹

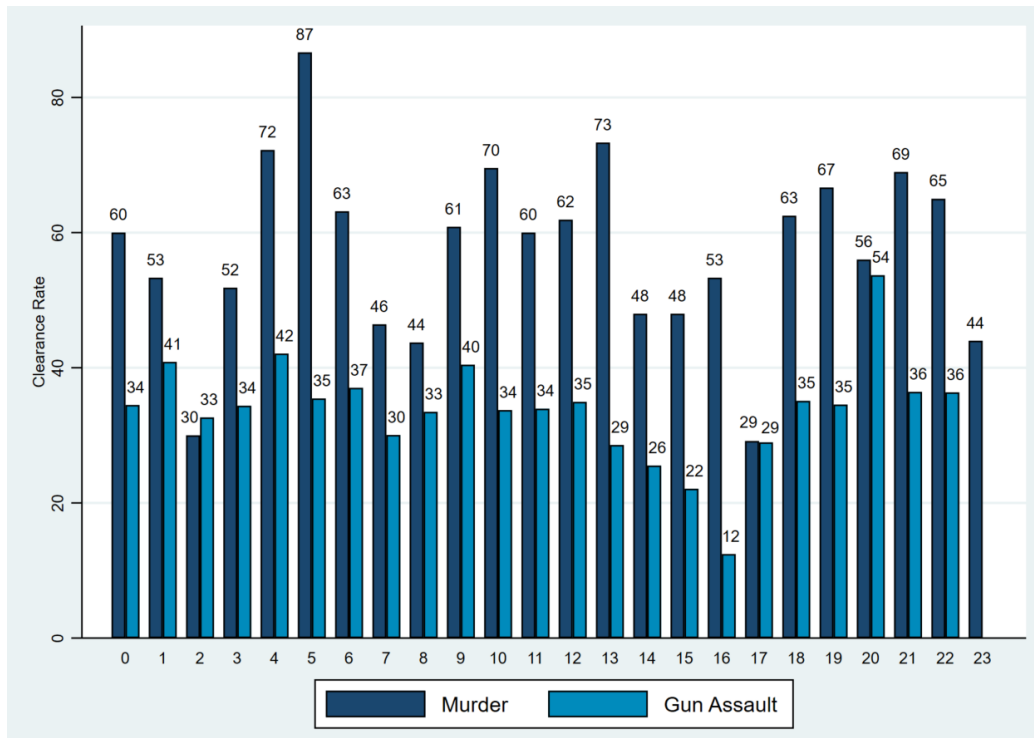
Table 1.1 Newport News Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Incident Counts and Clearance Rates, 2019–2023

Incident Occurrence		Homicide		Nonfatal Shooting	
Year	No. of Incidents	Clearance Rate	No. of Incidents	Clearance Rate	
2019	25	64%	65	31%	
2020	25	64%	70	44%	
2021	30	73%	82	33%	
2022	31	65%	88	39%	
2023	47	44%	68	42%	

¹ For more information, see the Newport News Police Department’s 2023 Annual Report (Department, 2023).

Looking further back in time using crime and clearance data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program, NNPD’s recent murder and gun assault (including nonfatal shootings and other forms of aggravated assault with a gun) clearance rates are high relative to its past performance, except for the department’s murder clearance rate in 2023, which was a year when Newport News experienced a dramatic spike in murders. Additionally, recent murder and gun assault clearance rates are an improvement compared with rates obtained during the years 2014–2017, which was a period of noticeable decline (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. NNPD Murder and Gun Assault Clearance Rates (%), 2000–2023



1.3 Newport News Police Department

NNPD has an authorized staff of 472 sworn officers and 179 civilian personnel (Department, 2023). NNPD’s Chief of Police has been in place since 2018. In 2023, NNPD completed the voluntary accreditation process with the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

The agency is divided into three major bureaus: the Patrol Bureau, which covers three precincts and includes the Special Operations Division; the Administrative Services Bureau, which includes support services, training, IT, communications, and logistics; and the Investigations Bureau, which includes the Community & Youth Outreach Division, the Special Investigations Division, and the MCD.

The responsibility of investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings falls to the MCD, which includes the following units:

- **Homicide Unit:** The unit investigates murders, suspicious deaths, officer-involved shootings, and suicides.
- **Aggravated Assault Unit:** This unit investigates cases where an individual has suffered serious bodily injury, including nonfatal shootings.
- **Special Victims Unit:** This unit includes the Domestic Violence Team and family services liaisons.
- **Forensic Services Unit (FSU):** This unit is responsible for processing crime scenes, including collecting, photographing, and submitting evidence for processing. The unit works closely with outside agencies including the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, USAO, and the Newport News Fire Marshal's Office.
- **Technical Investigations Unit (TIU):** This unit assists with extracting digital forensic material related to criminal investigations.

In addition to the MCD, the Investigations Bureau also includes the:

- **Special Investigations Division**, which comprises the Narcotics Enforcement Unit, the Gang Enforcement Unit, the Federal Task Force Officers, the RTCC, the Fugitive Apprehension Unit, and the Economic Crimes Unit.
- **Community & Youth Outreach Division**, which is designed to create a positive, ongoing, and creative working relationship with members of the community.

2. Assessment Methods

The NCCP involves an in-depth agency assessment to understand how each participating site responds to fatal and nonfatal shootings and to identify strengths and weaknesses within each agency. The assessment was directed at fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations conducted by MCD detectives, but data collection occurred throughout the agency and some findings may be relevant to other units within NNPD.

The NNPD assessment considered a range of operational and administrative activities associated with the investigation of fatal and nonfatal shootings. The assessment was conducted using four methods:

1. Review of relevant policies and procedures related to NNPD's response to fatal and nonfatal shootings
2. On-site observation of facilities, equipment, and personnel interactions
3. Interviews with NNPD personnel and external partners
4. Systematic coding and review of fatal and nonfatal shooting investigative case files

2.1 Policy Review

One component of the assessment was an evaluation of policy to assess whether NNPD's policies (1) guide agency personnel through the response and investigation processes; (2) align with recommended practices in investigations; and (3) are used for agency oversight, accountability, and performance management. NNPD provided copies of all policies, memos, and documented procedures relevant to its violent crime response and investigations. RTI also requested relevant operational procedures, including organizational charts, case assignment processes, and caseload measures.

2.2 On-Site Observation of Facilities and Equipment

The NCCP assessment team conducted systematic observations of facilities, equipment, and personnel interactions related to NNPD’s shooting response while on-site, including through a guided tour of the department and by attending a CompStat style meeting.

2.3 Personnel Interviews

Personnel interviews provided the opportunity to gather direct perspectives from individuals who participate in the response and investigation of fatal and nonfatal shootings cases, including staff within NNPD and those from external agencies and organizations (e.g., Commonwealth Attorney’s Office). The assessment team identified staff positions for the interviews and coordinated with NNPD to set up these interviews, most of which lasted 30 to 60 minutes and were conducted in person by teams of two interviewers. The team completed interviews using semi-structured interview guides. The interview guides used for this assessment are available to NNPD or its partners upon request.

The assessment team first met with NNPD command staff to develop an understanding of how fatal and nonfatal shootings are investigated, from the initial patrol response to case closure. As seen in **Table 2.1**, interviews were conducted with MCD supervisors and detectives, Patrol Bureau supervisors and officers, crime scene and forensic personnel, NNPD crime analysts, Special Investigations Division detectives, federal and state prosecutors, federal law enforcement partners, medical examiners, and stakeholders from key CBOs. To identify relevant CBOs, the assessment team worked with Captain Funaiock in the Community & Youth Outreach Division. The community stakeholders consisted of organizations funded through the Newport News Gun Violence Intervention Program (GVIP).

Table 2.1. Personnel Interviews Completed

Agency Affiliation	Role	Number
Newport News Police Department	Command Staff	3
Newport News Police Department	Homicide Unit Detectives/Supervisors	4
Newport News Police Department	Aggravated Assault Detectives/Supervisors	4
Newport News Police Department	Homicide Detective Team Interview	10
Newport News Police Department	Forensics	3
Newport News Police Department	Crime Analysis	3
Newport News Police Department	Real Time Crime Center	1
Newport News Police Department	Technical Investigations Unit	2
Newport News Police Department	Patrol Supervisors and Officers	4
Newport News Police Department	Special Investigations Division Detectives	2
Newport News Police Department	Public Information Officer	1
Newport News Police Department	Cold Case Investigator	1
Newport News Police Department	Community & Youth Outreach Division	1
Newport News Police Department	Domestic Violence Specialist	1

(continued)

Table 2.1. Personnel Interviews Completed (continued)

Agency Affiliation	Role	Number
USAO for the Western District of Virginia	Assistant United States Attorney	1
Newport News Commonwealth Attorney's Office (NNCAO)	Victim/Witness Advocate	1
NNCAO	Assistant Commonwealth's Attorneys	2
Federal Bureau of Investigation	Special Agent	1
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner	Medicolegal Death Investigator Supervisor	1
Various CBOs	Leaders and advocates	12

2.4 Case File Review

Finally, the assessment team reviewed a random sample of investigative case files for 39 fatal shooting incidents and 19 nonfatal shooting incidents that were reported to NNPD in the years 2021–2023. For each case, we recorded over 100 pieces of information about the crime and agency response to understand common features of shootings in Newport News and the types of actions taken by NNPD in response to them, including how these features and actions differ by the type of shooting (fatal vs. nonfatal). Additionally, while on-site, the NCCP assessment team conducted four in-person case file reviews with MCD personnel to further understand how NNPD investigates shootings and documents its investigations.

3. Assessment of Policies and Procedures

To be effective, the units that investigate homicides and nonfatal shootings must be governed by strong written policies that provide clear, comprehensive, and updated guidance (Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2018). The assessment team reviewed NNPD's policies and procedures that are related to homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations and found that NNPD's policies are comprehensive and provide detailed directions to personnel involved in the investigation of shootings that are specific to crime scene response, follow-up duties, accountability, and required timelines for the completion of tasks.

Although existing policies are sufficient, the NCCP team has found that some agencies benefit from the use of investigative manuals, which can effectively inform staff of policies and procedures related to the investigation of fatal and nonfatal shootings. Thus, we recommend that NNPD consider developing stand-alone manuals related to the investigation of homicides and nonfatal shootings. Additionally, we provide one recommendation for policies related to the FSU.

Develop comprehensive, clear, and detailed manuals for homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations that include all relevant policies, checklists, and other written materials that govern responsibilities related to the investigation of these crimes.

The purpose of the manual is to provide detailed direction for all units and individuals at NNPd who are involved in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations, including investigators, patrol officers, crime scene investigators (CSIs), support units, and victim assistance personnel. The assessment team recommends developing separate manuals for homicide investigations and nonfatal shooting investigations.

The manual should be organized into clearly marked sections and include a table of contents. The manual should address topics that include but are not limited to:

- Timelines and specific duties and responsibilities for each member involved in these investigations, including step-by-step instructions for investigators at each phase.
- Protocols for case assignment and scheduling, including detective call-out to scenes.
- The initial incident response, including actions taken by the 911 call taker, first officer(s) on the crime scene, lead investigator, supervisors, and other departmental units. Instructions should cover canvassing for physical evidence and videos at the scene.
- Protocols for next-of-kin notifications.
- Policies and protocols related to the follow-up investigation, including but not limited to attending autopsies, developing and following up with witnesses, taking witness and suspect statements, recovering and submitting physical and digital evidence, and following up with the victim's family members.
- Communication and information-sharing protocols with internal units (crime analysts, forensics personnel, digital evidence personnel, victim advocates) and external partners (prosecutors, crime labs, task forces, community and victim advocacy groups).
- Case documentation.
- The use of traditional and social media, including protocols for releasing video footage to the public.
- Policies and protocols for investigating specific types of homicides/nonfatal shootings, including mass shootings, infant deaths, suspicious deaths, and officer-involved shootings.
- Investigating cold cases.
- Mandated case reviews, including the timeline and expectations for review.
- Supervisor duties and responsibilities.
- Critical incident response that includes fatalities.

Additionally, the manual should include a checklist of basic investigative tasks that detectives must follow when conducting shooting investigations. The checklist should provide a detailed, step-by-step description of actions to be taken at each stage of the investigative process, which detectives and supervisors should use to ensure that all tasks are being completed in an investigation.

In formulating the manual, it is important to obtain input from detectives, supervisors, attorneys, and all other stakeholders. This will ensure that the standard operating procedure (SOP) correctly addresses all necessary aspects of shooting investigations and will also ensure that stakeholders buy in to the SOP protocols.

Recommendations	2	<p>Provide each detective with a copy of the manual upon joining the Homicide or Aggravated Assault Units.</p> <p>It is imperative that all members of the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units receive a copy of the manual along with training on its contents. The goal of these manuals is to provide a resource for all members to facilitate a comprehensive, thorough, and consistent investigative process. The manual will also provide a tool to hold accountable those who consistently fail to do their part in an investigation. Personnel outside of the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units who are involved in homicide or nonfatal shooting investigations should also receive a copy of the manual.</p>
	3	<p>Revise the following sections of the FSU SOP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section VI.B.2 (Securing Images): This section requires that all images be burned to a disk and stored in the FSU. Because of the large file size and quantity of photos taken by CSIs, many departments are transitioning to store these images on a server or through an external cloud-based storage system. This also helps in preserving the images when discs are no longer functioning due to equipment upgrades or advances. • Section X.B.3.f (Swabs of Guns): The requirement that all guns be swabbed for evidence is a positive thing; however, it is recommended that this section include specific language about the areas to be swabbed (e.g., slide, trigger, front sight) and in what order during the process the swabbing should take place (e.g., after or concurrent with processing for fingerprints, or prior to test firing). • Add language detailing the procedures for processing fingerprint evidence (e.g., the use of fingerprint powders, dye stains). • Add language detailing the procedures for using the 3D scanner in homicide and officer-involved shooting cases.

4. Case File Review Findings

By reviewing and coding investigative case files for a sample of fatal and nonfatal shootings, the assessment team was able to evaluate certain aspects of shootings in Newport News and NNPd’s response to these shootings. Case files for a randomly selected sample of 34 fatal shooting incidents, 19 nonfatal shooting incidents, and 5 incidents involving both a fatal and nonfatal shooting that were reported in the years 2021–2023 were provided to RTI. Because agencies typically prioritize murder investigations over nonfatal shooting investigations and may apply distinct resources to this crime type, we grouped the cases involving both a fatal and nonfatal shooting with cases involving only a fatal shooting and compared them with incidents involving only a nonfatal shooting.

RTI and NNPd had a data use agreement in place that met the data security standards of both RTI and NNPd, and RTI adhered to this agreement when storing and accessing case files for review and analysis. Members of the assessment team reviewed case files for each of these 59 shootings and extracted more than 100 variables on the shooting and agency response from each case. **Tables 4.1** and **4.2** provide summary statistics for key attributes related to the crime and agency response, respectively, which were extracted from the case file data. We collected key information about the cases using a set of predetermined data metrics. The data collection instrument and codebook used to code investigative case files are available to NNPd or its partners upon request. Table 4.1 provides NNPd with an understanding of the types of shootings reviewed by the NCCP team, while Table 4.2 provides NNPd with an understanding of its response to these shootings.

Table 4.1. Incident Characteristics, by Type of Shooting

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Total number of cases reviewed	19	39
Number of guns fired		
1	11 (58%)	20 (51%)
2	5 (26%)	9 (23%)
More than 2	3 (16%)	5 (13%)
Unknown	0 (0%)	5 (13%)
Type of gun used ^a		
Handgun	15 (79%)	33 (85%)
Rifle	2 (11%)	2 (5%)
Shotgun	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Unknown	5 (26%)	6 (15%)
Median number of rounds fired	6.0	7.5
Location of shooting		
Street/outdoors	10 (53%)	31 (79%)
Inside residence	3 (16%)	4 (10%)
Inside vehicle	4 (21%)	3 (8%)
Convenience or liquor store	2 (11%)	1 (3%)
Number of victims		
1	14 (74%)	31 (79%)
2	4 (21%)	5 (13%)
More than 2	1 (5%)	3 (8%)
Victim sex ^a		
Male	17 (89%)	38 (97%)
Female	6 (32%)	2 (5%)
Victim race ^a		
Black	17 (89%)	34 (87%)
White	2 (11%)	4 (10%)
Hispanic	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (3%)

(continued)

Table 4.1. Incident Characteristics, by Type of Shooting (continued)

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Median victim age (years)	26.0	24.0
Number of suspects at end of investigation		
1	11 (58%)	15 (38%)
2	3 (16%)	4 (10%)
More than 2	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Unknown	4 (21%)	20 (51%)
Final suspect sex ^a		
Male	15 (79%)	19 (49%)
Female	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Final suspect race ^a		
Black	13 (68%)	15 (38%)
White	1 (5%)	2 (5%)
Hispanic	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Median final suspect age (years)	25.5	23.5
Primary relationship between victims and offenders		
Current/former intimate partner	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Family member	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Friend/acquaintance	6 (32%)	5 (13%)
Stranger	2 (11%)	2 (5%)
Rival gang/cliq ue member	0 (0%)	2 (5%)
Other relationship	1 (5%)	1 (3%)
Unknown	9 (47%)	29 (74%)
Primary motive for shooting		
Domestic abuse	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rivalry over lover	1 (5%)	1 (3%)
Conflict over money	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Drug-related	0 (0%)	3 (8%)
Gang-related	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Robbery	3 (16%)	2 (5%)
Shot inadvertently or self-defense	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Other dispute	6 (32%)	5 (13%)
Unknown	8 (42%)	28 (72%)

(continued)

Table 4.1. Incident Characteristics, by Type of Shooting (continued)

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Clearance status		
Open/inactive	7 (37%)	17 (44%)
Cleared by arrest or exceptional means	8 (42%)	1 (3%)
Unknown	4 (21%)	21 (54%)

^a Response options are not mutually exclusive so values may sum to greater than 100%.

Table 4.2. NNPD Initial Response Characteristics, by Type of Shooting

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Total number of cases reviewed	19	39
Number of patrol officers who responded to scene		
1–4	10 (53%)	6 (15%)
5–9	5 (26%)	11 (28%)
10+	1 (5%)	19 (49%)
Unknown	3 (16%)	3 (8%)
Patrol supervisor responded to scene		
No	2 (11%)	0 (0%)
Yes	11 (58%)	36 (92%)
Unknown	6 (32%)	3 (8%)
Number of detectives who responded to scene		
0	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
1	4 (21%)	0 (0%)
2	7 (37%)	3 (8%)
3	5 (26%)	5 (13%)
4	1 (5%)	6 (15%)
5+	0 (0%)	20 (51%)
Unknown	1 (5%)	5 (13%)
Detective supervisor responded to scene		
No	15 (79%)	0 (0%)
Yes	2 (11%)	39 (100%)
Unknown	2 (11%)	0 (0%)

(continued)

Table 4.2. NNPD Initial Response Characteristics, by Type of Shooting (continued)

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Evidence collected at scene		
No	2 (11%)	1 (3%)
Yes	17 (89%)	38 (97%)
Type of evidence collected at scene ^a		
DNA/bodily fluids	5 (26%)	19 (49%)
Latent prints	4 (21%)	17 (44%)
Pattern evidence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Trace evidence	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Suspect firearm	3 (16%)	8 (21%)
Bullets	5 (26%)	29 (74%)
Casings	16 (84%)	35 (90%)
Clothing	12 (63%)	32 (82%)
Electronics	3 (16%)	26 (67%)
Digital	4 (21%)	31 (79%)
Drugs	1 (5%)	10 (26%)
Other	3 (16%)	6 (15%)
Victim statement obtained		
No or not applicable	0 (0%)	35 (90%)
Yes	19 (100%)	4 (10%)
Victim participated/cooperated in investigation during initial response		
No or not applicable	6 (32%)	35 (90%)
Yes	13 (68%)	4 (10%)
Number of third-party witnesses		
0	7 (37%)	3 (8%)
1	3 (16%)	8 (21%)
2	7 (37%)	7 (18%)
3	1 (5%)	7 (18%)
4+	1 (5%)	8 (21%)
Unknown	0 (0%)	6 (15%)

(continued)

Table 4.2. NNPd Initial Response Characteristics, by Type of Shooting (continued)

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Witness statement obtained		
No or not applicable	7 (37%)	4 (10%)
Yes	12 (63%)	29 (74%)
Unknown	0 (0%)	6 (15%)
Witness participated/cooperated in investigation during initial response		
No or not applicable	8 (42%)	3 (8%)
Yes	10 (53%)	28 (72%)
Unknown	1 (5%)	8 (21%)
A suspect identified at time of response		
No	8 (42%)	27 (69%)
Yes	11 (58%)	12 (31%)
Suspect identification at time of response ^a		
Police identified	4 (21%)	3 (8%)
Victim or witness identified	7 (37%)	6 (15%)
Other identification	1 (5%)	2 (5%)
Identifying information on a suspect vehicle at time of response		
No	14 (74%)	29 (74%)
Yes	5 (26%)	10 (26%)

^a Response options are not mutually exclusive so values may sum to greater than 100%.

Although the NCCP team typically extracts information on an agency's initial response to and follow-up investigation of fatal and nonfatal shootings, in the case of NNPd, we found that the case files we received often had little to no documentation of activities performed during the follow-up investigation, or the outcomes of those activities. The initial response was typically well-documented, but the documentation often ended there. For this reason, Section 4 describes incident characteristics of the fatal and nonfatal shootings we reviewed and aspects of NNPd's initial response, but not aspects of NNPd's follow-up investigations. Section 5.3 provides recommendations for improving case file documentation practices.

Several notable findings stand out in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. First, one can see that case file documentation was often lacking, especially among the fatal shooting case files we reviewed. For instance, the assessment team was unable to determine if a case was open or closed by arrest or exceptional means in 21% of the nonfatal shooting incidents and 54% of the fatal shooting incidents we reviewed. As mentioned, information on the follow-up investigation and its outcomes, such as whether an offender was arrested, active leads were still being pursued, or all leads were exhausted, was often missing from the case files we reviewed.

Second, one can see that NNPD's initial response is more intense in the case of fatal shootings compared with nonfatal shootings. For example, 10 or more patrol officers responded to the scene in 49% of the fatal shootings we reviewed but this was true in only 5% of the nonfatal shootings. This is compared with 53% of nonfatal shootings and 15% of fatal shootings, where 4 or fewer patrol officers responded to the scene. Relatedly, a patrol supervisor responded to the scene in 92% of fatal shooting incidents compared with 58% of nonfatal shooting incidents. Like with patrol personnel, the investigative response to shooting scenes was more intense when the shooting was fatal. When the shooting was fatal, 5 or more detectives responded to the scene in 51% of the cases we reviewed. In none of the nonfatal shootings we reviewed did 5 or more detectives respond to the scene. Compared with fatal shootings where the modal investigator response was 5 or more detectives, the most frequent investigator response to nonfatal shooting scenes was 2 detectives (37% of the nonfatal shooting incidents we reviewed). Additionally, a detective supervisor responded to the scene in every fatal shooting incident we reviewed compared with 11% of the nonfatal shooting incidents we reviewed.

Finally, one can see that fatal shootings differed from nonfatal shootings in the types of evidence available to investigators at the time of the initial response. Specifically, compared with nonfatal shooting incidents, fatal shooting scenes more often included various types of physical and digital evidence and had a greater number of third-party witnesses. Nonfatal shooting incidents, in contrast, had surviving victims who participated in the investigation at the time of the initial response in 68% of the cases we reviewed (compared with 10% of fatal shooting incidents) and more often included an identified suspect at the time of the initial response than fatal shooting incidents did (58% compared with 31% of cases). The two shooting types were equally likely to include identifying information on a suspect's vehicle at the time of the initial response (26% of cases).

The NCCP team was unable to assess which follow-up investigative activities occurred in these cases, including which technologies, support units, and external partners were involved in the investigation, and which investigative activities occurred. Section 5 reviews information that the NCCP assessment team learned from personnel interviews within NNPD and its partner agencies and from on-site observations, which builds on the findings presented here.

5. Findings from Site Visit

5.1 Agency Resources and Workload

5.1.1 *Staffing and Organization*

Homicide Unit

NNPD's Homicide Unit is part of the MCD, which is housed in the Investigations Bureau. The MCD is led by a captain and the Homicide Unit is led by a lieutenant. The Homicide Unit has 10 detectives that are split into two squads—the Red and Blue Squads—and each squad is led by its own sergeant. These 10 detectives are responsible for investigating all homicides, suspicious deaths, officer-involved shootings, overdose deaths, and suicides.

Detectives in the Homicide Unit work the day shift on Monday through Friday. One squad is responsible for being on call during a 2-week period, after which it rotates with the other squad for a 2-week period. Interviewees appeared to like this system, as detectives have a set 2 weeks when they are not on call

and can plan for off-duty activities with family and friends. Two members of the on-call squad work from 4:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. and respond to overdoses and other suspicious deaths. Importantly, they are able to respond quickly to the scene of homicides as needed.

Each homicide case is assigned a lead detective based on a rotation system. Per this system, a detective is considered the “next up” and responds to the next homicide as lead detective. That detective will respond to the scene with the rest of the current “homicide only team,” which rotates biweekly. If the incident occurs after hours, the lead detective is assisted by the on-call squad for the initial response. The lead detective’s regular squad will then step in to assist with follow-up investigative duties upon returning to work. It is expected that in the 72 hours following a homicide, the entire unit will focus its efforts on assisting the lead detective. After those 72 hours have elapsed, any further assistance is based on availability and who the lead detective requests assistance from.

Interviewees said that Homicide Unit detectives average three to four cases per year and that their caseloads are manageable. This is aligned with the U.S. BJA’s recommendation that detectives serve as lead investigator on an average of three to four new homicide cases per year (Carter, 2013). Interviewees said that the rotation system allows ample time to thoroughly work cases and keeps case distribution even among the detectives.

Aggravated Assault Unit

NNPD’s Aggravated Assault Unit is responsible for investigating cases where an individual has suffered serious bodily injury, including nonfatal shootings and serious stabbings, as well as shootings into an inhabited house or vehicle. Nonserious stabbings are handled by precinct detectives or patrol officers. The unit has seven detectives (with one vacancy) who are split into two squads, each of which is led by a sergeant. Detectives in the Aggravated Assault Unit average 15 nonfatal shooting cases per year. Interviewees indicated that this caseload is manageable.

Like in the Homicide Unit, the two Aggravated Assault Unit squads rotate being on call each 2-week period. During the squad’s on-call period, two detectives, a primary and wing detective, work a night shift (4 p.m.–12 a.m.). These two detectives will be assigned all new cases that arise during their 2-week rotation.

Staffing Challenges

The assessment team learned that there has been recent turnover in both the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units. Interviewees indicated that two factors have been largely responsible for the Homicide Unit attrition. First, agency leaders have encouraged underperforming detectives to transfer out of the unit. Second, the Homicide Unit’s rotation system was changed so that the detective who is “next up” to be assigned a case remains in that position until they are assigned a new case. The assessment team found that feelings about this system were mixed, with some interviewees disliking it and others believing that it ensures even case distribution and a chance to more thoroughly work the cases that they have been assigned.

Additionally, interviewees noted that the recent spike in violent crime cases has been taxing and has contributed to burnout among detectives. Although interviewees were generally satisfied with their

working conditions, some said that Homicide and Aggravated Assault Unit assignments are less desirable now due to the high demands and workloads associated with these positions.

Based on these findings, the NCCP team recommends the following:

Recommendations	4	Maintain at least the current Homicide Unit staffing levels. Maintaining the number of Homicide Unit detectives will help ensure that caseloads remain manageable. It will also help promote the continued team approach to investigating cases, which is an effective practice.
	5	Identify effective incentives to attract experienced, talented personnel to join and remain in the MCD. One potential option is to implement a corporal position for detectives that would come with a pay increase. Interviewees said that NNPd detectives are paid the same hourly wage as patrol officers, so a pay increase upon promotion could help attract more applicants to these positions. Additionally, corporal is a rank that NNPd already has in place for patrol officers, so this change should be easy to implement.
	6	Review the case assignment system for the Homicide Unit. Given the mixed feelings among detectives regarding the Homicide Unit's rotation system for case assignments, the assessment team recommends that NNPd review this system to determine whether it should remain in place. NNPd leaders should meet with Homicide Unit detectives and supervisors to gather feedback and determine what would work best for the unit.

5.1.2 *Physical Work Location and Facilities*

The Homicide Unit, Aggravated Assault Unit, TIU, RTCC, and FSU are all physically located in the main NNPd headquarters building. The physical work location and facilities appear adequate. The Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units are located near one another, and there is space for crime analysts to work within their designated units. Additionally, members of the FSU have cubical workspace outside of the laboratory in the detective area. The close location of these units to each other is likely to promote intra-agency information sharing and collaboration during shooting investigations.

5.1.3 *Personnel Selection and Supervision*

Detective Selection

Interviewees said that NNPd has an official selection process governing assignment to the Investigations Bureau. After completing the process, which includes an interview panel and performance review, the candidates are ranked in order of how they performed.

NNPD's three police precincts also have detective units that are separate from the Investigations Bureau. These precinct detectives, who fall under the direction of the precinct commander, investigate incidents such as property crimes, less serious assaults, and robberies. It was unclear from the interviews how the precincts select their detectives. Additionally, as the precincts fall under three separate commands, there may be inconsistent investigative practices among the precinct detectives and between detectives in the precincts and those in the Investigations Bureau.

Recommendations	7	<p>Move all detectives under the command of the Investigations Bureau.</p> <p>Although NNPD appears to be functioning well in its current configuration, to ensure consistency in detective selection and investigative practices among all NNPD detectives, we recommend that the precinct detectives and detective supervisors fall under the command of the Investigations Bureau. The precinct detectives and detective supervisors could still physically be housed in the precincts and communicate with the precinct commander, but the Investigations Bureau would oversee the investigations and ensure that proper, consistent investigative protocol is followed. This would also help create a pool of detectives who have the proper training and experience to one day serve in other Investigations Bureau units, such as the Homicide Unit or the Aggravated Assault Unit.</p>
	8	<p>If precinct detectives remain under the command of the precinct commander, NNPD should take steps to ensure consistency in detective selection, training, and investigative practices.</p> <p>It is important that there is consistency in how detectives in the precincts and in the Investigations Bureau are selected, trained, and evaluated. Additionally, NNPD must ensure that investigative practices are consistent regardless of whose command the detective is under.</p> <p>Therefore, if NNPD decides to keep precinct detectives under the command of the precinct commander, rather than moving them under the Investigations Bureau’s command, the agency should consider taking steps that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a rigorous, formal process for selecting precinct detectives. This process should mirror the one used to select Investigations Bureau detectives. The process and metrics for selecting detectives into these positions should be standardized and added to written policies and SOPs. • Requiring all precinct detectives and their supervisors to attend the same basic detective training required of Investigations Bureau personnel. • Reviewing policies and SOPs governing precinct detectives to ensure that investigative requirements and guidelines are consistent with those in the Investigations Bureau. • Ensuring that detectives who are selected into the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units have experience investigating crimes at the precinct level. This would help ensure that detectives have a good investigative foundation and would allow them to receive training in basic investigative procedures prior to being assigned to work more complex crimes.

Leadership and Supervision

A successful leader provides the necessary support, guidance, mentorship, and resources to ensure that people can achieve their goals. When it comes to fatal and nonfatal shootings, an agency’s leadership must ensure that the detectives have the appropriate training, guidance, resources, and support to thoroughly investigate cases.

First-line supervisors (sergeants) have the most direct interaction with detectives and therefore play a significant role in ensuring that investigations are comprehensive, thorough, and consistent. The Homicide Unit and the Aggravated Assault Unit each have two sergeants, and three of these four supervisors have prior detective experience. This prior experience not only helps the supervisors understand the responsibilities and challenges that their detectives face but also helps supervisors provide guidance when there are several new detectives in a unit, as is the case with the Aggravated Assault Unit. The assessment team learned that the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Unit supervisors have been in these roles for many years and that there is very little turnover for these positions. Interviewees said that they feel comfortable relying on their supervisors for sound advice and leadership.

One way that sergeants can ensure that their detectives are investigating cases thoroughly and consistently is by holding regular case reviews with the detectives on their team. Case reviews give detectives an opportunity to explain to supervisors why cases are not solved, what efforts they had made or have failed to make, and what resources or information they may need to solve a case. In this way, case reviews are critical for determining whether cases are being properly investigated, discussing ongoing investigative strategies, and identifying potential new leads.

The assessment team learned that NNPD detectives investigating homicides and nonfatal shootings do not currently receive regular, comprehensive case reviews with either their sergeants or lieutenants. Although the Homicide Unit closes most of its cases, there are still a few cases each year that remain unsolved and are not thoroughly reviewed.

NNPD's Homicide Unit SOP appears to require formal case review, stating:

Internal Case Review a. The case agent will review all open cases generated during the current calendar year at the six (6) and twelve (12) month anniversary. The review will include the following: Homicide Unit SOP - 6 of 12 - 01/2023 1. Verification that all synopsis and case notes are updated and include all investigative activities. 2. Document status checks for any pending lab work or court orders 3. Document any case updates or check-ins with next-of-kin. Verify the identified family representative/point of contact is documented in the file. When appropriate, follow up with the next-of-kin.

Throughout the investigation, the case agent conducts reviews of the entire case with the unit supervisors and FSU personnel and keeps The NNCAO informed of the progress of the investigation. This review will ensure completeness and accuracy in all areas, including evidence collected, laboratory requests, as well as identification of any follow-up work required. The frequency of the reviews is based on the complexity of the case and the direction of the MCD chain of command.

5.2 Detective and Supervisor Training

All new detectives, regardless of their assigned unit, should receive basic investigations training that provides the knowledge and skills needed to work general investigations (Carter, 2013; Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2018). The training can also ensure that detectives selected into the Investigations Bureau are well-versed in fundamental investigative techniques. Detectives who investigate, or who may potentially investigate, homicide and nonfatal shooting cases should receive additional advanced training in the skills and techniques necessary to work complex violent crime cases.

The assessment team learned that all Homicide Unit detectives received training on interviews and interrogations and attended a basic detective school and a homicide training school. The assessment team learned that the four newly assigned detectives in the Aggravated Assault Unit have not yet attended the detective training school but are scheduled to attend soon. Interviewees said that they feel they are properly trained for their assignments. There appear to be no issues with funding trainings, and detectives are permitted to attend any training they request. Homicide and Aggravated Assault Unit supervisors have prior detective experience and have attended necessary training for investigations.

Implement a formal, systematic case review process between sergeants and detectives in the Homicide Unit and the Aggravated Assault Unit.

Supervisors should continue to meet frequently and informally with detectives to discuss ongoing cases and check in on a detective’s progress. However, this practice should be supplemented with a more formal, systematic case review. A formal case review involves a thorough review of the entire case file, along with a conversation with the detective to determine which tasks have been addressed and which ones are outstanding, to brainstorm leads and prioritize next steps, and to ensure all investigative work has been documented. Simply asking a detective to give an update on the status of an investigation is not a case review.

For example, the case review protocol may require that a sergeant ensure the following steps have been taken at the end of 15 days following a case assignment:

- Previous investigative steps have been completed.
- Unresolved investigative steps are modified for completion.
- Further investigative steps are prioritized.
- All pertinent locations have been canvassed.
- Further inquiry has been made about any evidence not yet processed (e.g., firearms, fingerprints, trace evidence).
- Available outside resources and partnerships (e.g., community, federal, task forces) have been utilized to the appropriate degree.
- All witness interviews and other investigative efforts have been documented.
- Contact has been made with victim’s family and friends to update them on the case.

9

The primary goal of a case review is to ensure that all investigative leads are addressed and documented and that a thorough investigation has been completed. A secondary goal is to hold detectives accountable and ensure they are following protocol. Case reviews will help identify training needs for individual detectives and possibly the entire unit. All case reviews should be well-documented and include details on the investigative plan of action.

Sergeants should conduct an official case review within 30 days of a case being assigned. After 60–90 days, open cases should also receive a thorough review by the Homicide Unit or Aggravated Assault Unit lieutenants and be presented to all detective personnel and command staff. The Homicide Unit should also provide quarterly briefings to the command staff. This will allow the command staff to keep abreast of investigations and help them better understand investigative capabilities and needs.

At a minimum, the case review process for Homicide Unit detectives should meet the case review requirements of the Homicide Unit SOP.

Continue and expand the use of the “Arrest Letter.”

For closed cases, the Homicide Unit detectives prepare a detailed “Arrest Letter” that gives a complete synopsis of the case and the results of elements such as interviews and evidence analysis. The letter is then presented to the prosecutor. This seems to be a valuable tool that the Homicide Unit should continue using and that Aggravated Assault Unit detectives should adopt for closed nonfatal shooting cases.

10

Additionally, detectives should prepare a similar detailed synopsis for all homicide and nonfatal shooting cases still open after 60 or 90 days. This can be used during the presentation to detectives/supervisors/command staff detailed in Recommendation 9.

NNPD should ensure that there is a standard, consistent training process for detectives in the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units. Detectives who are new to these units should receive proper training prior to or immediately upon joining the units. Our recommendations in this area include:

Recommendations	11	<p>Ensure that all new detectives and detective supervisors attend a basic detective training course.</p> <p>The training must be consistent for all new detectives and should cover all aspects of an investigation, including at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime scene response, management, and processing • Evidence recovery and submission • Report writing • Writing and executing warrants • Investigative follow-up actions • Case prosecution • Courtroom procedures • Relevant laws and NNPD policies <p>One way to ensure that detectives are properly trained at the time they join an investigative unit is to have candidates attend the basic training course before they are selected into the unit. The assessment team learned that NNPD ranks potential candidates during the process of selection into the Investigations Bureau, and the agency could send the top-ranked candidates (e.g., the top 15) to the training. Even if all these candidates do not move into a detective unit immediately, this would ensure that they will have received training prior to assignment to the unit.</p>
	12	<p>Ensure that detectives who investigate homicides and nonfatal shootings, as well as their supervisors, receive advanced training in investigating these types of cases.</p> <p>Specialized training should cover topics that include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using advanced interview and interrogation techniques, including trauma-informed interviewing • Understanding crime scene management • Making next-of-kin notifications • Performing forensic analysis of seized evidence • Using digital evidence from cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other devices • Using social media in investigations • Using network analysis to identify linkages between individuals or groups • Understanding constitutional law • Prosecuting a homicide or nonfatal shooting case

5.3 Case File Documentation

The Homicide Unit uses a computer file to manage case documentation. Each case file has a folder system with 25 numbered tabs, each of which is named for its contents (e.g., case synopsis, victim information, suspect information, lab results). During a review of the computer files during the on-site visit, the assessment team discovered that many, if not most, of the folders were empty. The team learned that detectives sometimes have a lax approach to keeping these files up to date. Additionally, through our review of the digital investigative case files NNPD provided (see Section 4), the NCCP assessment team found that many reports lacked necessary details. Typically, the initial response was documented well, but there was little to no documentation by the assigned detective(s) of their follow-up investigation, including any interviews conducted, evidence processed, or the case outcome. When information was documented, it was often lacking details. For instance, a report might say that the detective interviewed a witness but not point to where the interview recording could be found or provide a synopsis of important information relayed by the witness. Similarly, reports may document a National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) lead, but not whether the detective followed up on the lead or the outcome of any follow-up. Detective investigative documents should provide complete and detailed information about

what activities were performed in the case and the results of those activities. The recommendations in this section are aimed at improving these documentation practices.

Detectives are also required to maintain a case file of hard copy reports. These reports are organized into a case package (i.e., murder book) contained in a three-ring binder with numbered tabs for different categories. The assessment team reviewed two of these murder books and found that the tab numbers did not correspond with the tab numbers in the computer file. Otherwise, the assessment team found that the case packages were thorough and reflected what was produced during the investigation. Additionally, interviews with the NNCAO and USAO suggest that NNPD does a good job of documenting investigative activities and outcomes in the case files they provide to these agencies. Therefore, it appears that aggravated assault and homicide detectives may get their reports in order when they are submitting a case for prosecution, but they do not appear to update the digital case file by documenting their investigative activities and the case outcome. Maintaining detailed and consistent case files is important not just for improving investigations but also for helping supervisors conduct case reviews (see Recommendation 9).

Recommendations	13	Strengthen the use of the computer case file system in the Homicide Unit. NNPD should require detectives to update the computer case files daily. Supervisors should routinely review the computer case files to ensure they are being updated and that they mirror the hard copy case packages.
	14	Train MCD detectives on case file documentation policies and procedures and the importance of providing sufficient details in their reports. NNPD should ensure that MCD detectives are aware of department policies and procedures for case file documentation and know how to properly document investigative follow-up activities.
	15	Ensure that the lead detective writes a detailed synopsis report for cases that remain open after 60 to 90 days. The synopsis report should be comprehensive and summarize the facts of the case, all investigative efforts conducted to date, the results of any evidence testing and analysis and how these results were used in the investigation, and what tasks still need to be addressed. An added benefit of this report is that detectives may discover leads they overlooked or did not exhaust and can complete those tasks prior to completing the report.

5.4 Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings

This section explores how fatal and nonfatal shootings are investigated by NNPD and provides recommendations for strengthening practices through every stage of the investigation.

Importantly, the NCCP assessment team found that NNPD does an excellent job of investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings. Still, we identified recommendations that could strengthen NNPD's shooting response. These recommendations are disaggregated by investigative stage and staff. Overall, we noticed that there is no standardized investigative checklist for detectives and patrol officers to use, and for supervisors to review, when working homicide and nonfatal shooting cases. This checklist will help ensure that critical tasks are being consistently performed throughout the duration of an investigation.

16

Develop and use a standard case checklist of basic investigative tasks for detectives to follow when conducting fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations.

The checklist should provide a detailed, step-by-step description of actions to be taken at each stage of the investigative process (Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2018). The checklist should detail the detective’s tasks and responsibilities during the initial response to the scene and during the ongoing investigation, including following up with victims and witnesses, collecting and submitting evidence for analysis, following up on results from the crime lab, contacting/consulting with other units (e.g., crime analysts, gang or narcotics detectives, task forces), submitting and following up on digital evidence, consulting with prosecutors. Supervisors should hold detectives accountable for completing the checklist. The checklist form should include room for the detective to note when the task was completed and the reason for not completing any unfinished tasks. Supervisors should use the case checklist as the primary basis to conduct supervisory case reviews at specific intervals throughout the investigation. The case review should include the supervisor’s signature, date/time of review, and comments or suggestions. The checklist should include confirmation that victims and their families were provided with information about their rights and expectations for assistance (National Crime Victim Law Institute, 2021).

5.4.1 *Initial Crime Scene Response*

The assessment team found that NNPD has an outstanding response to homicides and nonfatal shootings.

Newport News has three patrol precincts. In addition to patrol officers and patrol sergeants responding to all major crime scenes, the patrol watch commander and the patrol captain from the precinct respond. NNPD also has “night detectives” who respond to all nonfatal shooting scenes that occur during off-duty hours. The night detectives assist with coordinating investigative duties pending the arrival of the on-call Homicide Unit or Aggravated Assault Unit detectives.

As discussed previously in Section 5.1.1 (Staffing and Organization), the Homicide Unit is split into two squads, one of which is on call during nights and weekends. When a homicide occurs during these off-duty hours, the entire on-call squad (including the sergeant) responds to the scene. The sergeant from the other squad also typically responds, along with the Homicide Unit lieutenant, the MCD captain, and the Investigations Bureau chief. Interviewees said that the response from supervisors and command staff does not interfere with detectives’ duties at crime scenes. The lead detective and squad sergeant delegate specific tasks such as handling the scene, responding to the hospital, and canvassing for video, to the assisting detectives.

Immediately after returning from the scene of a homicide, the squad meets and each member briefs the others on what information they have. The squad then puts together an investigative plan and the sergeant and lead detective designate tasks to be completed by each member. This “team approach” occurs for the first few days after a homicide or until fresh leads have been exhausted, and then the lead detective continues to follow up on the case.

For nonfatal shootings that occur during on-duty hours (Monday–Friday day shift), two Aggravated Assault Unit detectives, a lead and wing detective, and their sergeant will respond to the scene. If additional detectives are needed, they will be called to assist. For nonfatal shootings that occur during

nights or weekends, the on-call primary and wing detective will be called to the scene, as well as their supervisor.

When a homicide or nonfatal shooting occurs, a group text is sent out to detectives, the RTCC, and NNPd's TIU. If the services of these units are needed, they will work remotely from home or respond to assist with the investigation. Examples of the tasks these units may perform include RTCC personnel accessing city cameras and ShotSpotter alerts and TIU personnel initiating cell phone or computer extractions and assisting in writing search warrants for electronic devices. Personnel from these units will continue to work leads until they are exhausted. Additionally, as will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.7 (Physical and Digital Evidence), NNPd's CSIs are on call 24/7 and will respond to homicide and nonfatal shooting scenes when they are called.

5.4.2 Follow-Up Investigation

The assessment team found that detectives from the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units appear to conduct thorough follow-up investigations. It was clear that detectives utilize their support units to aid with investigations, communicate daily with other detectives and supervisors about their cases, follow up on leads, and work cases properly.

5.4.3 Cold Case Unit

Solving cold cases not only brings offenders to justice but can also raise morale within a police department, strengthen community trust and satisfaction in the police, and relieve the burden on detectives working active cases.

NNPD disbanded its Cold Case Unit in 2018, then revived it in May 2024. There are currently two full-time detectives from the Homicide Unit and one part-time retired detective who are assigned to work cold cases. The full-time detectives still respond to homicide calls but are not assigned as a primary or secondary detective on cases and are they part of the 2-week on-call schedule. This structure appears to be working well and gives the Cold Case Unit the time needed to dedicate to its cases.

The new Cold Case Unit is currently reviewing more than 250 cold cases dating back to 1977. Based on solvability factors and leads, investigators are categorizing the cold cases into four groups:

- **Priority 1:** Named suspects exist. Forensic evidence (DNA, latent prints, firearms, etc.) remains in evidence storage. There is witness identification of a suspect or suspects. Physical evidence was located that connects the suspect(s) to the victim.
- **Priority 2:** Named suspect or person of interest exist. Forensic evidence (DNA, latent prints, firearms, etc.) remains in evidence storage. Witnesses can potentially identify the suspect. Physical evidence exists that potentially connects the suspect(s) to the victim.
- **Priority 3:** Suspect is unknown. Physical evidence was collected. Witnesses could not identify the suspect, or there were no witnesses.
- **Priority 4:** Human remains were found. Suspect is unknown. Little or no physical evidence exists. There are no witnesses. Victim has not been identified.

Recommendations	17	<p>Establish formal policies and procedures for investigating cold case homicides.</p> <p>Cold case policies should cover topics that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold case investigative training. Cold case investigators and their supervisor should complete specialized training on working these challenging cases. • Notification of victims' family and friends. NNPD should develop a trauma-informed protocol for notifying victims' friends and family members when the case is receiving new investigative activity. It is important to recognize that victims' friends and family members may be retraumatized when the case is opened for new investigative work. Care must be given to the notification process. The NNPD notification protocol can be grounded in lessons learned from notifying victims when their sexual assault kits have been tested years after the incident occurred. NNPD should include victim advocates within NNPD and the NNCAO in the development process. The NCCP team can provide NNPD with resources to support the development of these protocols.
	18	<p>Continue to invest in training for members of the Cold Case Unit, including conferences.</p> <p>Receiving outside training on investigating cold cases would be valuable to members of this newly formed unit.</p>

5.5 Internal Coordination and Collaboration

Collaboration and communication between various investigative units within a police agency can be critical to an effective ongoing homicide or nonfatal shooting investigation (Wellford, 2018). Members of different units may have pertinent information to share about suspects, witnesses, or leads, and this vital intelligence may fall through the cracks without strong coordination.

The assessment team learned that, overall, the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units work well with the support units assigned to the Investigations Bureau (e.g., crime analysts, RTCC personnel, forensics personnel, TIU personnel, and task force officers). These units are co-located with homicide and nonfatal shooting detectives in the same building and provide valuable support at the onset of a case. For example, the turnaround time for in-house analyses of digital evidence is quick, sometimes within 24 hours. The members of these units are available throughout the investigation and offer assistance and guidance when it is requested by detectives.

However, the assessment team found that there are no formal meetings or information-sharing protocols between the Homicide Unit and the Aggravated Assault Unit and these investigative support units once investigations move past the initial stages. Instead, all communication appears to be informal and self-initiated. This may result in lost opportunities for the support units to provide insight based on their special expertise. It is also unclear whether all detectives are aware of the capabilities of the support units.

The assessment team also learned that communication between Homicide Unit detectives, patrol officers, and precinct detectives is sporadic and mostly limited to on-scene briefings. In contrast, interviewees stated that Aggravated Assault Unit detectives are typically more likely to reach out to patrol officers. The assessment team heard that homicide detectives rarely attend roll calls, and that any follow-up with patrol officers occurs on an informal, individual level. Interviewees indicated that patrol officers are usually briefed on homicides by their sergeants and that they do not always receive complete information. Similarly, precinct detectives do not respond to the scene of homicides or have a formal method of sharing information to case detectives.

19

Hold an internal weekly violent crime meeting.

The Investigations Bureau should hold a weekly violent crime meeting to discuss the city’s most serious crimes.

- Each murder, nonfatal shooting case, and any other prioritized violent crime that occurred during the preceding 7 days should be presented by the lead detective(s) and then discussed among the group to gain information and intelligence, develop leads, and ensure that detectives have the resources and support necessary to move their investigations forward.
- Participants in the meeting should include Investigations Bureau detectives and sergeants, Investigations Bureau command, CSI personnel, crime analysts, patrol representatives, precinct detectives, prosecutors, and other local and federal partners. If an investigation is potentially related to another jurisdiction, that agency should also be invited to attend.
- When appropriate, additional guests such as medical examiners, CSI experts, or community group leaders could be invited to discuss their areas of expertise.

Additionally, it would be useful to hold a weekly crime briefing/conference call attended by all command staff, including chiefs, captains, and lieutenants from the Investigations Bureau and the precincts, to discuss homicides, nonfatal shootings, and other major crimes and crime trends. This may help leaders identify resources needed for homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations and initiate deployments to prevent retaliatory shootings.

20

Strengthen formal information-sharing protocols between Homicide Unit and Aggravated Assault Unit detectives, patrol officers, and precinct detectives.

Examples of ways to strengthen coordination between these parties include:

- Ensure that Homicide Unit and Aggravated Assault Unit detectives attend roll calls on a regular basis to share information about ongoing homicide and nonfatal shooting cases. A Homicide Unit detective should be mandated to attend roll call after every homicide to brief officers and request assistance. This should occur even in closed cases, as patrol officers should be aware of potential retaliation factors.
- Have the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units conduct trainings at roll call on investigative tasks such as interviewing and crime scene response.
- Require case detectives to follow up with patrol officers who submit a supplemental report in a case for which they are lead.
- Have precinct detectives respond to all homicides and assist the Homicide Unit with any information they may have about the neighborhood, trends, suspects, and other details.

These steps should be formalized in policy as part of the investigative checklist (see Recommendation 16) and case review process (see Recommendation 9).

21

Ensure that NNPD executive leadership facilitates the flow of communication among all units within the department.

Strategies include:

- Holding weekly conference calls involving all command staff, including the Investigations Bureau chief, captains, and lieutenants, to discuss critical incidents, necessary deployments to prevent retaliatory shootings, and other details.
- Holding a weekly crime briefing attended by all chiefs, district commanders, precinct detective lieutenants, Investigations Bureau captains and lieutenants, and others to discuss homicides, nonfatal shootings, and other major crimes and crime trends.
- Ensuring that when patrol officers, precinct detectives, or others provide information that leads to a closure, they receive appropriate recognition within the department. This will foster good relationships and encourage these personnel to assist in future cases.

This lack of formal communication is problematic in several ways. For one, officers and precinct detectives often have valuable information gained from working in the same geographical area on a daily basis. Without formal information sharing or communication, this information may slip through the cracks and never make its way to a case detective. Additionally, the assaults, robberies, and other crimes that are investigated by precinct detectives are often intertwined with homicides and nonfatal shootings. There may be an overlap in victims, witnesses, and suspects. For example, minor crimes are often committed by the same persons or groups who commit murders, or these crimes may lead to a retaliatory shooting. Homicide detectives investigating a murder that was the result of a botched robbery may be looking at the same suspects as the precinct detectives, and thus both could benefit from an exchange of information.

5.6 Victim and Family Advocacy

5.6.1 *NNPD's Domestic Violence Specialist*

Currently, NNPD's victim advocacy services are limited to victims of domestic violence (including domestic violence-related homicides and nonfatal shootings). These services are coordinated through NNPD's DVS. The DVS position was originally a grant-funded position but is now incorporated into and supported as part of the NNPD's budget. The need for the DVS position was identified through data showing that a large percentage of aggravated assaults were domestic violence related. The goal of creating the position was to reduce the number of domestic-related aggravated assaults using a multipronged approach to include (1) working with victims to break the cycle of violence through safety assessments, outreach, and education; (2) training law enforcement officers on how to engage with victims and offenders in their responses to domestic incidents; and (3) strengthening NNPD's relationships with community partners. Importantly, the DVS does not work with victims of incidents that are not domestic violence related, and NNPD currently does not have any in-house advocates who do so. Therefore, these recommendations are focused on building upon NNPD's successful model for victim advocacy in cases of domestic violence and applying those practices to advocacy for victims, witnesses, and families in fatal and nonfatal shooting cases.

Engagement with Victims

The DVS reviews all intimate partner domestic violence incidents daily and reaches out to victims proactively. The DVS works with victims and builds relationships with them, an effort that may be aided by the fact that the DVS is a civilian with whom survivors may feel more comfortable engaging. Although the DVS does not directly talk to victims about investigations, victims sometimes disclose prior incidents of domestic violence during their engagements with the DVS, at which point the DVS will carry out warm handoffs to officers so that victims can report the incidents. Additionally, the case manager at the Riverside Hospital's violence intervention program sometimes reaches out to the DVS to help make connections with detectives investigating shootings in which victims are ready to participate. The additional information and reporting that the DVS can facilitate can serve as a valuable tool for investigators. Expanding advocacy efforts to support victims, witnesses, and families of nondomestic-related homicides and nonfatal shootings could potentially reveal similar investigative benefits.

Expand advocacy services to support victims, witnesses, and families involved in fatal and nonfatal shooting cases unrelated to domestic violence.

As part of this effort, NNPD should review data related to fatal and nonfatal shooting cases that are not domestic violence related to determine the number of cases where victim and family support might be needed. A similar multipronged approach to advocacy as is currently used by the DVS could be adapted to support victims in other types of cases.

22

- **Victim Support:** Assigning an advocate to the Homicide Unit and the Aggravated Assault Unit could help ensure that victims of fatal and nonfatal shootings, as well as witnesses, families, and others involved in these cases, receive the support and resources they need. Advocates should proactively reach out to victims and families at regular intervals (e.g., monthly) and during key events, such as the date of the victim’s murder and the victim’s birthday.
- **Training:** The new advocate could play a role in educating law enforcement officers and the community about topics such as how trauma impacts the brain and body, which in turn may affect a victim’s or witnesses’ ability to recall or communicate details about a violent event. This would help people better understand the behaviors of individuals perceived as “difficult” victims and witnesses and how tools such as trauma-informed interviewing can help navigate these challenges.
- **Liaison Services:** By serving as the liaison between NNPD and victims, witnesses, and families, the new advocate would help forge connections, build trust, and facilitate communication between investigators and these impacted groups.

The NCCP team can link NNPD to agencies that have expanded their victim advocacy efforts to include nondomestic homicides and nonfatal shootings. If NNPD chooses not to invest in in-house victim/witness advocates to support shooting investigations that are not related to domestic violence, NNPD should work toward better integrating the NNCAO’s victim advocate assigned to violent crimes into its response to these types of shootings.

Ensure that any new victim advocates handling homicides and nonfatal shootings are guided by strong policies and training.

NNPD should ensure that any new advocates are guided by written policies and procedures that cover the following topics:

23

- Required outreach to victims and families and the timelines for those contacts.
- Topics that should be covered during the initial contacts with victims and their families.
- The death notification process and the victim advocate’s role in that process.
- Procedures for documenting contacts with victims and their families.
- Formal reports or information-sharing protocols with detectives.
- Any required trainings or certifications, which should include specialized training on victim advocacy and trauma-informed death notifications.
- The process for selecting victim advocates, which should include a background screening if the personnel are co-located within the Investigations Bureau and have access to Criminal Justice Information Services and NNPD’s records management system.
- Spontaneous disclosures of case-related activity by victims and their families.

Example policies and related materials are available from the International Association of Chiefs of Police ([Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services \(LEV\) | International Association of Chiefs of Police](#)) and the NCCP team can connect NNPD to agencies that have implemented strong policies for victim advocacy. NNPD should also ensure that advocates receive current and comprehensive training. The NCCP team can work with NNPD to identify relevant training topics or programs, and resources are available from the International Association of Chiefs of Police to support departments in training victim advocates (<https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/law-enforcement-based-victim-services-template-package-v-training>).

Work toward involving a victim advocate in every homicide and nonfatal shooting case.

If NNPD does expand its advocacy services to nondomestic homicides and aggravated assaults, an advocate should be notified at the time an incident is reported. If possible, an advocate should strive to respond to homicides and nonfatal shooting scenes. The advocate's on-scene presence can help put victims, witnesses, and their loved ones at ease and earn their participation in the case. NNPD should also work with the NNCAO to identify ways to leverage its new grant-funded violent crime victim advocate early in shooting investigations, and potentially to secure a permanent position to support both agencies. Related recommendations include:

- Policies and procedures should state the circumstances under which a victim advocate should respond to the scene.
- Officers and detectives should receive training on the services that advocates can provide and their value to investigations.
- Contacting the victim advocate should be included in the investigative checklist for detectives.
- A victim advocate should accompany detectives when providing next-of-kin notifications.

Community Partnerships and Initiatives

One reason it is critical to have strong relationships with community service partners is to ensure prompt follow-up on referrals for victim services. The DVS understands the importance of making warm handoffs with trusted community partners and how the DVS position can serve as a liaison between victims, NNPD, and service provider partners. The DVS has good relationships with the victim advocates at the NNCAO and with the sexual assault nurse examiners at the local hospital.

One initiative started by the DVS is the Community Coalition Against Domestic Violence. This initiative, which launched in 2023, has the goal of empowering the community, nonprofit organizations and service provider partners, and law enforcement with education about domestic violence. Meetings are held monthly, during which survivors of domestic violence often speak. There are resources focused on the Hispanic population and education includes the intersection of domestic violence with various populations, such as LGBTQ communities and youth. The meetings empower the community to be ambassadors to raise awareness about domestic violence and promote healthy relationships.

The DVS also started the Luka Project, which helps family members in cases of domestic-related homicides by assigning the family an "illumination advocate," along with an endowment to provide resources. An illumination advocate is someone with lived experience who can assist families with specific needs such as transitioning into caretaker roles for children who have lost their parents in a domestic-related homicide event.

5.6.2 *The Role of Officers and Detectives in Victim Advocacy*

Detectives and officers also must play a role in victim and family advocacy. The way law enforcement personnel treat and respond to victims and families can significantly impact their engagement and participation in a case, community relationships, and the quality of an investigation. Notably, we uncovered a good working relationship with and strong communication between detectives in the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units and victim advocates in the NNCAO. These relationships could be leveraged to better integrate the NNCAO victim advocates in NNPD's fatal and nonfatal shooting

responses and to build NNPD detective competencies in working with shooting victims, witnesses, and their loved ones.

Recommendations	25	<p>Take steps to ensure that detectives are proactively reaching out to victims and families at regular intervals (e.g., monthly), regardless of whether the detective has any case updates.</p> <p>Check-ins should be intentional and on a regularly scheduled basis. Detectives should also reach out to victims and families on key events, such as the anniversary of the incident or the victim’s birthday. In addition to demonstrating to the victim that the officer or detective cares, such contact also can help elicit more information as victims and families move past the initial trauma in the immediate aftermath of the incident.</p>
	26	<p>Incorporate trauma-informed interviewing into training for detectives.</p> <p>This training will help detectives to better understand the behaviors of individuals perceived as “difficult victims/witnesses,” which may be related to trauma.</p>
	27	<p>Incorporate into written policies and SOPs expectations for detective follow-up and communication with the families of homicide victims and with victims of nonfatal shootings.</p> <p>These expectations should be grounded in a victim-centered approach and emphasize that detectives should treat all victims and families with respect. These expectations should also be included in the checklist discussed in Recommendation 16.</p> <p>At a minimum, policies and protocols should require detectives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide families of homicide victims with information about the Homicide Support Group before and after interviews. If victim advocacy capacity is expanded to fatal and nonfatal shooting cases, have an advocate available before and after interviews for additional victim support. If the NNPD cannot provide victim advocacy, work with the NNCAO to increase its involvement in these investigations. • Keep victims and their families informed of the investigation to every extent possible. • Promptly return calls and emails from victims and their families regarding inquiries about the case or status of the investigation. • Proactively reach out to victims and their families at regular intervals (e.g., monthly; victim’s birthday), regardless of whether there are any case updates. • Reach out to victims and their families when there is turnover in the assigned victim advocate and detective and provide contact information for the new point(s) of contact. • Meet with the assigned victim advocate at the outset of any case in which an advocate is involved to ensure strong communication and collaboration.

Homicide Support Group

The Homicide Unit currently facilitates the Homicide Support Group for family members of homicide victims. The support group meetings are held monthly at the NNPD and is attended by NNPD command staff, homicide detectives and supervisors, forensics personnel, other investigative support staff, and a chaplain. The goal of this effort is to reassure families that their cases are not forgotten, to let them know that there is continued support from NNPD, and to provide peer support among the family members who attend. The meetings offer opportunities for investigators and families to connect and for investigators to answer questions. There are currently no financial resources available to Homicide Support Group participants, but they are provided with information about counseling and other resources. Support for surviving families is also available through victim advocates in the NNCAO, which has received recent grant funding that expanded victim advocacy capacity for both homicide and nonfatal shootings through personnel and resource assistance.

Two years ago, families in the Homicide Support Group decided to turn their “pain into purpose” and began an annual Gun Violence Awareness Walk in the community. These walks help not only raise community awareness but also allow survivors to heal and remember as they distribute materials with the names of loved ones lost to gun violence, read their loved ones’ names out loud, and share stories about those they have lost. The walk is supported by NNPD, with the Chief of Police and other city officials providing remarks. NNPD homicide detectives distribute flyers to families of homicide victims—including victims in cases that have not yet been cleared—to spread awareness about the Homicide Support Group.

Although members of the Homicide Support Group are in different places in their healing journey, most have immediate needs that include housing, employment, food assistance, mental health resources, and grief support. Families in the group would like to see more focus on youth prevention and intervention efforts and have expressed a desire to have a greater voice with city leaders. The City of Newport News has been very responsive to gun violence in recent years and has allocated grant funding to approximately 15 CBOs for work related to gun violence prevention and response. More about that effort and the community organizations involved with these programs will be included in the forthcoming complementary Project CLEARs report.

Recommendations

28

Continue to support the Homicide Support Group and consider including its members in the Community Care Walks.

Given the desire among Homicide Support Group participants to be active in the community, NNPD should consider inviting support group members to participate in Community Care Walks in response to homicide incidents. Having civilians who have been personally impacted by gun violence present in the community to speak about the importance of providing investigative information may increase the likelihood that individuals who have information will share it. Establish information-sharing agreements and policies between NNPD and civilians serving in this role so that civilians will know what to do with information and understand what they can expect law enforcement to do with information.

5.7 Physical and Digital Evidence

5.7.1 Forensic Services Unit

NNPD’s FSU, which is part of the MCD, is composed of a sergeant and nine civilian members, who are designated as either forensic technicians or forensic specialists. The unit also has a civilian NIBIN technician. Members of the unit start as forensic technicians. They may obtain the position of forensic specialist after a required performance period and upon selecting a forensic specialty and demonstrating work toward that specialty.

Members of the FSU perform general crime scene processing and evidence collection. Each member of the FSU has a take-home vehicle that is specially equipped to allow them to respond to crime scenes directly from home when needed. The unit also has a FARO scanner, which is used for fatal shootings and officer-involved shootings. FSU members also process evidence for latent prints and test them for potential DNA evidence at NNPD’s in-house crime lab. Fingerprints and DNA evidence are examined at the Virginia Department of Forensic Science crime lab.

Forensic technicians undergo training at the Forensic Science Academy, which is provided by the Virginia Department of Forensic Science. However, due to limited class sizes, FSU members may have to wait more than a year before being selected for the training.

Recommendations	29	<p>Explore additional training opportunities for FSU personnel.</p> <p>Identifying additional training is especially important given the long wait times to attend the Forensic Science Academy. Training options may include attendance at “short courses” hosted by the Virginia Department of Forensic Science or attendance at state and national forensic conferences. NNPd could also host trainings at its facility provided by a third-party vendor.</p>
	30	<p>Consider staffing the FSU with a civilian supervisor.</p> <p>The FSU is currently staffed by a detective sergeant. Transitioning to a civilian forensic professional supervisor would allow members of the FSU to pursue career progression for and would allow the detective sergeant to be utilized in other areas of the department. This move would also benefit the FSU by having a trained forensic person who could provide valuable knowledge for things such as responding to difficult scenes, training new members, and considering what equipment to purchase.</p>
	31	<p>Encourage diversified forensic specialties within the FSU.</p> <p>The FSU has a position of forensic specialist, which requires members to select and work toward a forensic specialty. Currently, all of the forensic specialists have selected 10-print as their specialty. The unit should consider diversifying to include specialists in areas such as shooting reconstruction, NIBIN, and blood stain pattern analysis.</p>

5.7.2 *Firearms and Ballistics Evidence*

NNPD has one NIBIN technician who works under the direction of the FSU supervisor. The agency shares a BrassTrax machine with the Hampton Police Department, though the machine is physically located within the NNPd headquarters facility. The NIBIN technician also performs test fires on weapons seized by the NNPd. Pistol test fires are done within the NNPd headquarters facilities, and rifles and shotguns are test fired at a range in Hampton. Processing firearms for DNA and fingerprints is performed by FSU prior to the weapon being received by the NIBIN technician. NIBIN leads are communicated to the lead case detective and their sergeant, members of the FSU (including the FSU sergeant), and the crime analyst for the unit.

The benefits of having a dedicated NIBIN technician and a NIBIN terminal located within the NNPd were obvious at the time of the site visit—there was no backlog for weapons needing to be test fired or for cartridge cases to be entered into NIBIN.

5.7.3 *Digital Evidence*

NNPD has a dedicated TIU that is located in the MCD along with the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units. The TIU is composed of four detectives who are split between the functions of processing data from cell phones, performing digital downloads and analysis, and geo-tracking. The unit also assists with video extraction and recovery (using a voyage data recorder). There is a dedicated crime analyst assigned to the TIU.

Recommendations	32	<p>Implement a remote firing platform/system, also referred to as a forensic ballistics machine.</p> <p>This device would provide a safe distance between the NIBIN technician and the weapon during test fires, which is especially important when operating weapons that may be faulty.</p>
	33	<p>Consider hiring an additional NIBIN technician or cross-training another member of the FSU to assist with reviewing NIBIN leads.</p> <p>NIBIN leads should be reviewed by a second technician prior to dissemination. This could be accomplished by hiring an additional NIBIN technician or cross-training another member of the FSU. Alternatively, NNPd could enter into a formal agreement with the Hampton Police Department to have Hampton's NIBIN technician review NNPd's leads. This would be made easier by the fact that Hampton's NIBIN technician is routinely at NNPd to access the NIBIN terminal stored there.</p>
	34	<p>Consider increasing training for NIBIN technicians.</p> <p>This training should encompass additional and formal training on performing test fires with a wide variety of weapons, access to regional or national conferences, and a formal training program for new technicians. NNPd may also consider having the NIBIN technician attend an armorer's school, as well to receiving training on providing court testimony.</p>

The TIU appeared to be well equipped with LINX, Clear, Cellebrite, GrayKey, Magnet AXIOM, and other software options. Additionally, the unit has its own server for cell phone extractions. Unit members (to include the analyst) were highly trained and stated the department was very willing to keep up with the ever-changing nature of the digital field by affording members additional training opportunities.

Recommendations	35	<p>Consider assigning a supervisor to the TIU.</p> <p>The TIU appears to be the only detective unit that does not have a sergeant supervising detectives. Due to the highly technical nature of the work, as well as the unit's workload, it would be useful to assign a supervisor to the TIU. It would be helpful if the supervisor had a strong working knowledge of the various tasks and equipment used by the TIU so that they could assist in triaging major cases if needed and present a knowledgeable opinion at larger department/detective meetings.</p>
------------------------	-----------	---

5.8 Crime Analysis and Real Time Crime Center

5.8.1 *Crime Analysis*

There are currently nine crime analysts at NNPd who conduct a myriad of functions such as performing victimology research, conducting social media searches and analysis, producing bulletins about crimes and potential suspects, developing incident maps, cross-referencing names and persons of interests, and producing NIBIN linkage charts. The Homicide Unit, Aggravated Assault Unit, TIU, and RTCC each have dedicated analysts who are physically located within the workspace of their units. The crime analysts utilize a variety of technologies, including LINX, PLX, and Clear. Analysts can access some of these tools remotely, which allows them to perform some tasks, such as developing photo spreads, from home when an incident occurs. NNPd's crime analysts also use a statewide analyst email network to populate bulletins and request information.

Recommendations	36	<p>Ensure that all crime analysts are able to perform the functions of a precinct analyst.</p> <p>Precinct analysts typically focus on providing statistics to NNPD leadership. It would be useful for all of NNPD’s crime analysts to be able to perform this function to ensure coverage in the event that an analyst is needed on a temporary basis at the precinct level. This may be accomplished by requiring analysts to start in the position of precinct analyst or by having all analysts participate in a formal training period with a precinct analyst.</p>
	37	<p>Provide more focused training opportunities for crime analysts based on their assigned positions.</p> <p>It appears that NNPD supports crime analysts in attending various trainings. However, it would be useful to take a more systematic approach and ensure that analysts receive training that is specialized to their position within the agency. Additionally, NNPD may consider encouraging and sponsoring certification for its crime analysts, such as through the International Association of Crime Analysts, to ensure that proficiency with known standards is met.</p>
	38	<p>Consider creating a supervisor analyst position.</p> <p>NNPD does not currently have a position of supervisory analyst to oversee its crime analysts. There are benefits to the current system of having crime analysts reporting to the units in which they are embedded. However, the downsides are that upward movement as a crime analyst is nonexistent, and various tasks assigned to analysts may be better focused with one supervisor who would have a “big picture” view of things such as current workloads, analyst proficiencies, and training needs.</p>
	39	<p>Require crime analysts from the MCD to attend weekly detective meetings when possible.</p> <p>Analysts from the Homicide Unit, Aggravated Assault Unit, TIU, and RTCC should attend the weekly detective meetings when possible. This would allow for greater information sharing between investigative units. The NCCP assessment team found that although some analysts appear to attend these meetings, it does not seem to be a consistent practice.</p>

5.8.2 *Real Time Crime Center*

NNPD’s RTCC is staffed by a supervisor (sergeant), one full-time detective, one part-time member (a retired NNPD detective), one civilian crime analyst, and an additional full-time detective who is “on loan” to the RTCC due to a current suppression operation. The RTCC is located in the Special Investigations Division, which is part of NNPD’s Investigations Bureau.

The current setup of the RTCC has been in place since 2021. It uses a Fusus web-based platform to integrate multiple systems. The RTCC has access to license plate reader information, city and police camera systems, cameras from partner commercial businesses (upon submission and approval of NNPD’s access), ShotSpotter, and body-worn camera systems when activated. RTCC members currently work daytime hours Monday through Friday. They are available on call for nights and weekends as needed. Some of the unit’s functions may be performed remotely, which helps limit the number of call-outs for members. The assigned crime analyst commonly fields requests from members of the Homicide and Aggravated Assault Units.

Interviewees indicated that the RTCC has been important for obtaining corroborative evidence in shooting cases, which helps mitigate the need to rely on victims and witnesses who may not be cooperative. Some NNPD personnel noted that they wish the agency had access to a program that would allow the RTCC to view doorbell cameras with the authorization of residents; however, this issue was reportedly held up by

the City Attorney. Interviews with community members indicated that the community generally supports the use of cameras to assist with investigations, and NNPd interviewees said that community members most often agree to share personal video footage with investigators.

Recommendations	40	<p>Increase training opportunities for members of the RTCC, especially in the use and development of camera systems.</p> <p>The unit should also further develop a comprehensive training plan for future RTCC members that includes a checklist of competencies to be “signed off” on by an assigned RTCC training officer.</p>
	41	<p>Consider collaborating with other local jurisdictions that have or plan on having RTCCs.</p> <p>The assessment team learned that some jurisdictions neighboring Newport News have implemented, or are planning to implement, their own RTCCs. NNPd should consider collaboration opportunities with these jurisdictions. Such activities may include training (especially if the other jurisdictions use similar software) and further development of best practices and information sharing.</p>
	42	<p>Consider expanding the RTCC staffing to allow for at least partial weekend and evening in-person coverage.</p> <p>The RTCC appears to be well-run and staffed with dedicated, capable personnel. However, to strengthen its effectiveness, the NNPd should consider expanding the unit’s staffing to allow for greater coverage during nights and weekends. This coverage would more closely coincide with the timing of fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents.</p>
	43	<p>Explore continued investments in technologies.</p> <p>Although the RTCC currently uses the tools and equipment needed to respond to a variety of requests, NNPd should consider exploring further investment in technologies to increase the effectiveness of actionable intelligence. Examples include facial recognition software and AI analytics that are used to search for evidence such as certain clothing and vehicle types.</p>

5.9 Case Prosecution

5.9.1 Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office

The NNCAO has approximately 30 prosecutors divided among two adult trial teams and one juvenile and domestic relations trial team. Office policy requires that two attorneys be assigned to each homicide, one senior and one more junior, while more complex cases might have additional attorneys assigned to them. The NNCAO assists detectives with search warrants and uses a multijurisdictional grand jury to secure testimony from witnesses to these violent crimes.

Interviewees said that the NNCAO enjoys a good relationship with detectives in both the NNPd Homicide Unit and the Aggravated Assault Unit. The NNCAO indicated that detectives do an excellent job on their cases, particularly when working with nonengaging victims, and that they care about their city. They said that detectives do good work documenting their cases, interviewing witnesses and suspects, and issuing retention letters to secure third-party evidence for trial. The NNCAO finds that NNPd’s TIU is very helpful in moving cases forward, particularly cases with nonengaging victims and evidence from the Drive Test Scanner that has proved valuable at trial.

Interviewees said that communication between the NNCAO and NNPD detectives is excellent and includes critical feedback regarding investigations and individual detectives, as well as prosecutions and individual prosecutors. They also said that NNPD, NNCAO, and the district USAO enjoy a good working relationship and meet monthly to discuss firearms cases.

Witness fear and intimidation is an issue in Newport News requiring detectives to maintain regular contact with witnesses, including providing assistance with their transportation to court. The NNCAO has a small grant to assist with witness protection and relocation and stated that they work well with detectives to protect witnesses. The NNCAO is also regularly available for training with detectives. Although detectives routinely do excellent work on their cases, occasionally the lead detective does not have all the reports related to a case as trial approaches, which can impact defense readiness and plea negotiations. Additionally, on occasion, evidence is being sought or analyzed close to trial, which may impact resolution or trial of the case. Time frames for return of evidence from third parties or lab analyses may not always be in control of detectives, but where possible, forensic technicians and lead detectives should coordinate so that requests for evidence or analysis can be done as early as practicable.

Recommendations	44	<p>Continue open communication and training with NNCAO.</p> <p>NNPD and NNCAO should continue to meet regularly and identify training topics related to investigations, particularly for newer detectives in the Aggravated Assault Unit.</p>
	45	<p>Ensure that lead detectives receive complete reports from all personnel who respond to or assist in fatal and nonfatal shooting cases.</p> <p>Detectives should develop a protocol that ensures identification of personnel who responded to a shooting scene and documentation of their role/activities on-scene to be included in case files shared with the NNCAO.</p>
	46	<p>Lead detectives should prioritize requests for evidence from third parties and evidence submitted for analysis to the lab to prevent late-returning evidence from interfering with plea negotiations and defense readiness.</p> <p>Lead detectives should work with other units to ensure the timely request of evidence from third parties, such as social media providers, and with crime scene technicians to ensure timely submission of evidence for analysis by the lab.</p>

5.9.2 *U.S. Attorney's Office*

The USAO for the Eastern District of Virginia has a Newport News office that covers multiple jurisdictions on the peninsula, including Newport News, Hampton, Matthews County, Gloucester, York County, Williamsburg, and James City County. The USAO handles a variety of cases from NNPD, including firearms cases, current and cold case homicides, and other violent crimes.

The assessment team learned that the USAO has an excellent working relationship with NNPD. The USAO also enjoys an excellent working relationship with the NNCAO, with whom it engages in a longstanding partnership that effectively screens cases for prosecution in the jurisdiction that will yield the best result. Once a month, the USAO, NNCAO, and NNPD have a Gun Meeting to screen cases for federal or state prosecution, with the USAO regularly adopting a portion of state firearms cases. Additionally, some cases are directly referred to the USAO from NNPD task force officers who have experience and training in what cases are most appropriate for federal prosecution. These cases are referred via an intake form that is completed by the task force officer for review by the USAO.

The USAO is also able to use the federal grand jury to secure testimony and provide some protection to witnesses as it is a secret proceeding. The Eastern District of Virginia has what is known as a “rocket docket,” which requires a case to be tried very quickly, typically within 60 days from the date of indictment. The USAO must work closely with detectives to ensure cases are complete and ready for trial before an indictment is sought. The USAO also has access to some witness protection and relocation services to assist with those victims/witnesses who appear to be at credible threat of retaliation. Although this protection at the federal level has been provided in the past, it is not available in all cases. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the USAO regularly provided training to NNPD about its ability to prosecute violent crime at the federal level; however, this training has not occurred over the last 4 years.

Recommendations	47	<p>Continue the practice of screening violent crime cases to determine the appropriate jurisdiction and ensure the best results.</p> <p>The assessment team recommends that NNPD, the USAO, and NNCAO continue holding Gun Meetings and collaborating in this effort.</p>
	48	<p>Consider reinstating regular training from the USAO on what makes a case appropriate for federal prosecution.</p> <p>NNPD and USAO leaders should work together to determine training needs. The assessment team learned that it would be useful for the USAO to provide NNPD with training regarding what cases are eligible for federal prosecution and what the USAO, with its limited resources, can realistically handle. This training would be particularly helpful for newer detectives in the Aggravated Assault Unit.</p>

5.10 Community Engagement

NNPD’s Chief of Police expressed a dedication to community engagement, and this commitment was reflected during the assessment team’s interviews with community members. Many interviewees from the community noted that the Chief of Police has been instrumental in leading by example in community engagement and has fostered closer working relationships with community organizations. One CBO leader shared, “Our work is hard, and we need law enforcement partnerships. I am thankful that this is happening in Newport News. I have been in the law enforcement/community partnership space for [a long time], and it doesn’t always happen like this.”

Although NNPD is recognized by CBO leaders as having made considerable strides in building trust and increasing engagement in the community, some recommendations emerged that could help grow and improve NNPD’s existing community efforts. These recommendations will be part of the accompanying Project CLEARs report, which will be made available to NNPD command staff. The report will include additional findings and recommendations based on data collection from NNPD personnel in community-engaged positions, CBO leaders, and residents about their perceptions of NNPD’s level of community engagement, methods of communication and information sharing, and community participation in the investigative process. The CLEARs report will also contain a detailed inventory of CBOs active in the gun violence response and prevention space. The remainder of this section covers ways to increase the community’s participation in shooting investigations and build on NNPD’s community partnerships and programs. This section includes recommendations for leveraging existing efforts and partnerships to increase community engagement and support investigative efforts.

5.10.1 *Community Participation in Investigations*

NNPD personnel indicated that it is often challenging to obtain participation from witnesses and victims in shooting investigations. Additionally, many shooting victims may participate up to the point that a suspect is arrested, but then the victim does not follow through with testifying or attending court. Interviewees noted that a lack of participation from victims and witnesses is often due to the “no-snitching code” that is prevalent in high-crime areas, particularly with shootings that are related to gangs or drugs. Many times, interviewees said, the parties wish to handle the situation themselves. Some NNPD personnel said that although victims and witnesses may not wish to be seen talking to police officers, they are more engaging if brought to a private location.

CBO partners shared that the “no-snitching” narrative is a frequent topic of conversation between CBO staff and the community members they serve, particularly the youth. Several CBO leaders described that their approach is to teach young people the “real definition” of a snitch. In their view, a snitch is someone who participates in something illegal and then tries to reduce penalties against themselves by telling on others, not someone who comes forward with information about a crime in general. Some CBO interviewees also believe another way to combat the “no-snitching” code is for community members to hold themselves and others accountable to reset the norms about what behavior will be tolerated.

Several CBO leaders believe that the community, especially youth, will not want to speak directly to the police. Instead, trusted CBO staff could serve as intermediaries in situations where they can help community members provide information to police that would be useful for investigations. CBO interviewees were able to provide several examples where community members have come to them with information about shootings and other violent crimes. One interviewee who has received information directly from the community has submitted anonymous tips through P3 Tips. Other CBO interviewees stated that they have provided information to community members about the Crimeline should they want to use it, though they believe that it is not widely used. Educating the community about Crimeline and how anonymity is protected could be useful in reassuring community members that the information they provide will not come back to hurt them.

CBO leaders overwhelmingly told the assessment team that the best way for NNPD to increase community participation in investigations is for officers to build relationships and trust with the communities they serve. Research supports this view—without strong police-community relationships, it can be difficult to motivate members of the public to report violent incidents, participate in investigations, testify in court, and engage in the criminal justice process (Brunson et al., 2015; Wellford & Cronin, 1999). CBO leaders recommended that NNPD be present in the community often, not just when things are going badly, such as when a shooting occurs. For example, CBO leaders suggested that officers do more foot patrols and walk through neighborhoods as a way for residents and officers to engage with one another and build trust. According to one CBO leader, “Visibility is a game changer. If you can be at different events, it will always send a positive message to the community. Make sure that remains a priority. Think about the little things. It does not always have to be about these big programs, but when you are patrolling streets, connect with the kids through one-on-one interactions.”

49

Consider ways of expanding the use of trusted community leaders to obtain information from witnesses in shooting investigations.

Because of distrust in the police and reluctance to be viewed as a snitch, witnesses may share information with trusted community leaders such as faith or nonprofit leaders that they are unwilling to share with police officers. These leaders may be able to work with NNPD to connect these witnesses to investigators and support their participation in shooting investigations. NNPD should continue to develop relationships with CBO and faith leaders in Newport News, which the NCCP team can assist with. This includes developing strategies in partnerships with CBOs to increase reporting and coordinating with CBOs about what their staff should do with information once it is reported.

50

Identify ways to better market the anonymous tipline.

The assessment team learned that the Crimeline may be underused, potentially due to a lack of knowledge about it. NNPD should explore ways to better market the Crimeline, including by working with community leaders as discussed in Recommendation 49, to ensure residents know about the tipline, believe in its anonymity, and do not associate providing information to the tipline with providing information directly to the police. NNPD should consider having the voices of those who have been impacted by violence, such as a family member whose loved one's homicide has not been solved, communicate about the importance of reporting investigative information.

Several CBO leaders indicated that educational efforts are needed to help community members, especially youth, understand how they can share information that is critical to investigations in a way that is protected and confidential. This includes expanding the messaging surrounding Crimeline and other safe reporting options. Strategies for promoting the Crimeline may include:

- **Promoting the Crimeline in public schools.** Interviewees from the school system said that, although they have a tipline in schools focused on bullying and safety, they have not seen the Crimeline promoted. NNPD should review messaging about Crimeline for youth audiences and work with NNPS to identify ways to educate students about this resource.
- **Working with CBOs to advocate for Crimeline.** NNPD should educate CBO leaders on how the Crimeline works, and then partner with the CBO leaders to promote its use and vouch for its credibility.
- **Expanding educational and awareness efforts.** NNPD should update its awareness efforts about the Crimeline to include the message that the identities of anonymous tipsters have never been compromised (if this is the case) and that the program is a safe, confidential way to report information and help address violence in the community.
- **Continuing promotional efforts.** NNPD should continue to promote the Crimeline and other reporting options by handing out cards with the Crimeline information at community meetings and to CBOs during visits and events. Community Youth & Outreach Division officers should also promote the Crimeline when engaging with the community.
- **Demonstrate the Crimeline's successes.** When the Crimeline leads to the successful closure of cases, NNPD should promote this outcome and demonstrate the effectiveness of the Crimeline to clear cases without compromising the identify of tipsters.

One NNPD program that may potentially help encourage community participation is the C.A.R.E. (Community, Awareness, Reconnection & Education) Walks. C.A.R.E. Walks are held after homicides occur and are attended by the Chief of Police and other command staff, investigative units, the NNPD chaplain, and community partners. NNPD leaves contact information with residents so that they can follow up to provide information that might help the investigation. Some NNPD personnel said that, although they do not usually receive investigative information during the walks, the program still serves the purpose of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with the community. It is possible that

increasing resident participation in these walks, such as by including members of the Homicide Support Group (see Recommendation 28) and CBO leaders, may improve the likelihood that the department obtains investigative leads.

Recommendations

51

Continue to conduct C.A.R.E. Walks following homicides.

Having civilians and trusted community partners participate alongside NNPD personnel provides greater opportunities for residents who may be more comfortable sharing information with civilians or trusted community leaders to provide investigative information. As mentioned in Recommendation 28, NNPD may want to consider inviting members of the Homicide Support Group to participate in these walks.

5.10.2 NNPD's Community Partnerships

NNPD has strong existing partnerships with many CBOs. One of the strongest and most formalized partnerships is with the Newport News Public Schools (NNPS). For example, NNPD participates in the Level Up mentorship program in local elementary schools, where NNPD officers serve as mentors to students who are identified as being at high risk for future violence. Another partnership between NNPD and the schools is the Chief of Police's Young Adult Police Commissioners program, which invites students from each of the six Newport News high schools to share their concerns. Additionally, NNPD coordinates a program with the schools called Camp Connections, and schools host Fun Fridays, where NNPD officers come to the school to hang out with students during lunch. Interviewees from NNPS believe that these ongoing efforts are helpful in allowing NNPD officers to connect with students and in overcoming students' negative perceptions of police.

NNPS personnel also said that NNPD does a good job of informing the schools about incidents that may impact students, so that the schools can be prepared with a response. For example, upon learning of an incident the school can have mentors and additional mental health support on hand to help students who may have been affected. As one interviewee from NNPS said, "We absolutely love NNPD. They are invaluable."

Additional interviewees from various CBOs indicated that NNPD's Chief of Police does a good job of showing up in the community and that he expects his officers to do the same. They noted that NNPD representatives come when they are invited to attend community events, which they appreciate. CBO interviewees said that the community knows the chief, that they often see the chief out at events, and that they have a personal relationship with him that they value. However, CBO interviewees also said that they would like to have a liaison at NNPD with whom they can connect on an ongoing basis so that they do not always have to go to the chief. Some CBO interviewees said that they have this type of relationship with NNPD's community program coordinator or the Community Youth & Outreach Division community resource coordinator.

CBO leaders said that NNPD recruits often connect with their organizations in order to learn about the CBOs and what they do. Each quarter, recruits are invited to the CBO facilities to see firsthand how they work. This also gives the CBO leaders a chance to speak directly with recruits about the importance of showing up in the community, which interviewees said they greatly appreciate. Some CBO leaders

reported that although they work closely with NNPD, they must also maintain boundaries between their organizations and the department to maintain trust and credibility with people in the community.

The assessment team learned that community violence intervention programs were not well-known by NNPD investigators. Meanwhile, CBO leaders said that their groups are involved in these programs, though CBOs working in this area often focused on youth and their work may not yet involve on-scene response protocols by violence interrupters. A few CBOs are funded through the Newport News GVIP and are building toward having a formal response to gun violence, including near-term violence interruption efforts. However, most of these CBOs funded through GVIP are active in prevention and early intervention efforts. Additionally, Riverside Hospital has a formal hospital-based violence intervention program that NNPD's DVS collaborates with (see Section 5.6.1 for more information on the DVS). Working with CBOs who are active in community violence intervention is an area of partnership development that NNPD could further explore.

The following recommendations emerged from the perspectives of both community leaders and NNPD personnel. These recommendations focus on how NNPD can better coordinate and partner with community groups.

Encourage investigators to partner with the Community Youth & Outreach Division to engage residents in areas impacted by shooting incidents.

Detectives should rely on these trusted resources to help build connections within the community, which could assist them in identifying and gathering information from potential witnesses. Strategies include:

- 52 • Attending neighborhood watch meetings to present information about unsolved cases and to encourage individuals to come forward with information.
- Consider allowing a Community Youth & Outreach Division community resource coordinator to present a case during a community meeting, as residents may feel more comfortable speaking first to these individuals. Investigators should be in attendance and available for a warm handoff by a trusted source who can vouch for the detective.

Develop a protocol for NNPd and partners to better record, respond to, and prevent acts of victim/witness intimidation, including how to assess risk levels for those who are threatened.

NNPD should partner with community groups active in this space to coordinate responses and ensure there is relocation assistance for those victims and witnesses who are at the highest risk of violence. NNPd should also use existing tools to develop protocols for identifying and responding to victim/witness intimidation and to promote victim/witness safety. One useful resource to see is *Improving Witness Safety and Preventing Witness Intimidation in the Justice System: Benchmarks for Progress*

(<https://aequitasresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Benchmarks-for-Progress.pdf> )

53

Leverage existing partnerships with the Newport News School System and other youth-focused initiatives to address the “no-snitching” culture, which many believe contributes to the lack of victim and witness participation in investigations.

Strategies include:

- 54 • Having youth participants in the Young Adult Police Commissioners program be a sounding board to begin developing strategies and messaging campaigns to address the “no-snitching” norm and change the narrative. These campaigns could be focused on school-based programming and educational efforts.
- Considering convening a working group with CBOs to discuss strategies to address the “no-snitching” culture. CBO staff are already having informal conversations with youth on this topic, and the NCCP and Project CLEARs team can provide connections to other sites that are adopting similar strategies.
- Referring to the resource *The Stop Snitching Phenomenon: Breaking the Code of Silence*, which was developed by the Police Executive Research Forum and funded by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS, 2009). This resource includes promising practices and potential solutions to address the “stop-snitching” phenomenon.

Acknowledge the community-based work of NNPd officers and other personnel.

Officers who are involved in community-based activities as part of their other assigned duties or in volunteer roles should be acknowledged for their efforts. Acknowledgment does not have to include a financial award; alternatively, it can include publicly recognizing the officers and giving them credit and documenting their efforts for the purposes of performance reviews. This will help encourage continued community-focused activities, which will go a long way in the eyes of the community.

55

For example, one CBO interviewee indicated they are asking community agencies to provide overtime or comp time for their staff members who volunteer to be mentors with the CBO. NNPd might consider whether overtime or comp time would be a possibility to allow personnel to participate in this type of effort.

	<p>Explore facilitating events or meetings to bring CBOs together for the purpose of sharing information and strengthening collaboration with NNPD.</p> <p>56 Many community leaders desire this type of organized effort, particularly when it allows them to learn more about NNPD’s priorities and how CBOs can work with NNPD to accomplish shared goals. For example, one CBO leader said they would like to know how nonprofit organizations can be part of NNPD’s planning and whether there is a meeting for community-based partners. This leader said, “NNPD could bring us in to make partnerships more meaningful, particularly with smaller organizations.”</p>
	<p>Establish a formal position to serve as liaison between NNPD and CBOs.</p> <p>Guidelines include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBOs should know who this person is and how to connect with them. • The liaison should engage in proactive outreach to CBOs, starting with those in the community inventory included in the Project CLEARs report, to connect and learn how to facilitate increased information sharing and partnerships. • Consider having the liaison attend the quarterly GVIP grantee meetings to share information with these groups and coordinate around shared goals. <p>57</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The liaison could also help organize and facilitate more formal mechanisms for information sharing between NNPD and CBOs. • The liaison must be someone who the CBOs can trust and who can be discreet with sensitive information. CBOs want to ensure that working with the liaison will not result in losing trust and credibility within the community. • The liaison should reach out to partner CBOs when a shooting occurs. This would allow the CBO staff to have a presence at every shooting scene to engage with community members and potential witnesses, provide a calming presence, and serve as a bridge between NNPD and the community.
	<p>Expand the Level Up program in partnership with the Newport News School System.</p> <p>58 Early evaluation of the program shows positive results among its youth participants, including improved behaviors and increased positive perceptions of law enforcement. NNPD should work to identify funding to support an expansion and evaluation of the program.</p>
	<p>Connect with CBOs involved in community violence intervention work.</p> <p>59 NNPD should make efforts to better understand the work of violence interrupters who are striving to intervene in near-term violence. Allow CBOs who work in this space to educate NNPD investigators about the purpose of community violence intervention and identify opportunities to collaborate and share information with them in a way that is actionable for violence interrupters while maintaining the credibility of CBOs within the community. The NCCP and CLEARs assessment team can provide connections to peer sites where law enforcement and community violence intervention programs have developed processes to better work together and share information.</p>

6. Conclusion

The NCCP assessment of NNPD's response to homicides and nonfatal shootings revealed that the department has taken many positive steps toward strengthening its investigations. The agency is staffed with hardworking and dedicated personnel, there is effective communication and coordination between investigative and support units, and NNPD has forged strong partnerships with prosecutors and members of the community. The recommendations in this report are intended to build upon this solid foundation and to help NNPD strengthen its practices. The NCCP team will work with NNPD to determine which recommendations the department can address and will support NNPD as it implements and evaluates agency changes.

7. References

- Brunson, R. K., Braga, A. A., Hureau, D. M., & Pegram, K. (2015). We trust you, but not that much: Examining police-Black clergy partnerships to reduce youth violence. *Justice Quarterly*, 32(6), 1006-1036.
- Carter, D. L. (2013). *Homicide process mapping: Best practices for increasing homicide clearances*. Institute for Intergovernmental Research. Retrieved from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/bja/grants/243969.pdf>
- COPS. (2009). *The stop snitching phenomenon: Breaking the code of silence*. <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/RIC/Publications/cops-p158-pub.pdf>
- Department, N. N. P. (2023). *Newport News Police Department 2023 Annual Report*. <https://www.nnva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/35957/2023-Annual-Report-for-Website?bidId>
- National Crime Victim Law Institute. (2021). *Select victims' rights – North Carolina*. Retrieved from <https://ncvli.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/North-Carolina-Select-Victims-Rights-last-updated-2021.pdf> ↗
- Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. (2018). *Promising strategies for strengthening homicide investigations*. Retrieved from <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/homicideinvestigations.pdf> ↗
- Wellford, C., & Cronin, J. (1999). *An analysis of variables affecting the clearance of homicides: A multistate study*. Retrieved from <https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/analysis-variables-affecting-clearance-homicides-multisite-study>
- Wellford, C. F. (2018). *Organizing for effective homicide investigations*. Retrieved from <https://centerforimprovinginvestigations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Organizing-for-Effective-Homicide-Investigations-Wellford-May-2018-NRTAC.pdf> ↗