National Case Closed Project
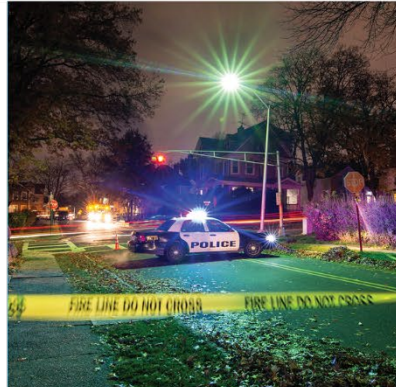
Response to Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings Assessment

Final Report

April 2025

Roanoke (VA) Police Department

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Executive Summary

In 2024, The Roanoke Police Department (RPD) in Virginia 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 RPD's policies and practices related to its initial response to, and follow-up investigation of, fatal and nonfatal shootings. The assessment included a review of RPD policies, a review of fatal and nonfatal shooting case files, on-site observations of facilities and equipment, and personnel interviews with RPD personnel and personnel within external partner agencies including prosecutors and leaders of community organizations.

The assessment team found that RPD is staffed with dedicated, talented, hardworking personnel who are committed to serving the people of Roanoke. Overall, when it comes to investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings, RPD is doing many things "right." As discussed in more detail throughout this report, some of the agency's promising practices include:

- Ensuring that caseloads are manageable and evenly distributed among detectives.
- Reinstating a formal cold case investigations process.
- Having supervisors and leaders within the Major Crimes Unit (MCU) with investigative experience.
- Implementing "Shoot Teams" of detectives from non-MCU units who respond to the scene of each shooting and support MCU investigators.
- Supporting a detective response to nonfatal shootings.
- Using the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) in shooting investigations.
- Ensuring that crime analysts have ample training.
- Participating in initiatives with federal, state, and local partners to reduce violent crime, such as the Star City Drug and Violent Crime Task Force.
- Strengthening the focus on community engagement, which saw members of the agency's Community Response Bureau (CRB) more than double its documented number of engagement activities since 2023.
- Implementing the Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of Trauma (RESET) program, which provides resources and support to community members in areas that have recently experienced shootings or other traumatic events.

The recommendations in this report are intended to help RPD build upon these strengths and support the agency and its accompanying partners in optimizing their response to fatal and nonfatal shootings. The following list of topics highlights the assessment team's findings and recommendations:

- **Policies and Procedures**. This report provides recommendations for ensuring that written policies and procedures adequately offer guidance for those involved in violent crime investigations. This includes developing a comprehensive, user-friendly manual for investigating homicides and nonfatal shootings, as well as ensuring that written policies establish clear expectations for the roles and responsibilities of each unit.

- **Investigator Training and Supervision**. MCU investigator caseloads appear manageable, and overall leadership and supervision of detectives seems quite strong. Recommendations in this area include implementing a formal supervisory case review process and providing advanced and targeted training on homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations.

- **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 overall case file cohesion and standardization, including adopting the "Murder Book" model developed by the Los Angeles Police Department.

- **Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings.** To improve the effectiveness of shooting investigations, report recommendations focus on developing and using a standard case checklist of investigative tasks, continuing to ensure that detectives respond to every nonfatal shooting scene, and having written procedures that provide detailed directions for all units and individuals who respond to shooting scenes.

- **Internal Communication and Coordination.** Collaboration and communication between various units within a police agency can be critical to an effective investigation. Recommendations include strengthening formal information-sharing protocols between detectives and patrol officers outside the initial scene response and holding an internal weekly violent crime meeting.

- **Physical and Firearms Evidence.** RPD recently began hiring civilian forensic investigators and currently has a "hybrid" model, with sworn and civilian forensic investigators working in teams of two. The agency should develop a comprehensive plan for using and integrating the civilian forensic investigators moving forward. This section also provides detailed recommendations for establishing a Crime Gun Intelligence Center and process flow for NIBIN.

- **Digital Evidence.** It appears that detectives effectively use digital evidence in their investigations. Recommendations for strengthening this area include creating a separate, centralized Digital Evidence Unit and considering investing in technology for processing digital evidence in-house.

- **Crime Analysis.** The crime analysts who work in I-STAR (Intelligence, Statistics, Technology, Analysis, and Research) manage a variety of responsibilities and have received an impressive amount of advanced training. RPD must take steps to ensure that crime analysts are being effectively used in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations, and the agency should also explore strategies for improving retention among analysts. The report also includes recommendations for using analysts within the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC), which is currently in development.

- **Case Prosecution.** RPD and its prosecutorial partners should work together to implement cross-training on what constitutes a viable case for prosecution. This includes training on building cases using circumstantial evidence, recognizing the value of using federal resources to assist with shooting investigations, and understanding the impact that prosecutorial decisions have on community engagement.

- **Community Engagement.** The assessment team learned that RPD has been working toward strengthening its community engagement efforts and expanding its outreach to victims, families, and the community at large. This is exemplified by the efforts of the agency's CRB, initiatives such as the RESET program and the monthly Chief's Walk, and the newly implemented Group Violence Intervention Program. The report provides recommendations for building upon these efforts to further improve community engagement, services to victims and witnesses, and community participation in investigations.

1. Shooting Response Assessment Overview

1.1 Introduction

In 2024, RPD applied for and was accepted into the NCCP, an initiative led by 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 and increasing their clearance rates for these crimes. This report describes the methods used to assess RPD's response to shootings and provides recommendations for agency changes that are based on findings from the assessment and evidence-informed best practices. The NCCP supports training and technical assistance for each participating site to assist with the implementation and evaluation of project recommendations.

RPD is also participating in Project CLEARS (Community-Law Enforcement Alignment to Resolve Shootings), an initiative supported by Arnold Ventures. The initiative, which is intended to complement the NCCP assessment, allows for a deeper dive into RPD's community engagement activities. Specifically, Project CLEARS supports additional input from community-based organizations (CBOs) and residents to guide increased community participation in gun violence prevention and response in partnership with RPD, with a specific emphasis on leveraging CBOs to increase victim and witness participation in violent crime investigations. Additional information about RPD's community engagement efforts and the community's perceptions of the department is included in a separate Project CLEARS report.

1.2   Violent Crime in Roanoke

RPD serves the City of Roanoke, Virginia, which is the largest city in the southwestern part of the state. The City of Roanoke is an independent city that, while geographically located within Roanoke County, is not considered part of the county. Roanoke has a population of nearly 100,000 residents and covers an area of approximately 43 square miles.

The number of homicides in Roanoke climbed from 13 incidents in 2019 to 28 incidents in 2023. The number of aggravated assaults (including nonfatal shootings) also increased during that period, from 231 in 2019 to 402 in 2023. The 2023 numbers represented a record high in the city for both homicides and aggravated assaults. At the same time, homicide clearance rates dropped from 84% in 2019 to 68% in 2023, while clearance rates for aggravated assaults fell from 75% in 2019 to 65% in 2023. The assessment team was told that most gun violence in Roanoke results from interpersonal conflicts, domestic violence cases, robberies, and local gang/group activity.

1.3   Roanoke Police Department

At the time of this assessment, RPD had 198 sworn and 56 civilian personnel. The agency is divided into four bureaus: the Patrol Operations Bureau and Investigative Operations Bureau, both of which fall under the Deputy Chief of Operations, and the CRB and Special Operations Bureau, both of which fall under the Deputy Chief for Services. Each of the four bureaus is led by a captain. The assessment team learned that there have been many changes at RPD in recent years, including the selection of a new police chief in October 2023.

The responsibility of investigating violent crime falls to the Investigative Operations Bureau, which is further divided into the Criminal Investigations and Special Investigations divisions, each of which is led by a lieutenant. Criminal Investigations includes the Special Victims Unit, the Property Crimes Unit, and the Forensic Services Unit (FSU). Special Investigations includes the MCU, the Narcotics and Organized Crime (NOC) Unit, the Gang Unit, and the Violence Suppression Unit.

The MCU is responsible for investigating homicides, aggravated assaults (including nonfatal shootings), robberies, suspicious deaths (including suicides and some overdoses), and any other major person-

related felony. At the time of this assessment, MCU was staffed by a sergeant, seven full-time detectives, and one part-time retired detective who handles cold cases. One MCU detective is primarily tasked with processing and analyzing evidence from cell phones, while the detective who handles computer crimes is assigned to the Special Victims Unit.

The FSU is led by a sergeant who reports to the Criminal Investigations lieutenant. The FSU is composed of five sworn and four civilian forensic investigators, one full-time latent fingerprint analyst, and one part-time fingerprint analyst. A civilian digital evidence technician also reports to the FSU sergeant.

RPD also has a crime analysis function that is located in a unit called I-STAR, which reports directly to the Deputy Chief of Operations. I-STAR comprises four civilian crime analysts and one civilian supervisor; however, the assessment team learned that two analysts would soon be leaving RPD.

The agency's CRB is led by a captain and includes the Community Engagement Team (CET), which is led by a lieutenant and includes a sergeant, two full-time community resource officers (CROs), and one part-time CRO.

RPD enjoys many strong relationships with local, state, and federal law enforcement and prosecutorial partners. For example, RPD works closely with the Virginia State Police (VSP) on a number of initiatives, including the Star City Drug and Violent Crime Task Force. The agency also partners with several CBOs, local businesses and schools, and other city agencies on efforts focused on reducing violent crime in Roanoke.

2.   Assessment Methods

As part of the NCCP, RPD received an in-depth assessment to understand how the department responds to fatal and nonfatal shootings and to identify strengths and weaknesses in its response. This information is meant to be used to make improvements that will be supported with customized training and technical assistance. The assessment was directed at fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations conducted by MCU detectives, but data collection took place throughout the agency and some findings may be relevant to other units within RPD.

The RPD 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:

- Review of relevant policies and procedures related to RPD's response to fatal and nonfatal shootings
- On-site observation of facilities, equipment, and personnel interactions
- Interviews with RPD personnel and external partners
- 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 RPD'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. RPD 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 and equipment related to RPD's shooting response while on-site, including through a guided tour of the department. The assessment team also observed a weekly Crime Strategy Meeting while on-site.

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 RPD and those from external agencies and organizations. The assessment team identified staff positions for the interviews and coordinated with RPD 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 are available to RPD or its partners upon request.

The assessment team first met with RPD 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, i**nterviews were conducted with Investigative Operations Bureau supervisors and detectives, Patrol Operations Bureau supervisors and officers, FSU personnel, RPD crime analysts, members of RPD's CRB, prosecutors from the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office, and stakeholders from relevant CBOs. To identify community stakeholders, the assessment team worked with the Captain of RPD's CRB.

Table 2.1.   Personnel Interviews Completed

Agency Affiliation	Role	Number
Roanoke Police Department	Command Staff	5
Roanoke Police Department	Major Crimes Unit Detectives and Supervisors	6
Roanoke Police Department	Forensic Services Unit	5
Roanoke Police Department	Crime Analysis	2
Roanoke Police Department	Victim Advocate Unit	1
Roanoke Police Department	Patrol Supervisors and Officers	2
Roanoke Police Department	Community Response Bureau	3
Roanoke Police Department	Special Victims Unit (Computer Crimes Detective)	1
Roanoke Police Department	Gang Unit	1
Roanoke Police Department	Violence Suppression Unit	2
West Palm Beach Police Department	Investigators and Supervisors	2

(continued)

Table 2.2. Personnel Interviews Completed (continued)

Agency Affiliation	Role	Number
U.S. Attorney's Office	Assistant U.S. Attorney	1
Roanoke Commonwealth's Attorney's Office	Prosecutor	1
Various Community-Based Organizations	Leaders and Advocates	4

2.4   Case File Review

Finally, the assessment team reviewed a random sample of investigative case files for 33 fatal shooting incidents and 35 nonfatal shooting incidents that were reported to RPD in the years 2020–2023. For each case, we recorded over 100 pieces of information about the crime and agency response to understand common features of shootings in Roanoke and the types of actions taken by RPD 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 MCU personnel to further understand how RPD 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 up-to-date guidance (Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2018). The assessment team reviewed RPD's policies and procedures that are related to homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. RPD produced 17 Operational Directives for review that cover topics such as departmental organization, follow-up investigations, the use of body-worn cameras, and evidentiary procedures.

The assessment team found that these directives were quite general and were largely focused on the operational structure and the basic responsibilities of various units. The directives provided little detailed guidance on the investigative process or the tasks that personnel must complete when responding to homicides or nonfatal shootings. Thus, the recommendations in these sections are aimed at improving RPD's policies to provide more detailed instruction to RPD staff involved in the response to fatal and nonfatal shootings.

3.1   Policies and Procedures Recommendations

The assessment team identified the following areas where RPD's procedures governing homicide and nonfatal shootings investigations could be strengthened. Our recommendations include:

3.1.1 Major Crimes Unit

Recommendations	1	**Develop a comprehensive, user-friendly manual for the MCU that includes all relevant policies, checklists, and other written materials that govern responsibilities related to homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations.**

The purpose of the manual is to provide detailed direction for all units and individuals at RPD who are involved in fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations, including but not limited to 911 call takers, first officer(s) on the scene, patrol officers and supervisors, detectives and their supervisors, forensics personnel, support units, crime analysts, and victim assistance personnel. The assessment team recommends developing a separate manual for homicide investigations and a separate manual for nonfatal shooting investigations.[1]

The manual should be organized into clearly marked sections and include a table of contents. It should address both the initial response and the follow-up investigation and should include specific duties and responsibilities for each member involved. It should also include an investigative checklist of basic tasks that officers and detectives must consider or complete when investigating each crime type.

RPD's Operational Directive 42.1.4 (Follow-Up Investigations) sets forth the responsibilities of officers and detectives when they are conducting follow-up investigations. The manual and checklists described in this recommendation should expand upon Directive 42.1.4 and 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 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 notification, which should be trauma-informed and victim-centered.
- 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, and recovering and submitting physical and digital evidence.
- Specific guidelines for engaging with victims and families, including procedures for: developing a communication plan, developing timelines for initial and follow-up communications, providing case status updates, making required notifications and contacts with victims and their families, documenting contacts with victims and their families, and collaborating with RPD victim advocates. Procedures should require detectives to inform victims' families about the victim advocate position and provide the advocate's contact information.
- Policies for communicating and sharing information with internal units (e.g., patrol officers, crime analysts, forensics personnel, digital evidence personnel, victim advocates) and external partners (e.g., prosecutors, crime labs, task forces, community and victim advocacy groups).
- Case documentation and case file requirements.
- The use of traditional and social media, including protocols for releasing video footage to the public.

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[1] RPD could obtain some sample manuals, policies, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) from other police departments to provide guidance on creating policies and practices that are consistent with best practices, RPD's departmental regulations, and state and federal laws. The NCCP team can assist with this. In formulating the manual, it is important to obtain input from detectives, supervisors, attorneys, and all other stakeholders. This will ensure that the SOP correctly addresses all necessary considerations and will also ensure that stakeholders buy into the SOP protocols.

- Policies and protocols for investigating specific types of homicides and nonfatal shootings, including mass shootings, infant deaths, suspicious deaths, officer-involved shootings, and cold cases.
- Investigating cold cases.
- Mandated case reviews, including the timeline and expectations for review.
- Supervisor duties and responsibilities, including requirements for holding regular, formal case reviews.
- Sample forms, reports, and warrants, among other documents, with guidance on how to fill them out.

The NCCP team can provide RPD with sample policies and SOPs to help implement this recommendation and create a manual that is consistent with best practices, departmental regulations, and state and federal law. In developing this manual, it is important to obtain input from detectives, supervisors, attorneys, and all other stakeholders. This will help ensure that the manual correctly addresses all necessary aspects and improve buy-in from necessary stakeholders.

2	**Provide each detective with a copy of the manual upon joining MCU.** All MCU staff should receive a copy of the manual and any other relevant procedures and be trained on their contents. The goal of the manual is to serve as a resource to facilitate a comprehensive, thorough, and consistent investigative process and as clear guidance for agency expectations and accountability. RPD staff involved in homicide/nonfatal shooting investigations but who are not part of MCU (e.g., patrol officers) should also be provided with access to the manual.
3	**Regularly review and update the manuals and other procedures every 3 to 5 years to ensure they are up to date.** To ensure a regular review and update process, it should be clarified who at RPD will be responsible for overseeing this process including when it occurs in the calendar.
4	**Include supervisory review requirements and guidelines in the MCU policies and manuals (see Recommendation 13).** The requirements and guidelines for conducting formal supervisory review of cases should be included in MCU policies and manuals. Recommendation 13 provides details for what supervisory reviews should include and the purpose that these reviews serve.

3.1.2 Other Investigative Policies

Recommendations		
	5	**Update Operational Directive 42.1.1 (Criminal Investigations Function) to reflect the current organizational chart and structure of the Investigative Operations Bureau.** The NCCP team noticed that Operational Directive 42.1.1 appears to be out of date in this regard.
	6	**Revise Operational Directive 44.2.2 (Cold Case Investigations) to reflect a system of prioritizing cold cases based on a ranking of solvability factors.** Recommendation 25 provides additional details on what the solvability factors should include and how they should be used to triage cold case investigations.

3.1.3 Forensic Services Unit

Recommendations	**7**	**Update the following language in Operational Directive 83.1.1 (Evidentiary Protocol):** **Section III.3.D** • *Current language:* "Digital photography will be the usual medium for all Department photographs. Under unusual circumstances 35mm photographs may be taken." • *Recommended change:* The phrase "usual medium" is vague and should either be clarified or removed. Delete the language about 35mm photographs if RPD does not have 35mm cameras (or if they are not readily available), if forensic investigators are not properly trained in the use of 35mm cameras, or if film for such cameras is not available. **Section VI.B.5** • *Current language:* "An FI will allow the officer into the drying closet to air dry items, and then the collecting officer will be allowed to return within 48 hours, or once the item is dry, to final package the evidence, thus preserving the potential DNA evidence." • *Recommended change:* This is an effective practice to ensure items are properly preserved for DNA or other forensic testing and analysis; however, it is extremely important to clean the drying chambers after each use. Failure to do so may lead to cross-contamination of evidence. It would be helpful to add that the drying chamber should be properly cleaned after each use.
	8	**Update the following language in Operational Directive 84.1.1 (Physical Evidence, Storage, and Procedures):** **Section IV.4.J** • *Current language:* Section II.C.1 defines inventoried property as "any property or items whose ownership is known or unknown, may or may not be evidence related to any criminal activity and is property being held for evidentiary purposes or for the purpose of safeguarding a person's property." Section IV.4.J states that "Multiple items of inventoried property from the same incident may be packaged together pursuant to this Operational Directive. Officers will remove and package any monies, firearms, valuables or drug items individually and place those items in the appropriate storage location pursuant to this Operational Directive." • *Recommended change:* In Section IV.4.J, for items that should be removed and packaged individually, it would be helpful to include "items that may be processed later by the FSU or other forensic entity." This would help preserve the integrity of evidence items that may be subjected to processing for things such as DNA, fingerprints, and trace evidence.

4.   Case File Review Findings

By reviewing and coding the investigative case narratives for a sample of fatal and nonfatal shootings, the assessment team was able to evaluate key aspects of shootings in Roanoke; RPD's response to these shootings, including its initial response and follow-up investigations, and case outcomes. Case narratives for a random sample of 31 fatal shooting incidents, 35 nonfatal shooting incidents, and 2 incidents involving both a fatal and nonfatal shooting that occurred during the years 2020–2023 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 RPD had a data use agreement in place that met the data security standards of both RTI and RPD, and RTI adhered to this agreement when storing and accessing case files for review and analysis. Members of the assessment team reviewed case narratives for each of these 68 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 from the case narratives using a set of predetermined data metrics. The data collection instrument and codebook used to code investigative case files are available to RPD or its partners upon request. Table 4.1 provides RPD with an understanding of the types of shootings reviewed by the NCCP team, while Table 4.2 provides RPD with an understanding of its response to these shootings, as documented in the case narratives.

Table 4.1.   Incident Characteristics, by Type of Shooting

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Total number of cases reviewed	35	33
Number of guns fired		
1	26 (74%)	26 (79%)
2	5 (14%)	4 (12%)
More than 2	2 (6%)	2 (6%)
Unknown	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
Type of gun used[a]		
Handgun	23 (66%)	29 (88%)
Rifle	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Shotgun	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Unknown	15 (43%)	5 (15%)
Median number of rounds fired	2.0	6.0
Location of shooting		
Street/outdoors	18 (51%)	18 (55%)
Inside residence	5 (14%)	6 (18%)
Inside vehicle	6 (17%)	6 (18%)
Other	5 (14%)	3 (9%)
Unknown	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Number of victims		
1	29 (83%)	31 (94%)
2	3 (9%)	1 (3%)
More than 2	3 (9%)	1 (3%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Victim sex[a]		
Male	29 (83%)	29 (88%)
Female	11 (31%)	5 (15%)
Victim race[a]		
Black	28 (80%)	27 (82%)
White	6 (17%)	6 (18%)
Hispanic	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Median victim age (years)	29	29
Number of suspects at end of investigation		
1	26 (74%)	25 (76%)
2	3 (9%)	3 (9%)
More than 2	3 (9%)	3 (9%)
Unknown	3 (9%)	1 (3%)
Final suspect sex[a]		
Male	23 (66%)	28 (85%)
Female	6 (17%)	2 (6%)
Final suspect race[a]		
Black	22 (63%)	25 (76%)
White	6 (17%)	5 (15%)
Hispanic	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Median final suspect age (years)	22	26
Primary relationship between victims and offenders		
Current/former intimate partner	4 (11%)	3 (9%)
Family member	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
Friend/acquaintance	12 (34%)	20 (61%)
Stranger	8 (23%)	1 (3%)
Rival gang/clique member	2 (6%)	2 (6%)
Other relationship	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Unknown	8 (23%)	5 (15%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Primary motive for shooting		
Domestic abuse	2 (6%)	3 (9%)
Rivalry over lover	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Conflict over money	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Drug-related	2 (6%)	2 (6%)
Gang-related	6 (17%)	4 (12%)
Robbery	3 (9%)	3 (9%)
Shot inadvertently or self-defense	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
Related to "snitching"	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
Other	9 (26%)	11 (33%)
Unknown	10 (29%)	6 (18%)
Clearance status		
Open/inactive	18 (51%)	11 (33%)
Cleared by arrest or exceptional means	16 (46%)	22 (67%)

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

Table 4.2. RPD Response Characteristics, by Type of Shooting

Response Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Total number of cases reviewed	35	33
Number of patrol officers who responded to scene		
1–4	6 (17%)	2 (6%)
5–9	15 (43%)	20 (61%)
10+	14 (40%)	11 (33%)
Patrol supervisor responded to scene		
No	10 (29%)	3 (9%)
Yes	25 (71%)	30 (91%)
Number of detectives who responded to scene		
0	10 (29%)	0 (0%)
1	8 (23%)	2 (6%)
2	8 (23%)	13 (39%)
3	1 (3%)	11 (33%)
4	0 (0%)	5 (15%)
5+	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
Unknown	6 (17%)	1 (3%)
Detective supervisor responded to scene		
No	26 (74%)	17 (52%)
Yes	3 (9%)	13 (39%)
Unknown	6 (17%)	3 (9%)
Evidence collected at scene		
No	4 (11%)	0 (0%)
Yes	31 (89%)	33 (100%)
Type of evidence collected at scene[a]		
DNA/bodily fluids	5 (14%)	24 (73%)
Latent prints	7 (20%)	16 (48%)
Pattern evidence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Trace evidence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Suspect firearm	5 (14%)	9 (27%)
Bullets	14 (40%)	25 (76%)
Casings	29 (83%)	29 (88%)
Clothing	15 (43%)	27 (82%)

(continued)

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

Response Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Electronics	15 (43%)	28 (85%)
Digital	20 (57%)	27 (82%)
Drugs	3 (9%)	5 (15%)
Other	2 (6%)	5 (15%)
Victim statement obtained		
No or not applicable	2 (6%)	31 (94%)
Yes	33 (94%)	2 (6%)
Victim participated/cooperated in investigation during initial response		
No or not applicable	17 (48%)	31 (94%)
Yes	18 (51%)	2 (6%)
Number of third-party witnesses		
0	6 (17%)	2 (6%)
1	13 (37%)	3 (9%)
2	6 (17%)	4 (12%)
3	3 (9%)	5 (15%)
4+	7 (20%)	19 (58%)
Witness statement obtained		
No or not applicable	7 (20%)	3 (9%)
Yes	28 (80%)	30 (91%)
Witness participated/cooperated in investigation during initial response		
No or not applicable	7 (20%)	4 (12%)
Yes	28 (80%)	29 (88%)
A suspect identified at time of response		
No	15 (43%)	5 (15%)
Yes	20 (57%)	28 (85%)
Suspect identification at time of response[a]		
Police identified	5 (14%)	7 (21%)
Victim or witness identified	15 (43%)	19 (58%)
Other identification	1 (3%)	2 (6%)

(continued)

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

Response Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Identifying information on a suspect vehicle at time of response		
No	26 (74%)	18 (55%)
Yes	9 (26%)	15 (45%)
Number of days until first detective activity		
0	21 (60%)	29 (88%)
1	2 (6%)	4 (12%)
2	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
3+	7 (20%)	0 (0%)
Unknown	3 (9%)	0 (0%)
Investigator(s) contacted victim(s)		
No or not applicable	7 (20%)	30 (91%)
Yes	28 (80%)	3 (9%)
In person	23	2
Not in person	5	0
Unknown	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Victim participated/cooperated in investigation after initial unwillingness to		
No or not applicable	34 (97%)	33 (100%)
Yes	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Detective contacted third-party witnesses identified at scene		
No or not applicable	15 (43%)	4 (12%)
Yes	19 (54%)	29 (88%)
In person	19	29
Not in person	0	0
Unknown	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Witness participated/cooperated in investigation after initial unwillingness to		
No or not applicable	35 (100%)	28 (85%)
Yes	0 (0%)	5 (15%)

(continued)

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

Response Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Initial leads on motive		
No	13 (37%)	1 (3%)
Yes	22 (63%)	32 (97%)
Confidential informant(s) came forward with information		
No	35 (100%)	33 (100%)
Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Specialized unit(s) helped with investigation[a]		
Fugitive	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Gang/Narcotics	1 (3%)	2 (6%)
Real-time task force	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Intelligence/Fusion	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Crime analysis	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Crime lab	27 (77%)	31 (94%)
Victim advocate	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Other	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
External resources/partners helped with investigation[a]		
Federal law enforcement	6 (17%)	9 (27%)
Local/state law enforcement	4 (11%)	18 (55%)
Real Time Crime Center (RTCC)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Regional fusion/intelligence center	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Community-/faith-based organization	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Public tip line	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Technologies used in investigation[a]		
Hidden recording device	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
License plate reader	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Facial recognition	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Social network data	3 (9%)	14 (42%)
Gunshot detection	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Firearm/toolmark identification	20 (57%)	29 (88%)
Gun trace	6 (17%)	8 (24%)
Digital data	4 (11%)	25 (76%)

(continued)

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

Response Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Video data	5 (14%)	5 (15%)
IMSI-catcher or geofence	0 (0%)	5 (15%)
Cell phone location	4 (11%)	16 (48%)
Vehicle computer data	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Social media investigated		
No	31 (89%)	14 (42%)
Yes	4 (11%)	19 (58%)
Suspect cell phone investigated		
No	31 (89%)	17 (52%)
Yes	4 (11%)	16 (48%)
Search warrant executed		
No	24 (69%)	0 (0%)
Yes	11 (31%)	33 (100%)
Community group/leader asked to help with investigation		
No	35 (100%)	33 (100%)
Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Investigator made further contact with patrol officer(s) who responded to scene?		
No	35 (100%)	33 (100%)
Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Suspect interviewed by an investigator		
No	27 (77%)	7 (21%)
Yes	8 (23%)	26 (79%)
Suspect confessed to the crime		
No	31 (89%)	22 (67%)
Yes	4 (11%)	11 (33%)

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

Several notable findings stand out in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. First, fatal and nonfatal shootings seem to differ on several characteristics related to the incident. For example, based on the sample of cases we reviewed, more rounds are typically fired in fatal shootings compared with nonfatal shootings, fatal shootings more often involve a single victim compared with nonfatal shootings (94% and 82%, respectively), and, compared with fatal shootings, nonfatal shootings more often involve a female victim (31% compared with 15% of incidents) and female suspect (17% compared with 6% of incidents). More

importantly, based on findings in Table 4.2, one can see large differences in RPD's response to fatal shootings compared with nonfatal shootings.

One large difference involves the on-scene response. Namely, more patrol officers, patrol supervisors, detectives, and detective supervisors responded to the scene of fatal shootings compared with nonfatal shootings. For example, in none of the fatal shooting incidents we reviewed did a detective fail to respond to the scene. This is compared with 29% of the nonfatal shooting incidents where no detective responded to the scene. When a detective did respond to a nonfatal shooting scene, it was typically one (23% of incidents) or two (23% of incidents) detectives who responded. Three or more detectives responded to a nonfatal shooting scene in only 9% of cases compared with 51% of fatal shooting cases. As with the on-scene response, the two shooting types differed in the number of days that passed until a detective's first activity on the case. In fact, a detective began working on the case within 1 day of the incident being reported in all the fatal shooting cases we reviewed. This is compared with nonfatal shootings, where in 26% of the cases we reviewed, a detective did not begin working on the case until 2 or more days had passed since the incident report. Importantly, research has found a positive correlation between the number of investigators and other staff that respond to a murder scene and the likelihood of case clearance (Wellford et al., 2019). Thus, RPD would likely see an improvement in its nonfatal shooting clearance rate if similar labor resources were applied to nonfatal shooting scenes as they are to fatal shooting scenes.

Another notable finding from Table 4.2 is that RPD appears to underuse resources in its shooting investigations, regardless of the type of shooting. Compared with other agencies we have worked with, RPD has fewer instances of specialized unit assistance, external partner assistance, and technology use in fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations. When resources are applied to shooting investigations, it appears that they are more often applied to fatal shooting investigations compared with nonfatal shooting investigations. For example, despite casings being recovered in 29 incidents for both fatal and nonfatal shootings, firearm/toolmark identification (e.g., NIBIN) was used in only 20 nonfatal shooting incidents compared with its use in all 29 fatal shooting incidents. Similarly, technologies to process or analyze digital evidence were used in only 4 nonfatal shooting investigations despite digital evidence being collected from the scene of 20 nonfatal shooting incidents. Among the 33 fatal shooting investigations, technologies for digital evidence were used in 25 cases. In addition, social media was investigated in 11% of nonfatal shooting cases compared with 58% of fatal shooting cases, and social network data were analyzed in 9% of nonfatal shooting cases compared with 42% of fatal shooting cases. These findings, along with findings related to the on-scene response, suggest that RPD should work toward applying similar investigative resources to nonfatal shootings as it does to fatal shootings to improve its nonfatal shooting clearance rate (Braga, 2021).

In addition to the findings described in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, for each case we recorded the following: (1) the investigative components that seemed to have contributed to case clearance for those cases that were cleared and (2) the investigative components that may have produced new investigative leads if they had received additional investigative attention.

Among the 16 nonfatal shooting incidents that were cleared by arrest or by exceptional means, participation by a witness or victim contributed the most to case clearance (10 of 16 cases). Other important factors included the presence of audiovisual evidence (6 of 16 cases) and suspect vehicle

information (5 of 16 cases). A fast response to the scene seemed to contribute to case clearance in 4 of the 16 cases. Among the 22 fatal shooting incidents that were cleared by arrest or by exceptional means, participation by a witness or surviving victim contributed the most to case clearance (21 of 22 cases). Other important factors to case clearance included suspect vehicle information (9 of 22 cases), ballistic evidence or a NIBIN lead (8 of 22 cases), cell phone data (8 of 22 cases), audiovisual evidence (7 of 22 cases), and a fast response to the scene (7 of 22 cases).

Regarding investigative components that may have produced new investigative leads if they had received additional investigative attention, the assessment team concluded that more investigative attention could have benefited 20 (57%) of the 35 nonfatal shooting cases and 11 (33%) of the 33 fatal shooting cases we reviewed. For the nonfatal shooting incidents, the assessment team found that all 20 of these cases would have benefited from additional follow-up with witnesses and/or victims, and 18 of the cases would have benefited from additional follow-up with a suspect. In 17 of the 20 cases, it appeared that leads could have been produced if the department appealed to the public for information. In 9 cases, it seemed that a victim advocate would have benefited the investigation and in 7 cases, additional technologies could have been used to produce a lead. For the 11 fatal shooting cases where the assessment team felt additional investigative activities would have benefited the case, these activities most often included further suspect follow-up (11 cases), appeals to the public for information (10 cases), and further follow-up with witnesses or surviving victims (9 cases).

A few things stand out from the findings summarized in the paragraphs above. First is the value of witness/victim participation in shooting investigations and the finding that more effort could have been applied to additional follow-up with witnesses or victims in a significant number of the shooting cases we reviewed, especially in the nonfatal shooting cases. Based on findings from Table 4.2, a nonfatal shooting victim participated or cooperated in the investigation at the time of the initial response in only 51% of cases. Additionally, in only one nonfatal shooting incident did a victim decide to cooperate or participate in the investigation after initially being unwilling to. One way of increasing victim participation is by building trust with the victim, which can be accomplished in part by meeting with a victim in person. Of the nonfatal shooting cases we reviewed, in 5 of 28 cases involving detective contact with the victim during the follow-up investigation the contact(s) was by telephone only. In Section 5, we recommend that RPD ensures that detectives follow-up with victims in person whenever possible.

It seems likely that RPD can improve its nonfatal shooting clearance rate by increasing the effort dedicated to victim follow-up and by applying best practices to build trust with shooting victims (and witnesses). We discuss these issues further in Section 5. RPD must also work diligently to protect the victims or witnesses who do participate in an investigation. Notably, the motive in two fatal shootings involved the victim sharing information with law enforcement (i.e., "snitching"). If the community feels that it is dangerous to participate in a shooting investigation, they are unlikely to do so. Section 5.9 discusses actions to combat no-snitching attitudes and protect victims and witnesses.

Second is the value of digital and ballistic evidence in shooting investigations and the importance of applying technologies to analyze them. These technologies contributed to case clearance in a significant number of the cleared fatal shooting incidents we reviewed. If these technologies had been applied more often in nonfatal shooting cases (see technology section in Table 4.2), it seems likely that more of these cases would have been cleared. Third is the finding that (1) in no case we reviewed was a community

group or leader asked to help with the investigation, and (2) appealing to the public for information was often cited by the assessment team as an activity that may have produced a new investigative lead. The NCCP team can support RPD in increasing its reliance on both community organizations/leaders and the public in shooting investigations. Additionally, through its participation in Project CLEARS, RTI has provided RPD with a separate report that further discusses the department's community engagement efforts and opportunities for expanding these efforts.

5. Findings from the Site Visit

5.1 Agency Resources and Workload

5.1.1 Staffing and Organization

The assessment team found that overall the MCU is properly staffed and well-organized. As discussed throughout this report, MCU's response to crime scenes is strong and detective caseloads are manageable.

RPD's Investigative Operations Bureau is led by a captain and is divided into two divisions, each of which is led by a lieutenant. The Criminal Investigations division includes the Special Victims Unit, Property Crimes Unit, and Forensic Services Unit, while the Special Investigations division includes MCU, the NOC Unit, the Gang Unit, and the Violence Suppression Unit. At the time of this assessment, all RPD operations, including its investigative units, were centralized at RPD's headquarters.

The MCU is responsible for investigating homicides, aggravated assaults (including nonfatal shootings), robberies, and suspicious deaths (including suicides and some overdoses), as well as any other major person-related felony. At the time of this assessment, MCU was staffed by a sergeant, seven full-time detectives, and one part-time retired detective who handles cold cases. One MCU detective is primarily tasked with processing and analyzing evidence from cell phones.

MCU detectives work in two-person teams, with a lead and secondary detective assigned to every homicide. The MCU has an on-call rotation system in which each two-person team is on call for 2 weeks or until a homicide occurs on their rotation, after which they are relieved by the next team up on the rotation.

RPD recently implemented four "Shoot Teams" that also respond to homicides and nonfatal shooting incidents. The Shoot Teams, which consist of four to five non-MCU detectives, are there to provide extra resources and support to the MCU detectives running the case. Every investigator (excluding MCU detectives) is assigned to a Shoot Team, which is led by a sergeant. Each Shoot Team is on call 1 week per month. Upon responding to the scene of a homicide or nonfatal shooting, the MCU detectives and their supervisor will determine if they need support from the Shoot Team. Having a Shoot Team respond to homicides and nonfatal shootings is beneficial not only for providing extra support during the initial scene but also for promoting information sharing among the various units as the investigation continues (see Section 5.4, Internal Communication and Coordination).

Interviewees told the assessment team that the MCU caseloads are generally manageable. MCU detectives average 3–5 homicide cases per year, which is consistent with best practices. In addition to

homicide cases, MCU detectives average 8–10 nonfatal shooting investigations and 8–10 robbery or stabbing investigations per year.

5.1.2   Personnel Experience, Training, and Supervision

Detective Experience

Detectives in the MCU have a wide range of investigative experience, which is typical of most police agencies. Some detectives interviewed had as little as 2 or 3 years of investigative experience, while others had been detectives for decades. RPD leaders said that they prefer that detectives work in other investigative units prior to joining MCU so that they gain baseline investigative training and experience. However, the RPD leaders noted that this goal is not always met due to staffing issues.

Detective 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 help ensure that detectives selected into a detective 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 MCU detectives have largely attended basic and advanced investigations training, including interview and interrogation courses. However, detective training is not always consistent, and there appears to be no standard training track. For example, MCU detectives are supposed to attend a death investigations school within their first year of assignment, but interviewees said that this does not always happen. They also said that detectives, with the help of their sergeants, typically must proactively seek out training opportunities. Additionally, some interviewees expressed the need for more advanced detective training in using technology and digital evidence in investigations.

Recommendations	**9**	**Ensure that all new detectives and detective supervisors attend a basic detective training course.** The training must be consistent for all new detectives and should cover all aspects of an investigation. This is especially important at RPD, where personnel from all investigative units are assigned to a Shoot Team and may be called upon to respond to a homicide or nonfatal shooting. Additionally, the assessment team learned that RPD has recently begun assigning gang-related nonfatal shootings to Gang Unit detectives; therefore, it is critical that Gang Unit detectives receive consistent investigations training. At a minimum, basic detective training should include the following: • 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 RPD policies The NCCP team can work with RPD to help identify training courses and curricula that best meet the department's needs.
	10	**Ensure that detectives who investigate homicides and nonfatal shootings, as well as their supervisors, receive advanced training in investigating these types of cases.** This training should be consistent and required for all detectives who may potentially be called out to investigate a homicide or nonfatal shooting, regardless of their current assignment. Specialized in-service training should cover topics that include but are not limited to: • Advanced interview and interrogation techniques • Crime scene response and management • Next-of-kin notifications • Developing witnesses • Interview and interrogation • Conducting follow-up investigations • Forensic analysis of seized evidence • Using digital evidence from cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other devices • Using social media in investigations • Using crime analysis to assist with investigations • Using network analysis to identify linkages between individuals or groups • Constitutional law • Prosecuting a homicide or nonfatal shooting case • Using recordings made in jail/prison • Investigating deaths involving infants • Mass casualty investigations • Advanced DNA methods The NCCP team can work with RPD to help identify training courses and curricula that best meet the department's needs.
	11	**Create a training coordinator within the Investigative Operations Bureau to ensure that all detectives receive proper and consistent training.** The coordinator must monitor available courses for specific investigative disciplines and ensure that detectives receive the training necessary for their assignments.

12	**Make every effort to place new detectives in a nonviolent investigative assignment during their training period, with more experienced detectives then transitioning to work homicides and nonfatal shootings after the training period is completed.** This will help give hardworking and dedicated detectives the tools and experience they need to effectively investigate violent crimes. Some police agencies have also achieved success with providing opportunities for patrol officers and investigators in other squads to be temporarily assigned to assist with homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. This gives personnel the chance to gain experience and allows supervisors to evaluate staff abilities.

Leadership and Supervision

The leadership at RPD and within the Investigative Operations Bureau appears to be strong. The assessment team heard consistently positive feedback about the degree to which leaders engage with personnel and are involved with the units under their command. RPD's new leadership team is working to implement a variety of positive programs and reforms, such as ensuring that detectives respond to nonfatal shooting scenes, strengthening community engagement efforts, and implementing innovative violence prevention and accountability models.

The seven full-time MCU detectives are supervised by one sergeant. The BJA generally recommends having a ratio of one supervisor for every four detectives; however, interviewees said that the MCU sergeant has proven to be capable of supervising the entire unit of detectives. Additionally, RPD's overall staffing shortages may make it difficult for the agency to hire a second sergeant for MCU. That being said, RPD should keep the recommended supervisor-to-detective ratio in mind as it evaluates its operations going forward.

The sergeant who supervises the MCU has extensive investigative experience, including working in MCU as a detective. Additionally, the captain who oversees the Investigative Operations Bureau has prior detective experience in the MCU and other units. The fact that MCU leaders and supervisors have prior detective experience—especially with investigating homicides and other violent crimes—is a very positive thing. Having this kind of experience can help supervisors better understand the detectives' daily duties, challenges, and needs so that they can provide good guidance to them.

One important leadership tool for sergeants is 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 leads.

It appears that MCU supervisors do not hold regular, formal case reviews with detectives. However, the assessment team learned that the MCU sergeant does have daily informal discussions with detectives about cases and a strong knowledge of each of the cases that detectives are working. This is a good step toward promoting accountability and provides a strong foundation for case reviews upon which the MCU can build.

RPD's Operational Directive 42.1.1 (Criminal Investigations Bureau) sets forth the responsibilities and functions of personnel in investigative units, including the MCU. This policy requires detectives to complete a Daily Case Log and Monthly Status Activity Worksheet containing information about the

contacts they make, warrants obtained and arrests made, court hearings and prosecution reports, and clearance rates. This policy also requires sergeants to review the log and worksheet, as well as to periodically review detectives' case folders. However, Directive 42.1.1 does not include requirements for performing regular, formal supervisory case reviews, and the assessment team did not identify any other directives containing this requirement.

Recommendations	**13**	**Expand upon the current informal case review practice and implement a formal, systematic case review process between MCU sergeants and detectives.** Supervisors should continue to meet frequently and informally with detectives to discuss ongoing cases and check in on the detectives' progress. However, this practice should be supplemented with a more formal, systematic case review. A 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 that 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 data). • Available outside resources and partnerships (community, federal, task forces, etc.) have been used 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. 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 also help identify training needs for individual detectives and possibly an 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 case assignment. After 60–90 days, open cases should also receive a thorough review by the MCU captain and be presented to all detective personnel and command staff. This will allow for additional ideas and help command staff really understand the investigative capabilities and needs. The case review requirements and guidelines should be stated in written policy.
	14	**Require detectives to complete a comprehensive follow-up report for all homicide cases that remain unsolved after 60 days.** This report should document all investigative efforts taken by the detective(s), include any outstanding tasks or actions (e.g., open lab requests), and summarize information from the initial and supplemental reports to date. The detective's chain of command must review the report to ensure that the detective has completed all the necessary investigative steps, provide recommendations and resources to the detectives, and approve the report.

5.2   Case File Documentation

The assessment team reviewed four homicide case packages during the on-site visit. All packages were maintained in a three-ring binder. The team noted that although the packages appeared to contain all documents related to the investigation, each package was assembled differently. For example, one detective had placed tabs separating the contents into a few categories (e.g., People, Crime Scene Photographs), while another kept all reports in individual plastic protector sleeves, requiring a reviewer to remove the reports to read their contents.

The assessment team found that the details of homicide cases were adequately documented and that each individual officer and detective involved in the case typically completed a thorough and detailed Summary Report of their actions. However, the review found that the individual case file often lacked cohesion. It would be useful for the lead detective to put only the pertinent information from these reports into one comprehensive document (i.e., synopsis) so that it is easy to read the basic facts of the investigations and identify what tasks need to be addressed. Maintaining detailed and consistent case files is important not just for improving investigations but also for helping supervisors conduct case reviews (see Recommendation 13).

Recommendations		
	15	**Adopt the "Murder Book" model, which was developed by the Los Angeles Police Department, as a standardized method to capture and retain case information.** A structured Murder Book concept would ensure standardized organization and reporting, which is critical in managing major investigations and prosecutions. Shooting investigations organized consistently based on a standardized protocol also promotes efficiency and accountability. All CDs and DVDs of witness interviews, photographs, and other digital evidence should be properly labeled, identified, and stored. The Murder Book should include a table of contents, a chronology section, and consistent organizational protocols. All recordings of witness interviews, photographs, and other digital evidence should be properly labeled, identified, and stored. A standardized Murder Book can also be easily scanned and digitized for copying and sharing with prosecutors. Another benefit of a uniform Murder Book is accountability. A supervisor or command staff can easily review a book that has all its information under consistent tabs, allowing them to review the important reports as opposed to being required to review all documents in the case package to understand the investigation.
	16	**Include requirements for proper case documentation and case file checklists in the policy manuals governing fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations.** Currently, RPD's Operational Directive 42.1.1 (Criminal Investigations Bureau) includes a checklist of documentation that must be included in detectives' case files. This policy should be updated to reflect any changes made to case file documentation practices, including the adoption of the Murder Book model. Supervisors should be required by policy to review the files at scheduled times (e.g., 1 week, 1 month) to ensure that detectives are adhering to the checklist and completing all required tasks. RPD should work with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and U.S. Attorney's Office when determining the information that must be documented in case files. The importance of case file documentation should be reinforced during training. Policy should also mandate that the Murder Book be kept up to date with all related documents.

5.3   Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings

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

One finding that emerged from interviews and the case file review was that there is no standardized, consistent investigative checklist for detectives and patrol officers to use, and for supervisors to review, when working homicides and nonfatal shooting cases. This checklist, which is described in additional detail in Recommendation 1, will help ensure that critical tasks are being performed throughout the duration of an investigation.

Recommendations		
Recommendations	**17**	**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). More details about what items to include in the checklist can be found in Recommendation 1 in Section 3.1. (Policies and Procedures Recommendations). Supervisors should hold detectives accountable for completing the checklist, which should include space 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).

5.3.1   Initial Crime Scene Response

When a homicide occurs, the team of two MCU detectives (one lead and one backup) respond to the scene, along with the four- to five-member Shoot Team composed of detectives from other investigative units. The assessment team learned that RPD leadership is working to ensure that detectives also respond to the scene of nonfatal shootings, which had not always been the case (see Section 4).

Patrol officers are typically the first to arrive at a fatal or nonfatal shooting scene. RPD's patrol officers work 12-hour shifts, rotating the day/night shift every 6 weeks. Officers work 7 days out of 14. Interviews revealed that RPD patrol officers perform the kinds of tasks that are typical of officers who respond to a homicide or nonfatal shooting scene, including providing emergency medical assistance to victims; securing the scene and checking if the suspect is still present; gathering initial information about what occurred; establishing an inner and outer perimeter; maintaining a crime scene log of anyone who enters the scene; canvassing for witnesses, evidence, video surveillance, and other data; and transporting suspects and witnesses. Detectives told the assessment team that patrol officers do a good job of responding to scenes and performing their necessary tasks.

The assessment team learned that the patrol sergeant responds to all shooting scenes. The lieutenant in command of the responding platoon also typically responds. The supervisor in charge of the scene is usually the person who makes contact with the MCU and calls them to the scene. Upon the detectives'

arrival, the patrol sergeant typically gathers information from the patrol officers and passes it along to the detective.

Interviewees said that patrol officers receive training on crime scene response during their initial academy training. Some interviewees said that it would be useful to receive more specialized training on topics such as responding to homicide scenes or interviewing.

Recommendations	**18**	**Continue working to ensure that a detective responds to each nonfatal shooting scene, including those that occur during off-duty hours.** The assessment team found that RPD leaders are working to improve the response to nonfatal shootings, including implementing Shoot Teams and having a detective respond to the scene of every nonfatal shooting incident. Enhancing the on-scene response to nonfatal shootings should improve clearance rates for these crimes (Blanes i Vidal & Kirchmaier, 2018; Wellford et al., 2019).
	19	**Ensure that the written procedures that govern homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations include detailed directions for all units and individuals who are responding to the scene.** RPD's Operational Directive 42.1.4 (Follow-Up Investigations) provides some guidance on the tasks that personnel must perform at the scene of a homicide or nonfatal shooting. However, these directives should be expanded to include more details and checklists of each step that should be completed at the scene and identify who should complete them. Recommendation 17 at the beginning of this section and Recommendation 1 in Section 3.1 (Policies and Procedures Recommendations) include additional details on these checklists.
	20	**Provide additional training for patrol officers on crime scene response, interview/interrogation, and evidence collection.** In addition to providing specialized classroom training in these areas, RPD may consider having new patrol officers learn directly from investigative personnel during field training. For example, new officers could shadow forensic personnel to learn more about on-scene evidence collection and complete a brief assignment embedded with an investigative unit to learn more about what detectives need.
	21	**Ensure the crime scene log is detailed and completed for every homicide and nonfatal shooting case.** Interviewees indicated that the crime scene log only lists the name of personnel who are at the crime scene. The log should also include more detailed information such as the person's rank, assignment, time at the scene and time departing, and duties at the scene.
	22	**Explore using gunshot detection technology to improve the timeliness of response to the scene.** Several interviewees said that it would be beneficial to use a gunshot detection system (such as ShotSpotter) to help improve the response time to incidents involving gunfire. They indicated that improved response times could help them potentially obtain more evidence, such as casings, collected at the scenes.

5.3.2 Follow-up Investigation

The assessment team's on-site interviews suggest that MCU detectives are thorough with their follow-up investigations—they are recanvassing crime scenes for witnesses and video footage; conducting in-person interviews with witnesses and surviving victims; and processing evidence, including digital evidence such as cell phones, for forensic value. On the other hand, our case file review suggests that

follow-up investigations are often incomplete, especially in nonfatal shooting cases (see Section 4). Given that the cases we reviewed occurred in the years 2020–2023 and RPD has experienced recent changes, it could be that these cases no longer reflect RPD's response to shootings. It could also be that interviewees misperceived the depth of their investigations. We suggest RPD evaluate the totality of the findings in this report and make that determination.

Notably, based on interview findings, the assessment team learned that detectives frequently abandon investigations in nonfatal shooting cases when the surviving victims are reluctant to cooperate or refuse to prosecute. Some of these cases had video evidence or cooperating third-party witnesses that could have moved the case forward without victim participation, but detectives nonetheless declined to interview suspects or continue working the case. Interviewees indicated that this is in part due to the reluctance among prosecutors to pursue cases when the victim is uncooperative or refuses to prosecute, or if the victim has a criminal history or was involved in an illicit activity at the time of the crime. Additional recommendations for addressing this issue can be found in Section 5.8.1 (Commonwealth's Attorney's Office) and Section 5.9.4 (Victim and Witness Participation).

Recommendations		
	23	**Require detectives to contact victims of nonfatal shootings in person and make every effort to gain their participation in these violent crimes.** Experience shows that detectives have a much better chance of gaining victim or witness participation with a face-to-face encounter, as opposed to contact over the telephone. The NCCP team can assist RPD with identifying methods for improving the likelihood that nonfatal shooting victims and witnesses participate in police investigations.
	24	**Conduct witness interviews in person at a police facility whenever possible, rather than over the phone. Consider implementing a policy requiring the assigned detective to conduct in-person interviews of all victims and witnesses in fatal and nonfatal shooting cases.** In-person interviews at a police facility are better suited for gaining cooperation, obtaining information, and assessing credibility. If detectives are unable to interview the witness in a police facility, an in-person interview in a location outside the facility is also an acceptable option. Telephone interviews with witnesses should be done only as a last resort.

Recommendation 1 in Section 3.1 of this report suggests that RPD develop a comprehensive, user-friendly manual for MCU that includes a detailed checklist of investigative tasks that detectives must complete when working homicides and nonfatal shooting cases. This checklist (see Recommendation 17) will help guide detectives as they conduct follow-up investigations, and supervisors should hold detectives accountable for completing these tasks through the regular case reviews discussed in Recommendation 13.

5.3.3   Cold Case Investigations

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.

RPD did not have a cold case detective for many years. In 2023, the agency hired a retired RPD lieutenant with MCU experience (both as a detective and supervisor) to investigate cold cases on a part-time basis. At the time of this assessment, the cold case detective had reviewed 50–60 homicide cases, with two cases nearing charges. Although the part-time cold case detective could potentially benefit from

having additional help, the detective is part of the MCU and has access to the unit's full-time detectives for assistance.

When determining which cold cases to investigate, it is good practice to prioritize cases based on solvability factors. At this time, RPD's cold case review process, which is governed by Operational Directive 44.2.2 (Cold Case Investigations) does not use solvability factors to rank or triage cases. The assessment team discussed this with interviewees and found they were receptive to making this change.

Recommendations	**25**	**Establish a system of using solvability factors to prioritize cold cases for investigation.** Once a case is designated as eligible for cold case review, it should be screened and ranked based on established solvability factors (Cronin et al., 2007; Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2018).. Solvability factors that have been effectively used in other police agencies include: • A suspect has been identified and is currently living. • Eyewitnesses have been identified, or a previously uncooperative witness has decided to cooperate (and is available to be interviewed). • There is a presence of physical evidence conducive to testing, such as DNA or fingerprints. • During the initial investigation, there was a known suspect or motive, there was witness identification, and/or there was physical evidence connecting a suspect to the crime scene. The reviewer should use a standardized method to rank the case based on the solvability factors. Some police agencies have used civilians (e.g., retired investigators, forensics technicians, graduate students) to help conduct the initial case screening ranking, then have passed it along to the cold case detective for review and confirmation. The process for using solvability factors should be outlined in RPD's cold case investigations policy. The NCCP team can provide RPD with resources on this process, including sample ranking forms.
	26	**Establish a trauma-informed protocol for notifying victims' friends and family members when a 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. RPD's notification protocol can be grounded in lessons learned from notifying victims when their sexual assault kits have been tested years after the incident occurred.
	27	**Ensure that cold case investigators and their supervisor(s) receive specialized training on working these challenging cases.** The NCCP team can assist RPD with identifying cold case investigator training needs and opportunities.

5.4   Internal Communication and Coordination

Collaboration and communication between various units within a police agency can be critical to an effective homicide or 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.

Information Sharing with Patrol Officers

Communication between MCU detectives and patrol officers is important for several reasons. As the first responders to most homicide and nonfatal shooting scenes, patrol officers can provide a wealth of information about initial facts and impressions of the incident. Additionally, being in the field on a daily basis allows patrol officers to become familiar with the people and dynamics of a neighborhood, which puts them in a good position to provide intelligence and help locate potential suspects and witnesses as cases progress. Coordination between patrol officers and detectives can also create an opportunity for informal on-the-job training, as officers learn about what detectives need and how investigations work. Section 5.3.1 (Initial Crime Scene Response) discussed coordination between detectives and patrol officers at the scene of a homicide or nonfatal shooting. This section focuses on ongoing information sharing between officers and detectives throughout an investigation.

Interviewees said that communication between patrol officers and detectives is generally good in the department. They reported that because RPD is a small enough agency, most personnel know one another and can share information easily. It appears that officers feel fairly comfortable approaching detectives informally if they have information to pass along.

The assessment team learned that detectives typically use email to share information about cases with patrol officers. This includes information about NIBIN leads, suspects or evidence that patrol officers should follow up on, and case updates. RPD has also recently implemented SmartForce, an app installed on vehicle computers (but not cell phones) that allows personnel to communicate case intelligence and other information. Additionally, every patrol shift designates one volunteer as an "intel" officer, whose responsibility is to come in an hour before the shift starts to review reports of serious incidents, gather information, and disseminate it during the patrol lineup.

RPD's Operational Directive 42.1.1 (Criminal Investigations Bureau) requires detectives to "make arrangements" for monthly attendance at patrol shift briefings to "disseminate and exchange information." The purpose of this requirement is to "facilitate communication and exchange information between divisions, improve operational efficiency, and increase opportunities for the arrest and successful prosecution of criminals." However, it does not appear that MCU currently has a system for sending detectives to patrol lineups on a regular monthly basis. Interviewees said that MCU detectives do attend patrol lineups periodically, such as when they need to share information about a serious incident or if detectives feel that patrol officers need additional instruction, but this only occurs on an as-needed basis.

		Strengthen formal information-sharing protocols between detectives and patrol officers beyond the initial crime scene response.
Recommendations	**28**	Examples of ways to strengthen coordination between detectives and patrol include: • Ensure that detectives are meeting the requirements of Operational Directive 42.1.1 (Criminal Investigations Bureau) and attending patrol lineups on a regular (monthly) basis to share information about ongoing cases and to hear from patrol officers about what is going on in the community. Detectives should also continue to attend lineups after every homicide or serious incident to brief officers and request assistance. This should occur even in closed cases, as patrol officers should be aware of potential retaliation factors. • Have detectives conduct trainings at patrol lineups on investigative tasks (e.g., interviews/interrogations) and any other relevant areas where patrol officers need additional instruction. The assessment team found that patrol officers would welcome this training and would like to see more of the detectives in this capacity. Supervisors should solicit input from both detectives and patrol officers on which topics to cover in these trainings. • Require detectives to follow up with patrol officers who submit a supplemental report in a case for which they are the lead. This step should be part of the investigative checklist (see Recommendation 17) and case review process (see Recommendation 13). • Ensure that detectives are following the section of Operational Directive 42.1.1 requiring detectives to "meet with district uniform officers assigned to their geographical areas of responsibilities on a routine basis" and to document these meetings in their Monthly Status Activity Worksheet.

Coordination among RPD Units

This section discusses overall intra-agency coordination, while coordination between the MCU and specific units (e.g., I-STAR, FSU) is discussed in later sections.

Except for external partners such as prosecutors and the Virginia Department of Forensic Science (DFS) crime lab, most of the people involved in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations are located within close proximity to one another at the RPD headquarters. This is a positive thing, as it helps to foster communication and collaboration between detectives, patrol officers, crime analysts, forensics personnel, and others who may have information to share about a case. Additionally, the existence of the Shoot Teams helps facilitate information sharing between MCU detectives and the other investigative units. It appears that informal communication and collaboration is prevalent among RPD personnel, which is commendable.

The assessment team learned that RPD holds several regular meetings involving investigative personnel, supervisors, and leaders. For example, there are weekly Investigative Operations Bureau supervisor meetings, weekly meetings of the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) team, and semiweekly command staff meetings. There is also a weekly Crime Strategy Meeting attended by command staff, lieutenants, investigative unit supervisors, the head of the police academy, and representatives from external partners such as Probation/Parole and the Fire Marshal's Office. The assessment team attended a Crime Strategy Meeting during its site visit. This meeting was led by a deputy chief, the Investigations Operations Bureau captain, and RPD's supervisory crime analyst. The supervisory crime analyst provided summaries of major crimes that had occurred during the prior 7 days, crime trends and areas with crime clusters, and information about priority "problem people" and "problem areas." Participants were invited to provide updates on the cases, though engagement was limited to those involved and many managers and

outside stakeholders were not engaged or involved in the process. The stated purpose of Crime Strategy Meetings is to promote accountability for RPD's command staff and leadership, as well as prepare for the department's monthly CompStat-style meeting that the chief of police attends.

There are also semiweekly lineups attended by all Investigative Operations Bureau personnel. Interviewees said that these meetings tend to focus on more high-level administrative issues, rather than on sharing information or collaborating on ongoing cases.

Intra-agency meetings can certainly be useful for facilitating communication and coordination. However, given that having too many meetings can create a burden on personnel, it is important that these meetings be focused and effectively meet the goals they are designed to achieve. RPD should consider combining or restructuring some of these meetings in a way to better address the needs of RPD and promote coordination within the agency. One additional meeting that may benefit RPD's response to shootings and other major violent crimes is a weekly violent crime meeting to discuss recent violent crimes in depth to share information and develop new strategies or leads.

Recommendations	29	**Hold an internal weekly violent crime meeting.**
		MCU 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 MCU detectives and sergeants, Investigative Operations Bureau command, representatives from other investigative units (e.g., Gang Unit, NOC, Special Victims Unit [SVU], Violence Suppression Unit) Forensic Services Unit personnel, crime analysts, patrol representatives, prosecutors, and other local and federal partners. If an investigation is potentially related to another jurisdiction, that agency should also be invited to attend the meeting. When appropriate, additional guests such as medical examiners, crime scene investigation (CSI) experts, or community group leaders could be invited to discuss their areas of expertise.

30	**Evaluate the way information and intelligence are shared at the weekly Crime Strategy Meeting.** Overall, this meeting is beneficial for ensuring that information is being shared between the stakeholders who play key roles in managing resources and in reducing retaliation and subsequent offenses. This can ultimately help improve the solvability of crimes. However, the assessment team identified strategies for strengthening these meetings. This includes: • Ensure that an agenda is distributed the day before the meeting. This would allow stakeholders to come to the meeting already having vetted the names and places involved in the crimes to be discussed, which would improve collaboration and intelligence sharing. Information about the people to be discussed, including their dates of birth, should be included in the agenda. • Prioritize completing NIBIN analysis prior to the meeting to examine solvability factors and trafficking leads in the violent crime cases discussed. • Assign actionable intelligence for follow-up with an investigation's supervisor responsible for the accountability of resources and completion. When using the Stratified Policing Model (as this meeting was referred to by command staff), the meeting falls within the operational and tactical levels. The tactical level focuses on gathering intelligence and managing resources while the operational level is responsible for planning, management of resources and implementing strategies to achieve the goals of the executive staff's violent crime mission.

5.5   Physical and Firearms Evidence

5.5.1   Forensic Services Unit

RPD's FSU is led by a sergeant who reports directly to the Criminal Investigations Bureau lieutenant, who reports to the Investigative Operations Bureau captain. In addition to the sergeant, the FSU is composed of four sworn and four civilian forensic investigators, one full-time latent fingerprint analyst, and one part-time fingerprint analyst. A civilian digital evidence technician also reports to the FSU sergeant. There is also a sworn administrative aide who works a permanent day shift performing follow-ups and other administrative work.

Additionally, for some minor crimes, the FSU uses a select group of patrol officers, known as supplemental evidence technicians, who have received additional forensic training. The fingerprint analysts can also process evidence for latent prints and respond to scenes if needed, usually to obtain postmortem fingerprints from decedents for identification.

RPD uses the Virginia DFS crime lab to process DNA and other physical evidence. The Western Laboratory is located in Roanoke.

Forensic Investigators work 10-hour shifts, with coverage from 6 a.m. to 12 a.m. on Sundays through Thursdays and 8 a.m. through 3 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Forensic investigators alternate between the day and night shift every 4 weeks. Supplemental evidence technicians cover the remaining overnight hours, though forensic investigators are on call to respond to homicides, nonfatal shootings, traffic fatalities, or other major cases that require more extensive investigating.

Forensic investigators work in teams of two (one sworn paired with one civilian) and work Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday one week, then switch to a Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday rotation the next week. This schedule means that at any given time (other than Tuesdays), there could be

just one team working. If someone from that team is out, the teammate will be assigned to work with the sergeant, the administrative aide, or a supplemental evidence technician.

| Recommendations | 31 | **Consider obtaining forensic accreditation for the FSU.** Forensic accreditation would provide a yearly external review of FSU's policies and procedures. Obtaining it would demonstrate a measure of adherence to standards and good practice for the Forensic Investigators |
| | 32 | **Consider incorporating yearly proficiency evaluations for the forensic investigators.** Yearly proficiency examinations are a common practice for forensic units and allow supervisors to gauge the accuracy and expertise of their employees. This is one of the requirements for forensic accreditation and would need to be enacted prior to applying for accreditation. Without these evaluations, it is difficult and/or subjective for supervisors to evaluate their forensic investigators. |

5.5.2 Civilian Forensic Investigators

RPD began hiring civilian forensic investigators in April 2024 and currently has a "hybrid" model, with sworn and civilian investigators working in teams of two. The civilian forensic investigators are highly educated in the field of forensics, with all having a bachelor's degree and some having master's degrees. Unlike sworn forensic investigators, the civilian personnel do not have take-home cars or their own equipment.

The assessment team found that the transition to this hybrid model has had its challenges. Perhaps the most significant issue is that, at the time of this assessment, civilian forensic investigators typically were not permitted to respond to crime scenes on their own. Security concerns may partly drive this policy, as interviewees said that civilian forensic investigators do sometimes respond alone to scenes of minor crimes where there is no chance of a suspect being on the scene (e.g., auto thefts). However, it is likely that this policy is at least partially because RPD hired civilian forensic investigators before it had in place the policies, equipment, uniforms, and other factors to support them. Interviewees hoped that the civilian forensic investigators will become more independent as they continue to gain experience and obtain their own equipment.

| Recommendations | 33 | **Develop a comprehensive plan for the utilization of civilian forensic investigators.** This plan should include:
• A set of policies and procedures to govern the roles and responsibilities of civilian FSU members.
• A progressive system for advancement to promote retention and allow for the civilian forensic investigators to process scenes without having to rely on sworn members. A uniformed member can be used for scene security as needed. One possibility is to create a civilian forensic supervisor position.
• Investment in personal equipment and take-home vehicles for civilian forensic investigators.
• Advanced training in shooting reconstruction and bloodstain pattern analysis.

Many police agencies, such as the Milwaukee Police Department, Salt Lake City Police Department, and Riviera Beach Police Department, use civilian forensic and crime scene investigators. The NCCP team can help connect RPD to these or other agencies to explore additional resources and recommendations for implementing this model. |

5.5.3 FSU Training

The assessment team learned that there is no standard training track or program for forensic investigators. Sworn forensic investigators receive 1 week of forensics training in the initial police academy training, and both sworn and civilian forensic investigators attend the 2-week in-house forensics training course that the supplemental evidence technicians also attend. After that, forensic investigators must seek out their own training opportunities from the Virginia DFS or from outside agencies.

Interviewees said that most of their training, both for sworn and civilian forensic investigators, comes from on-the-job training. They have a checklist of items they must know or be observed performing before they are able to respond to scenes on their own. Interviewees said that one good thing about the policy of pairing a sworn with a civilian forensic investigator is that the sworn member often serves as a sort of training officer for the civilian personnel.

Recommendations	34	**FSU should explore additional training opportunities for both sworn and civilian forensic investigators.** Although it would be ideal for personnel to attend the state's Forensic Science Academy in Richmond, the cost and wait time likely make this unattainable. Other options include attending "short courses" hosted by the Virginia DFS, attending state and national forensic conferences, and hosting external vendor training at RPD's facility.

5.5.4 Evidence Collection, Processing, and Storage

The first floor at RPD's headquarters houses an intake room with lockers for after-hours evidence submission; a small property examination room; a vehicle exam bay, which is where the shooting trap for ballistics testing is located; and the long-term evidence storage/property room, which has a separate public-facing window. The larger examination room is located upstairs in the FSU offices within RPD's headquarters. It contains areas for evidence packaging and temporary storage, a drying area, and an area for fingerprint and photograph processing. All of the areas where evidence is processed and stored are properly secured with controlled access.

Forensic investigators get called to every homicide scene. They respond to nonfatal shooting scenes when they are available; otherwise, a supplemental evidence technician responds to process the scene. Upon arriving at the scene, the forensic investigators have a debriefing with the first arriving officer and any detectives who are present. After receiving a search warrant (if it is an indoor scene), they then conduct walk-throughs, take photographs and 3D scans, measure evidence, make sketches of the scene, and perform other tasks if needed. Interviewees said that for nonfatal shootings they only take 3D scans and measure evidence if the shooting was major or life-threatening.

The assessment team learned that the primary form of communication between forensics investigators and MCU detectives is through the SmartForce app, which detectives use to submit online requests for forensic testing. FSU personnel also now attend post-incident meetings with MCU detectives, which is another opportunity for them to discuss evidence needs and case strategy. The semiweekly Investigative Operations Bureau meetings include personnel from both MCU and FSU, though the assessment team learned that these meetings are more administrative in nature, rather than detailed case reviews or discussions. FSU personnel and detectives also personally check in with one another as needs arise.

		Whenever possible, measure and document seized evidence when processing any nonfatal shooting scene.
Recommendations	35	The assessment team learned that at nonfatal shooting scenes, the location of seized evidence, including the location of fired cartridge casings, is not commonly measured. This information may be useful for investigators when attempting to locate positions of suspects and recreating the crime for trial purposes. A possible solution may be to have the supplemental evidence technicians measure all seized evidence in those cases when a forensic investigator does not respond to the scene.
	36	**Reevaluate FSU's latent print processing equipment and techniques.** Changes may include potential upgrades to the fingerprint fuming chamber, improved forensic light source(s), and evaluating the adoption of additional fingerprint processing techniques. One potential source for chemical processing methods is the Virginia DFS, which has its manuals online and open access. **UPDATE:** Shortly after its NCCP assessment was completed, RPD purchased a mobile forensic imaging system from ForenScope. FSU personnel have been fully trained on the new piece of equipment and have started using it in their investigations.

5.5.5 Firearms and Ballistics Evidence

Every firearm that comes into RPD as evidence is test fired and entered into Ballistics IQ before the end of the shift in which it was collected. All sworn and civilian FSU personnel are able to perform test fires. After doing two test fires, the forensic investigator packages the casings together in an envelope, attaches a printout of the Ballistics IQ report, and places the package into the temporary storage unit as evidence. Interviewees said that the main benefit of Ballistics IQ is to triage the casings to determine which ones are the most useful.

		Evaluate the equipment currently used in the processing of shooting scenes and seized firearms.
Recommendations	37	The FSU may need new shooting trajectory kits to properly document scenes. These kits are useful in recreating and determining the angle of impact in shooting cases, and the setup can also be photographed when used to provide documentation for further investigation and court purposes. Additionally, there are safety benefits in obtaining and using a remote firing platform/system, also referred to as a forensic ballistics machine. This device would provide a safe distance between the technician and the weapon, which is especially important when operating weapons that are faulty. **UPDATE:** Shortly after its NCCP assessment was completed, RPD purchased two sets of forensic shooting trajectory kits to use in the processing of shooting scenes. The department also obtained a remote firing cart to use when forensically test firing firearms. Additionally, RPD added a full-time NIBIN unit and trained several evidence technicians to use NIBIN.

Firearms are tested for fingerprints and swabbed for DNA on a case-by-case basis. FSU typically swabs all weapons that have been involved in a homicide, and detectives provide input on what evidence they want tested for prints and DNA. Casings are rarely processed for fingerprints or DNA. FSU performs in-house fingerprint analysis and sends DNA evidence to the Virginia DFS crime lab. Interviewees said that the turnaround time for DNA testing from the state crime lab is more than a year.

RPD began using NIBIN a few months before this assessment. The department's NIBIN equipment is currently located at RPD headquarters on a temporary basis; however, RPD is pursuing plans to permanently obtain the equipment. The FSU sergeant is RPD's NIBIN site administrator and technician.

Currently, only the FSU sergeant is trained to enter casings into NIBIN, but two additional FSU personnel (one civilian forensic investigator and the sworn administrative aide) are currently being trained as well. The FSU sergeant also completed a train-the-trainer course and will be able to train the remaining FSU personnel.

Interviewees said that there is a quick turnaround time for correlations that come in through the Correlations Center. NIBIN hits are sent to FSU and distributed to all Investigative Operations Bureau supervisors and the case detective(s). Others who are involved in the case (e.g., a patrol officer who made an arrest) may also receive a hit notification. FSU maintains a spreadsheet containing information about NIBIN hits, including who all received hit notifications, that is stored in RPD's Records Management System (RMS).

RPD personnel said that NIBIN has already had a positive impact on shooting investigations. RPD received 17 NIBIN leads in September 2024 and 25–26 leads in August 2024, and one interviewee said that NIBIN has already helped him produce one arrest for a homicide and another for a nonfatal shooting.

The department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) task force officer (TFO) currently completes all of the eTrace submissions for RPD. The TFO receives trace requests through a required tracing form (submitted via email or placed in the TFO's box). The TFO reviews the forms, tracks down any missing information, and corrects any inaccuracies before entering the information into eTrace. The TFO strives to enter new requests on a weekly basis, and it takes up to a week to get eTrace results. The TFO typically receives between 20 and 30 eTrace requests per month.

Given RPD's investments in NIBIN and crime gun tracing, the NCCP team recommends that RPD build on its current NIBIN processes by establishing a Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC) and process flow for NIBIN, which should increase the impact of this work.

Establishing a CGIC and Process Flow for NIBIN

The following recommendations are for building an effective NIBIN program from start to finish. A successful CGIC program following the NIBIN process flow steps (see the Crime Gun Intelligence Center Workflow ⬈) will assure that firearms and casings will become a priority to get through evidence collection, processing, test firing, and entry within 24–48 hours on all crime guns regardless of crime type. This will benefit the investigators receiving the information while they are still working on the case for a higher solvability rate. Within the steps are several other resources investigators should have available to them, so investigators do not have to do the work themselves and are free to perform other investigative work. This fair and impartial business practice will help to quickly identify the most active armed offenders, so RPD can target the shooters who are currently committing the gun violence in their city. The NCCP team can work with RPD to provide resources and help implement these recommendations. The recommendations follow the CGIC process flow for NIBIN and are divided into the following categories:

- Comprehensive Collection of Casings and Firearms
- Entry and Tracing
- Crime Analysts and Intelligence

- Investigations
- Stakeholders
- Prosecution
- Feedback

Comprehensive Collection of Casings and Firearms

Recommendations	38	**Consider education and training on CGIC and NIBIN.** It is recommended that NIBIN and CGIC training for roll call, in-service, and academy trainings be developed and provided to patrol officers and investigators. Training should specifically address the importance of searching for, recovering, and documenting the recovery of all cartridge cases, regardless of the type of incident, emphasizing that comprehensive collection of cartridge case evidence drives the success of the NIBIN program, because without these recovered cartridge cases there would be nothing for the test-fired cartridge cases to be match against. The training should clearly delineate departmental policies regarding responses to calls for shots fired, the canvassing of neighborhoods for the collection of evidence, and identification of potential witnesses to further the investigation and as a means of performing community outreach. The training should also include the importance of asking the appropriate questions when an officer recovers a firearm.

Entry and Tracing

Recommendations	39	**Develop a process to rapidly process evidence for NIBIN-eligible crime guns.** Because an eligible crime gun has the potential to be linked to a violent crime when processed through NIBIN, the type or severity of the event where the firearm was recovered should have no bearing on whether or not it is prioritized for DNA or latent fingerprint processing. The recovering officer or detective should not be responsible for requesting any forensic processing for NIBIN-eligible firearms; forensic processing should be automatic. All NIBIN-eligible firearms should be processed for DNA swabbing, latent fingerprint processing, and test firing once retrieved from the street by CSI. A fast-track procedure must be developed, and its adoption will remove the pending status of NIBIN-eligible firearms waiting for an officer's request for forensic processing. A fast-track process acts as a type of "assembly line" with a single point of entry, which will dramatically limit the number of times NIBIN-eligible crime guns are stored pending a particular type of processing. Most importantly, this will remove the pending status of NIBIN-eligible firearms waiting for detectives to request forensic processing. RPD should ensure that multiple forensic investigators are trained to complete NIBIN entries. This would relieve the FSU supervisor of this responsibility and help ensure that casings are entered during the shift in which they were seized. The assessment team learned that additional FSU personnel were being NIBIN trained, and RPD should continue this effort.
	40	**Evaluate the test firing process.** Currently, firearms are test fired Monday through Friday, so guns and casings could sit for 2–3 days without results for detectives. The FSU sergeant is being notified with 12 hours of all guns that come in. RPD should develop a system so that all guns will be test fired within 24 hours of their recovery. Consider using multiple trained personnel, including using non-sworn personnel, to test recovered firearms and assigning personnel on weekends to perform test fires and entries. A sergeant could oversee this process. This will ensure that all guns are test fired and entered so investigators can get the NIBIN information on the crime gun within 48 hours for a higher solvability factor. Currently, the test fired rounds are entered into the IBIS machine and imaged for comparison with that image substantiating a hit. The casings do not need to be included into evidence as if the case needed to go to court, in which case the weapon would have to be test fired by a firearms and tool mark examiner expert for courtroom testimony and the casings would be used in a trial as evidence. Standard practice in the United States is to file these casings in a cabinet for a short retention period, as the image is the valuable piece prosecutors would use along with the RMS report of the test fire.

41	**Strengthen RPD's tracing capabilities.**	
	RPD should set up an eTrace account with ATF and have the FSU sergeant as the administrator. Evaluators determined that most individuals listed on the RPD account are retired or transferred, so administration of the account is not available. Training for firearms identification should be done with the personnel who perform the firearms test fires. This stage is the earliest point of contact with the firearm so that all the firearms information can be verified by the submitting officers for proper eTrace entry and the error rate can be reduced with tracing.	
42	**Strengthen the dissemination of eTrace results.**	
	RPD should ensure that all eTrace results are routed to the appropriate investigators or that eTrace is available for use in their investigations. The trace information can guide and inform the investigators in possible solvability in their criminal investigations and provide intelligence into the trafficking lead. It is highly recommended that RPD use ATF's ability to assist in intelligence analysis and participate in the interview of the purchaser to identify and prosecute firearm trafficking cases through the U.S. Attorney's Office. Currently, eTrace is being done by an ATF intelligence research specialist (IRS) every week. RPD should inquire about eTrace Direct.	
43	**Provide firearms identification training.**	
	The assessment team learned that firearms are sometimes being misidentified, which leads to incomplete or errors in firearms tracing. A training on firearms identification and the importance of asking the appropriate questions when an officer recovers a firearm should be done within the police department. This training can be provided to officers, detectives, crime scene investigators, prosecutors, and people doing the test fires.	

Crime Analysts and Intelligence

44	**Assign a full-time intelligence analyst to the NIBIN group.**	
	A CGIC is an intelligence unit dedicated to analyzing and referring actionable intelligence related to gun crime. Intelligence resources are often limited, making the careful selection of assignments and processes a critical factor for CGIC success. Having an analyst assigned directly to work with NIBIN and the investigative unit that will be the primary investigative group for RPD's NIBIN leads will significantly improve RPD's investigative capabilities. The analyst can also assist in accessing police reports from outside jurisdiction for triage. This will reduce the duplication of efforts with investigators locating and pulling reports and ATF also pulling the same police reports of case analysis. Having an assigned intelligence analyst would free up the investigators to conduct active investigative work and still be in communication with ATF and the use of ATF database resources.	
45	**Grant analysts access to additional systems.**	
	RPD should explore expanding systems access to analysts assigned to the CGIC. ATF is willing to give RPD access to the NIBIN Enforcement Support System (NESS) for departmental use. Currently, ATF TFOs are the only ones who have access to the system and do not use it. RPD's access to NESS will allow RPD to have access to intelligence software and expanded trace and trafficking data used by the ATF in the CGIC. Consider having analysts meet the ATF IRS to see the capabilities of other analysts and, more importantly. the databases they have access to. Communication by the crime analysts is a key component of intelligence sharing and easy access to information for the investigators.	

(Recommendations)

Recommendations	**46**	**Standardize a triage process with leads using intelligence.** Raw NIBIN lead information should be triaged through an RPD crime analyst for higher solvability factors and site-specific priorities. NIBIN leads have different degrees of investigative value based on the potential that the linked events were committed by the same suspect(s) or that the information from one or more linked events will provide valuable evidence toward another. This potential can be initially determined through a crime analyst and the use of the department's database and outside resources available. RPD will average about 20–25 leads a month and will be able to determine solvability factors for each lead. This will help supervisors shift resources by department priorities and objectives as they relate to violent gun crime and bring cases to close by solvability factors. RPD can develop a three-tier process to break the solvability factors into high, medium, or low solvability and do the same for department priority. Each lead or piece of intelligence in each tier should have a place to go no matter what the level of solvability, whether it is to the Violence Suppression Unit, investigations, or patrol.
	47	**Develop an intelligence process to add context to NIBIN leads.** Timely intelligence analysis of raw NIBIN lead information is critical for consistently successful outcomes. Adding context to raw NIBIN leads during the intelligence analysis process is important to investigators, first-line supervisors, and executive leadership. It allows investigators to quickly understand complex and interrelated events without the need to conduct intelligence gathering so that investigators can concentrate on investigative follow-up. In addition, it provides continuous operational awareness regarding accountability and resource allocation for department senior leaders. NIBIN lead processing and context information should be rapid—within 24 hours of lead receipt—to ensure important intelligence is in the hands of investigators in a timely manner. Even if another analysis is pending, the lead package should be disseminated within 24 hours. Supplemental intelligence reports can be submitted as information becomes available. RPD should have focus groups with end users, such as detectives, to determine if any additional intelligence should be included.
	48	**Develop a CGIC dashboard for intelligence sharing.** RPD should consider creating a CGIC dashboard that RPD, public officials, prosecutors, and collaborative CGIC partners can access. Consider leveraging the analytical capabilities to create a visual representation of cases through geographic information system (GIS) mapping, tables, and graphs. The dashboard could contain shooting totals for the year, firearms of frequency, total cartridge cases collected, total NIBIN leads, and firearm possession arrests. Various datasets can be filtered by district and visually display firearms trends through GIS mapping. This will assist in identifying shooting patterns and providing communication among all stakeholders. This data could be pulled from the property management system and RPD's Computer Aided Dispatch/RMS. Consider creating a data-sharing agreement with regional agencies to access eTrace data and other data.

Investigations

Recommendations	49	**Create a dedicated investigative unit to address NIBIN leads.**
		Consider an organizational change for the CGIC process. NIBIN leads link two or more shooting events that, if the same suspect(s) are responsible for both events, effectively creates a "new" investigation with investigative follow-up like a "cold case." With the volume of caseloads and continuous assignment of new cases, the ability to view and address NIBIN-linked events as a single investigation is challenging for the line investigator. A potential solution is to create a dedicated investigative unit or team that is not assigned cases and includes TFOs who would investigate multiple shootings under a single investigation. Although this may appear to diminish investigative resources, it will add a force multiplier to assist when investigations need extra assistance on complex cases. The dedicated investigation of complex NIBIN leads can clear multiple shootings under a single investigation and contribute to the department's mission of reducing violent crime. This unit could also be best suited to accomplish the recanvassing of shooting scenes and assisting investigators with follow-up on NIBIN-related shootings.
		It is recommended that the police department reviews personnel assignments to have a dedicated CGIC investigative unit separate from other groups so that all information, including crime analytical support, flows through one source and space. The CGIC is most effective when surrounded by an intelligence component and investigative teams working together. The ATF-Roanoke would be committed to sending special agents to a dedicated unit for NIBIN.
	50	**Consider increasing the number of TFOs.**
		Currently, the ATF TFO is assigned to one unit but is supervised under another. This line of command would improve with the development of a dedicated investigative unit to address NIBIN leads (see Recommendation 49).
		RPD should consider adding TFOs within the investigative units or the Violence Suppression Unit. The current TFOs are being underutilized given their investigative capabilities and their access to all of the available ATF resources. Because NIBIN leads and trafficking investigations often cross jurisdictional boundaries, it is recommended that ATF and RPD examine the possibility of designating additional investigators as TFOs. These should be investigators who are anticipated to be assigned long-term to conduct investigations of active shooters, not working within the property unit or making NIBIN entries. This will allow TFOs to pursue investigative leads with federal authority outside local jurisdictional boundaries and coordinate with TFOs from other jurisdictions. Additionally, TFOs or special deputies will be authorized to access NESS and tracing information to enhance intelligence sharing.
	51	**Develop a system for data management in tracking leads and outcomes.**
		RPD currently uses a spreadsheet to keep track of NIBIN leads, but no single database exists to track subsequent investigative follow-ups through to the stage of prosecutions. It is recommended that RPD discuss ways of tracking at the investigative supervisor level by using existing records systems or developing a comprehensive system that tracks NIBIN activity from lead generation through prosecution. Tracking cases will aid in supervisor accountability, within the CGIC group, to ensure that appropriate resources are devoted to NIBIN leads to increase the success rate of apprehending violent offenders. Tracking success is directly applicable to effective internal and external feedback processes, as well as the solicitation of additional resources to support the NIBIN and CGIC programs. Additionally, one of the critical statistical functions is to report programmatic success. NIBIN success can generally be defined as any investigation or prosecution that benefited from a NIBIN lead.

Stakeholders

Recommendations	**52**	**Establish regular meetings with all NIBIN stakeholders.** The CGIC should host regular (e.g., biweekly) meetings with all NIBIN stakeholders, including ATF, federal and local prosecutors, probation and parole officers, and RPD units (patrol, investigative units) to review the status and solvability of ongoing NIBIN cases and newly developed NIBIN leads. At these meetings, the participants should share intelligence, identify ways to coordinate with other ongoing investigations, focus on the NIBIN leads that can result in cases with the most prosecutorial promise, and track cases once an arrest has been made. In addition, the meetings should outline the follow-up investigation needed on the most solvable homicides and nonfatal shootings. Each meeting should review the progress of the investigative steps outlined in the previous meeting to hold all parties accountable for moving the investigation forward. This meeting would be separate from other violent crime meetings. Although this may seem similar in nature to the Crime Strategy Meeting, this meeting would take new leads that have come in from a 2-week period, which can be days, weeks, or months old, but with the recent new leads, the guns used in the crimes are still active guns in the city today or an arrest has been made.

Prosecution

Recommendations	**53**	**Provide NIBIN training to prosecutors.** RPD should stress to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office that NIBIN is a component of fair and impartial policing that uses science to link cases across jurisdictional boundaries regardless of geographic location, state, or federal involvement. RPD leaders should work with the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office to ensure that they are aware of the benefits of NIBIN and its importance in solving shooting cases and preventing future violent crime.

Feedback

Recommendations	**54**	**Establish an internal feedback system.** RPD should compile examples of cases where shooters have been investigated and prosecuted based on NIBIN leads. RPD should implement protocols for communicating NIBIN-related successes that resulted in the arrest and prosecutions of violent offenders to all participating individuals. From patrol officer to prosecutor, each person involved in this process plays a critical role and is motivated by the positive outcomes of their efforts. Feedback can be as simple as recognizing an officer at roll call, challenge coins, or formal commendations. A good practice is to generate a letter of commendation or similar informal document containing the individuals (from crime scene processing to prosecutorial effort) who participated in the outcome. This format provides positive feedback and reinforces the nature of NIBIN success as an interdependent process relying on the actions of many individuals.

5.6   Digital Evidence

Typical digital evidence used in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations at RPD comes from cell phones, computers, social media, and video camera systems. A sworn detective in MCU is dedicated to processing digital evidence from cell phones and video cameras, while computer analysis and cell phone plotting is handled by a sworn detective assigned to the SVU. There is also a civilian member assigned to FSU who assists with computer evidence. Detectives and crime analysts typically handle their own social media searches.

Interviewees said that detectives have done a good job of incorporating digital evidence into their cases. Some personnel noted that RPD has gotten multiple convictions based on evidence from cell phones, social media, and other digital sources.

5.6.1 Cell Phone and Video Evidence

A sworn MCU detective is responsible for processing evidence from cell phones and video systems. Although assigned to MCU, the detective also assists other investigative units with cell phone and video evidence needs. The detective's duties include responding to crime scenes to assist with digital evidence and other tasks; helping FSU obtain and download evidence from closed-circuit television, doorbell cameras, and other video systems; extracting cell phone data; working with federal partners (Secret Service, FBI) on complex cases involving cell phone evidence; assisting with social media data analysis; assisting with obtaining search warrants; and working with the VSP to build, deploy, and maintain covert surveillance camera operations.

After receiving a cell phone to process, the detective uses GrayKey to access and extract the mobile data. RPD does not have on-site access to GrayKey. However, the department is permitted to use the equipment located at the VSP headquarters and at the local ATF office. The detective responsible for cell phone evidence typically uses the equipment at VSP, which is a 10- to 15-minute drive from RPD headquarters. The detective then compiles the data report into a PDF file or other use-friendly format and pass it along to the case detective(s), who are responsible for analyzing the information and conducting follow-up. It appears that there is good coordination and communication among case detectives and the detective who processes cell phones when it comes to requesting and following up on cell phone evidence.

Interviewees said that there is a bit of a backlog for processing cell phone evidence, as there is only one person responsible for processing cell phones for all the department's investigative units. RPD's crime analysts are also trained to use Cellebrite, but RPD personnel agreed that as civilian personnel they should not be responsible for extracting cell phone data.

The detective who processes cell phones largely learned this skill through on-the-job training, rather than formal instruction. The detective seeks out digital evidence training when possible and is certified to testify in court.

5.6.2 Computer Crimes and Evidence

There is a sworn detective who is responsible for handling computer crimes, doing cell phone plotting, and processing evidence from computers (e.g., hard drive imaging). Despite performing these tasks for all types of investigations, the detective is technically assigned to SVU, carries a regular SVU caseload, and is on the on-call roster. There is also a civilian forensic investigator assigned to FSU who helps with computer evidence. Interviewees said that the workload is manageable for two people, as they may go a month or more without a request for cell phone plotting or hard drive imaging.

MCU relies on the computer crimes team to plot cell phone records but does not frequently request hard drive imaging or other services. The computer crimes detective was previously an MCU detective, so there is a strong understanding of what MCU detectives may need.

The computer crimes detective received no formal training upon starting this assignment. Nor did the detective receive on-the-job training, as the person who previously held the position had already retired. The civilian forensic investigator also did not have any training or instruction before assuming this assignment. The detective has attended a cybersecurity training program and has been able to seek out additional training when needed.

5.6.3 Digital Evidence Recommendations

Recommendations	55	**Create a separate, centralized Digital Evidence Unit.** The unit should be composed of the sworn and civilian personnel responsible for processing digital evidence from cell phones, computers, video systems, and other electronic sources. In addition: • RPD should develop operating procedures to govern the unit. The procedures should address the duties and responsibilities of various positions within the unit and set forth standards and procedures for processing digital evidence. • Personnel should be cross-trained on processing digital evidence from various sources (e.g., cell phones, hard drives, video systems) to help spread the workload and ensure that multiple people can effectively perform these tasks. • Personnel should be physically located together to share resources and tools. • Personnel should be dedicated to digital evidence responsibilities and should not carry separate investigative caseloads. • The unit should have a clear line of reporting.
	56	**Ensure that members responsible for processing digital evidence receive advanced training on a consistent basis.** The highly technical and constantly changing nature of digital evidence means that frequent training is critical. RPD should evaluate the current levels of training and invest in updated and advanced training opportunities.
	57	**Consider investing in technology for processing digital evidence in-house.** The assessment team learned that, although RPD has access to cell phone extraction tools located at VSP, using these tools requires a short drive and pulls the detective away from other work. This equipment is expensive, so RPD should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether it would be worth purchasing.

5.7 Crime Analysis and Intelligence

5.7.1 Crime Analysis

At RPD, the crime analysis unit is known as I-STAR (Intelligence, Statistics, Technology, Analysis, and Research) and reports directly to the Deputy Chief of Operations. I-STAR is led by a senior crime analyst and is staffed by four crime analysts, though two analysts were preparing to leave RPD at the time of this assessment. The crime analysts are physically located in the Investigative Operations Bureau in close proximity to investigators.

RPD's crime analysts are not assigned to any particular unit; rather, they all are available to assist with any type of case. Each analyst is assigned to handle a "problem area," which is a location within Roanoke that has experienced historically high levels of crime and violence.

The crime analysts' primary duties and responsibilities include:

- **Identifying patterns of crime and briefing RPD personnel**—As part of this task, analysts plot out the previous 30 days' worth of crime, identify "micro-time hot spots" (crime clusters), and create a daily bulletin in the Wizard program that they push out to the department and load into the SmartForce app.

- **Monitoring their assigned problem areas**—Analysts work with the captain in charge of the problem area to develop a customized report on what is happening in that area.

- **Providing investigative support**—Analysts provide some proactive investigative support to detectives, particularly for serious incidents like homicides and nonfatal shootings. Analysts assist detectives by analyzing reports and social network investigations, helping with identifications, conducting open-source investigations, looking for case linkages and submitting cases to the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, among other tasks. Analysts also provide information and feedback regarding the "problem people" list, which is a list of the Top 10 most violent offenders in the city. Crime analysts currently do not get involved with NIBIN leads at any stage of the process.

- **Producing statistical reports**—The senior analyst is primarily responsible for this task, which includes developing reports analyzing Understanding Crime Reporting Part I crime data and the percentage changes across time.

The crime analysts use GIS software from Esri as part of the daily workflow, as well as the i2 Analyst's Notebook for complex analysis and mapping.

It appears that RPD's crime analysts are very well-trained and have consistently had ample opportunities to receive advanced training. The senior analyst strives to identify cost-effective and useful trainings and tries to create training tracks tailored to each analyst's strengths and needs. All analysts attend an initial 1-week introductory crime analysis course offered by the Alpha Group Center. Most analysts also attend the Virginia Crime Analysis Network Symposium, which is a free training. Analysts have also received advanced trainings on social network investigations from the Secure Service and National Forensic Computer Institute; knowledge development regarding gangs; technical tools in EsriArcGIS Pro, Microsoft Power BI and Report Builder, and SQL Server Reporting Services; criminal intelligence; and open-source data collection.

Interviewees noted that crime analyst retention is an ongoing concern at RPD. They said that RPD's crime analysts are highly sought after by other departments due to their robust training and experience working in an urban police department. The assessment team learned that there are no step increases or promotional tracks within I-STAR.

Recommendations	58	**Take steps to ensure that crime analysts are being effectively utilized in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations.** RPD's crime analysts have the ability and desire to provide greater substantive assistance to detectives on violent crime investigations. With the right tools and access, analysts could help provide technical assistance to detectives, conduct social media and background research, perform linkage analysis on cases, and create linkage charts using an analysis of NIBIN hits, among other things. Having the analysts more involved in cases would also help free up detectives to focus on other aspects of their investigations. The command staff should ensure that they recognize and understand the capabilities of the crime analysts and how analysts can best contribute to violent crime investigations. Strategies for better integrating crime analysts into homicide and nonfatal shootings include: - Considering assigning an analyst directly to the MCU. This would help improve MCU capabilities and information flow.

		• Requiring detectives to consult with I-STAR at the outset of homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. This step should be included in the MCU policy manual and the investigative checklist detailed in Recommendation 1.
		• Involving crime analysts in the initial case debriefing that occurs immediately following the incident. This would allow analysts to provide tactical analysis and support.
		• Inviting crime analysts to attend case briefings, weekly violent crime meetings, and other information-sharing opportunities so they can share information and stay abreast of what is going on with investigations.
		• Inviting crime analysts to officer and detective trainings and roll calls to present information about their roles, capabilities, and ways they can assist with investigations.
		• Reassuring detectives that it is safe to share information with crime analysts and encouraging them to be more transparent and open about case information.
		• Ensuring that crime analysts get access to all up-to-date homicide and nonfatal shooting case files.
		• Assign crime analysts the duty of pulling police reports in NIBIN cases and performing independent analysis on the cases. This would allow information to flow through a crime analyst who is knowledgeable about NIBIN and ballistics linkages. It would also help reduce the redundancy of work performed by detectives and ATF personnel (analysts and TFOs) and allow investigators to focus on follow-up investigations rather than data analysis.
		The NCCP team can connect RPD with departments that are using crime analysts effectively in shooting investigations.
	59	**Explore strategies to improve retention among crime analysts.** For example, RPD should consider a possible crime analyst pay scale evaluation that looks at market rates of similar departments in the area. There should also be a possible step increase/promotional process within I-STAR, such as the creation of various levels of analysts (Level I, Level II) with commensurate pay increases.

5.7.2 Real Time Crime Center (RTCC)

At the time of this assessment, RPD was working on building an RTCC. The department has received funding for the RTCC, including to purchase additional equipment and hire another analyst, and has identified the RTCC facility. The plan is to begin operating the RTCC on Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with the goal of eventually expanding to 24/7 coverage.

Recommendations	60	**Develop a detailed plan for the development of the RTCC.** The plan should address topics that include but are not limited to:
		• A description of the duties and responsibilities of the RTCC and the positions within the RTCC.
		• Required staffing levels necessary for proper functioning, including at least partial evening and weekend in-person coverage to align with the timing of many fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents. If possible, the ultimate goal should be to eventually have the capacity to staff the RTCC on a 24/7 basis.
		• Budgetary needs, including investments in technology and equipment such as facial recognition software and artificial intelligence analytics that are used to search for things such as certain clothing and vehicle types.
		• Expected responsibilities for supporting investigations.
		• Products and outcomes to be generated.
		• RTCC data access needs.

61	**Develop policies and protocols for the RTCC prior to its launch. This includes protocols for conducting real-time intelligence analysis on homicides and nonfatal shootings.** Intelligence analysts can provide actionable intelligence related to shootings to assigned investigators in nearly real time. The protocol includes using existing intelligence resources to conduct analysis of homicides and nonfatal shooting incidents simultaneous to police response or shortly thereafter. The analysis may include victim and suspect profiles and potential associates, geographical intelligence, related phone numbers, social media analysis of involved subjects, license plate reader and vehicle associations, gang affiliation and the potential for retaliation, public records database searches, or crime camera analysis. The intelligence derived from such a process can greatly enhance investigators' initial efforts in determining suspects and interviewing witnesses. Moreover, if a homicide or assault with a firearm is later linked through NIBIN to other shootings, the initial intelligence report produced under this system should be in a shared drive so that other crime analysts can easy link new incidents to past NIBIN incidents with having to regather the information again. Such analysis also lends itself to supporting real-time patrol adjustments based on what intelligence is gathered from the initial assessment.
62	**Evaluate the role of crime analysts within the RTCC.** At the outset, RPD should determine the role that crime analysts will play within the RTCC. There is a difference between tactical real-time analysis and strategical analysis, and RPD will need to ensure that all RTCC personnel are trained in tactical real-time and intelligence analyses. If the RTCC expands to provide 24/7 coverage, RPD will need to hire an additional three intelligence analysts to serve in this role.

5.8   Case Prosecution

5.8.1 Commonwealth's Attorney's Office

The Roanoke Commonwealth's Attorney's Office (RCAO) has 14 prosecutors. Nine prosecutors handle adult crimes and five prosecutors are assigned to Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and drug crimes. The office may be understaffed by three positions based on certain state criteria. The Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney screens violent crime cases for charging and assignment to individual prosecutors, with the Commonwealth's Attorney occasionally getting involved in serious or unusual cases.

Interviewees from the RCAO said that their office has an excellent working relationship with RPD detectives generally and with the MCU in particular. They said that although RPD is understaffed, the detectives are some of the finest in the state and they would "put them up against any other jurisdiction's detectives." Prosecutors said that detectives maintain good communication with RCAO, are very responsive, have a strong work ethic, and do not appear to take it personally if one of their cases is declined for prosecution or pled out to a lesser charge. RPD personnel similarly reported having a good working relationship with RCAO prosecutors.

Prosecutors said that although witnesses to violent crimes are often reluctant to participate in investigations or prosecutions because they live in the neighborhood with the offenders, detectives do a good job of collecting independent evidence such as video or digital evidence. The assessment team learned that the volume of digital evidence that needs to be shared with prosecutors is quite large, and thus the jurisdiction could use a centralized system to share large digital files between agencies.

Interviewees said that on rare occasions, a patrol officer may handle a nonfatal shooting case with very little evidence to go on. It was suggested that the assistance of a detective or additional training for patrol officers could be useful in such cases. Additionally, cross-training for prosecutors and detectives on fatal and nonfatal shooting cases would be helpful so that both are on the same page about what needs to be done for a case to be successfully investigated and prosecuted.

| Recommendations | 63 | **Implement cross-training for prosecutors and detectives on what constitutes a viable shooting case for prosecution.**

RPD and RCAO should work together to develop a list of training needs. Training prosecutor/detective teams simultaneously can lead to improved case investigations, communication, and prosecution.

Cross-training should address topics that include:

• Determining how to build stronger cases using circumstantial evidence, including identifying admissible hearsay statements at trial. This training is particularly important for those cases when victims or witnesses refuse to cooperate.
• Clarifying evidentiary standards for various stages of the criminal justice process.
• The value of using federal resources to assist with shooting investigations, even if the case is not brought to federal court. These resources include federal TFOs (such as RPD's ATF TFO), federal partners who have advanced tools and training to assist with processing digital evidence, NIBIN, and eTrace. Federal resources can provide incredibly valuable assistance in shooting investigations and should be leveraged when possible.
• Collecting and analyzing digital evidence, including any legal restrictions.
• Drafting search warrants and other required documents.
• Training on moving forward with cases without the victim, including the importance of investigating and prosecuting cases regardless of the victim's status or involvement in criminal activity, and the importance of joint community engagement by police and prosecutors demonstrating a commitment to shooting cases and community safety regardless of victim status to dispel perceptions that certain shooting cases are not taken seriously. Detectives and prosecutors should hold regular meetings to discuss any issues in the investigation and prosecution of these types of cases. |
| | 64 | **Secure a centralized system to accommodate the sharing of large digital files.**
RPD and RCAO should implement a centralized online system to share large digital evidence files that will facilitate case screening and discovery obligations. |

5.8.2 U.S. Attorney's Office

The U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO) for the Western District of Virginia covers multiple jurisdictions, including Roanoke, Charlottesville, Abingdon, and Danville, with Roanoke having some of the highest rates of violent crime in the district. The USAO has a good working relationship with RPD, but described it as mostly on a case-by-case basis, rather than institutionalized.

RPD does have federal TFOs who work well with federal counterparts and the USAO. The handful of cases adopted by the USAO typically are referred through the TFOs. For example, the USAO has taken two homicide cases for federal prosecution that had a federal nexus. These TFOs tend to understand what is needed for a case to be adopted federally. The USAO did indicate that a good deal of federal criminal litigation revolves around search warrants and that RPD could use some training on common search warrant issues raised in federal court.

The USAO has a Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)[2] initiative and has previously met every other month to discuss violent crime in the district. The PSN initiative has not typically engaged in traditional case screening but instead focuses on more general meetings with criminal justice partners and allied professionals for broader discussions. The USAO also attends quarterly violent crime meetings hosted by the RCAO as well as quarterly gang intelligence meetings hosted by the VSP.

The USAO is eager to collaborate more closely with the RPD and RCAO to combat violent crime in Roanoke and has offered to participate in training on the federal nexus that makes a state case eligible for federal prosecution as well as training on search warrants that will withstand federal court scrutiny, two areas the USAO thought could assist RPD. The USAO also was willing to engage with the RPD and the RCAO on screening gun cases if all the entities thought this would be helpful.

| Recommendations | 65 | **Expand training opportunities with the USAO.** RPD and the USAO should arrange for training on federal eligibility of state gun cases and on search warrant writing that will withstand federal scrutiny. |
| | 66 | **Consider reinstituting regular PSN meetings and firearm case screenings.** The USAO, RPD, and RCAO should consider if regular PSN meetings and traditional PSN screening of gun cases could be helpful to the jurisdiction. The NCCP team can support RPD and its partners by connecting them to effective PSN groups across the country. |

5.9   Community Engagement and Participation

In response to questions posed to community leaders and RPD personnel about what is needed to increase community participation in investigations, the overwhelming response was for officers to build relationships and trust with the communities they serve. Literature in the field supports this—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 otherwise engage in the criminal legal process (Brunson et al., 2015; Wellford & Cronin, 1999). Prior research has shown that perceptions of law enforcement legitimacy is associated with voluntary cooperation with the police (Hinds & Murphy, 2016; Mazerolle et al., 2013; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Therefore, building meaningful engagement and trust with the community can be an important factor in increasing community participation in shooting investigations.

The assessment team learned that RPD has been working toward strengthening its community engagement efforts and expanding its outreach to victims, families, and the community at large. RPD's Chief of Police is committed to community engagement and has made it a priority. Both RPD personnel and community members told the assessment team that they have seen evidence of the chief's commitment to community engagement. Leaders from CBOs noted that it would be beneficial for RPD to be present in the community often, not just when things are going badly, such as when a shooting occurs. CBO leaders suggested that officers do more foot patrols, allowing opportunities for residents and officers to engage and build relationships.

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[2] PSN is a partnership between community groups, clergy, service providers, nonprofits, probation/parole officers, prosecutors, law enforcement, and others to reduce gun and group/gang-related violence crime.

This section documents RPD's community engagement initiatives and includes feedback from both RPD personnel and representatives from CBOs. Additional information about RPD's community engagement efforts and the community's perceptions of the department is included in a separate Project CLEARS report.

5.9.1   Community Response Bureau

RPD has a CRB that is led by a captain and includes a lieutenant, sergeant, two full-time CROs, and one part-time CRO position that focuses on homelessness and environmental services. The CROs also specifically refer to themselves as the CET. Interviewees said that the overarching goals of the CRB are to serve as a liaison between RPD and the community, to problem-solve with residents and businesses to address issues, and to build trust between the community and RPD.

The CRB is authorized to have seven full-time CROs. If fully staffed, there would be five CROs each assigned to a specific geographic zone (Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and the Downtown zone) and two crime prevention officers (CPOs) who are responsible for conducting security assessments with businesses and residents and implementing crime prevention strategies. However, the CRB staffing shortage means that the two full-time CROs currently perform all of these duties for the entire city. Additionally, interviewees said that RPD leadership's increased focus on community engagement has led to more demands on the CROs. CRB members documented participation in 311 engagement activities by September 2024, more than double the amount (145) documented for all of 2023.

The CET is involved in a number of community engagement activities and initiatives. For example, CET members provide education to the community in the form of active shooter/workplace violence trainings, CPR/first aid courses, and safety planning for religious organizations. They also work on long-term problems within the community that are raised by community members through an anonymous online reporting platform or that were referred to CET by patrol officers, city council members, or others. The CET takes a "broken windows theory" approach to addressing these concerns and works with a variety of community and city stakeholders to resolve them.

CET members also attend a variety of neighborhood meetings and community events, including:

- **Neighborhood Association Meetings:** CROs have traditionally attended monthly or bimonthly neighborhood association meetings; however, because there are currently only two CROs, they cannot attend them all. Residents have told CRB personnel that they miss having CROs more present in the community and available at the neighborhood association meetings to share incident-specific information. Community members have said that CROs provide residents with peace of mind by reporting on crime incidents at neighborhood association meetings and by providing context to the crimes and demonstrating that the crimes are not random. The civilian neighborhood association coordinator for the City of Roanoke (or its representative) now attends most neighborhood association meetings but cannot provide incident-specific information in the same way that RPD can. This coordinator does provide information to CROs about concerns raised at neighborhood association meetings, and the CRO will tries to attend the following meeting to answer questions.

- **RESET Walks:** These weekly walks are described in more detail in Section 5.9.3.

- **Downtown Visibility Walks:** These walks, which were initiated in partnership with the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority and the Roanoke Fire Marshal, give participants the opportunity to address specific complaints. Interviewees said that these walks help keep the downtown entertainment district "on its toes" and have been replicated by other law enforcement agencies.

- **Monthly Chief's Walk:** RPD's Chief of Police determines the location for the monthly walks. Participants distribute resources (e.g., gun locks, identification kits available through the National Child Identification Program, crime prevention pamphlets,) and talk to community members about quality-of-life issues such as street lighting, break-ins, gang/group activity, and problematic locations. The impetus for the Chief's Walk is that research has shown that communities feel forgotten when they do not see patrols or a police department presence in their area. Therefore, the chief wants to target areas around the city so that residents do not feel forgotten. Members of the CRB emphasized the importance of having the support of community groups during the walks, citing FEDUP (Families Expecting Deliverance Using Prayer), an organization that supports family members who have lost loved ones to gun violence, as the group RPD partners with most consistently. As one CRB member noted, "We can't do this job by ourselves. When the community gets involved, others will see it and follow suit." This quote illustrates the importance of having trusted community organizations vouch for RPD's credibility and be visibly seen in partnership with RPD to build greater community trust.

- **Quarterly neighborhood forums:** These forums are hosted by RPD and rotate among neighborhoods throughout the city. They are designed as a way to exchange information and to give residents the opportunity to pose questions to RPD members. Residents are provided with food, RPD shares crime prevention tips, and there is sometimes an educational panel with speakers on a certain topic. Residents can leave their names and contact information at the sessions if they have specific issues they would like RPD to follow up with them about. RPD interviewees said that they hope more residents begin attending the forums and that the CRB is considering whether podcasts or other mechanisms may be a more effective way to get information out to the community.

The CRB gets involved in homicide or nonfatal shooting investigations on a case-by-case basis. The CRB captain will ask the lead detective what is needed and will deploy staff as needed. Detectives sometimes reach out to CROs to get in touch with contacts, as the CROs often have better rapport with community members or know where to locate individuals. CROs are also instrumental in talking to property owners to get access to video footage of incidents.

RPD's community engagement efforts are on the rise, and the CRB is staffed with passionate members who enjoy problem-solving and truly want to make a difference. However, the RPD and CRB still face several challenges. The CRB was shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic due to concerns about social distancing, so it has been in a rebuilding phase after resuming operations in March 2023. Additionally, RPD personnel said that because officers became accustomed to not getting out of their vehicles or engaging with the public during the pandemic, they now have to be retrained (or trained for the first time) on the practice. Interviewees also said that the retirement of older officers sometimes means the loss of institutional knowledge about community policing and engagement. This can make it challenging for newer officers to learn firsthand about the benefits of community engagement and the importance of building community trust and relationships.

The CRB will need to be built back up to allow for consistent and regular community engagement to fully realize RPD's potential in this area. Staffing, training, and succession planning in this area are all important. RPD must focus on assigning personnel to the CRB who are community minded, are skilled at speaking with the public, and who are passionate about making a difference.

Recommendations	67	**Consider how to meet the needs of the community while the CRB remains short staffed.** Ideally, RPD would fully staff the CRB with its allotted five CROs (one assigned to each geographic zone) and two CPOs. However, this is likely not feasible until at least the RPD's patrol function is fully staffed. Therefore, RPD will need to consider innovative strategies to meet the needs of the community, particularly with respect to these two areas: • **Crime prevention efforts:** The lack of CPOs means that the CRB currently has no crime prevention component. It was suggested that a retired officer may be brought back on a part-time basis to help fulfill this need and to take on some of the community education functions, such as providing active shooter training. • **Neighborhood association meetings:** When CROs attend neighborhood association meetings, it provides a valuable direct connection between RPD and the community. In lieu of fully staffing the CRB so that CROs can consistently attend these meetings, RPD will need to explore alternatives to fill this void. For example, RPD may consider whether written materials about crime incidents may be prepared by a crime analyst or other personnel for the city's neighborhood association coordinator to share with residents. RPD may also consider piloting a podcast or video recording to share information at times that are convenient for CROs to participate (see Recommendation 68).
	68	**Expand the use of social and digital media to share information with the community.** The CRB is interested in creating podcasts or doing more interviews, which could be posted on social media to share information with the community. Although the CRB should continue to host in-person events whenever possible, it may reach a greater number of people through social media. CROs could host a podcast or Facebook Live video to allow the community to ask questions in real time. Prerecorded content could also be recorded at a time convenient for RPD personnel. The NCCP team can connect RPD with peer law enforcement agencies who are using podcasts and Facebook Live videos to share information with the community.
	69	**Identify revenue sources to purchase RPD-branded giveaway items.** There has been an increased interest by community members for RPD-branded T-shirts, bracelets, water bottles, and other items. This is a good indicator of increased community support and should be continued.
	70	**Educate RPD personnel on the value of the CRB and its role in strengthening community trust and participation in investigations.** RPD leaders and supervisors should educate RPD personnel on the important role that CRB plays in achieving the department's goals. Educational efforts should clearly draw direct lines between strengthening community engagement, building community trust, improving community participation in investigations, and helping close cases.
	71	**Have patrol officers and investigators make one positive contact with a community member each day.** The contact and the nature of the interaction should be documented. The more that officers become familiar with residents and vice versa, the greater the likelihood of building relationships, trust, and opportunities for community members to share information with trusted RPD contacts. Research has shown that a single instance of positive contact with a uniformed officer can substantially improve public attitudes toward the police, including legitimacy and willingness to cooperate (Peyton et al., 2019).

	72	**Incentivize the community-based work of RPD officers and other personnel.** Even if incentives are not necessarily monetary or financial, finding ways to give kudos, credit, or acknowledgment, or to document these efforts for the purposes of performance reviews, will encourage and reinforce continued community-focused efforts. This will go a long way in the eyes of the community and demonstrate that community engagement is a priority throughout RPD.
	73	**Determine whether there is a need for supplemental training on community policing.** Some RPD officers may need supplemental training on community policing and engagement due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is true both for officers who joined RPD during the pandemic and for those who may have fallen out of community engagement practices during that time.
	74	**Strengthen communication between CROs and MCU detectives so they better understand how they can help one another.** RPD should review information-sharing protocols and practices between CROs and detectives to identify ways to better leverage CROs' unique skills, community knowledge, and relationships for crime problem-solving and investigative purposes.

5.9.2   Victim and Family Advocacy

Feedback from residents whose family members are the victims of unsolved homicide cases, as well as from the CBOs that support them, identified concerns about uncleared cases and perceptions that the police and prosecutors are not doing enough to solve and prosecute such cases. This has led to frustration, concern about a lack of deterrence for future acts of violence, and unresolved trauma in the community surrounding these violent incidents. There is a need for community education about the criminal legal process and efforts to address the desire among community members for criminal justice system actors to explain more about their cases.

Recommendations	**75**	**Explore hiring an in-house victim advocate to assist families of homicide victims and nonfatal shooting victims and their families.** As discussed in Section 5.9.3, RPD is doing a good job of identifying and assisting victims and witnesses through RESET, and the RESET team has made great strides in providing victims and their families with the resources they need. However, RPD should consider hiring a dedicated in-house victim advocate to provide focused assistance to families of homicide victims and victims and families in nonfatal shootings. Feedback from the community supports this idea. Families of homicide victims stated that they have questions about the criminal legal process and desire more advocacy as they proceed through the criminal justice system. It may be most feasible to establish victim advocacy for homicide cases first and then consider expanding advocacy efforts to victims and families of nonfatal shootings. RPD could explore grants or other opportunities to support additional advocacy efforts. The NCCP team can link RPD to peer sites that have implemented or expanded their in-house victim advocacy efforts. These sites have reported multiple benefits of doing so.
	76	**Incorporate into written policies and SOPs the expectations for detective follow-up and communication with the families of homicide victims and with victims of nonfatal shootings. These expectations should be grounded in a victim-centered approach and emphasize that detectives should treat all victims and families with respect.** Policies and protocols should require detectives to: • 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, anniversary of the victim's murder), regardless of whether there are any case updates. In addition to providing support to victims' families, this type of outreach can improve perceptions of the police within communities and increase community participation in future investigations. Creating a liaison or victim advocate position (Recommendation 75) could assist with this effort and take the burden off detectives, especially in cases where there are no new updates. These steps should also be included in the checklist discussed in Recommendation 17.
77	**Consider strategies for bridging the gap between RPD and the surviving family members of homicide victims.** For example, RPD could host a meeting where family members engage with investigators about their cases and have their questions answered. RPD could also consider implementing the VOICES intervention (Hill et al., 2021), which uses theories from intergroup communication and facilitated dialogue to build trust and legitimacy and break down barriers between law enforcement agencies and marginalized communities. The VOICES intervention can help repair damaged relationships and lay a foundation of trust so that community members and a law enforcement agency can move forward and work together. The NCCP team can provide more information and resources about the VOICES intervention and other programs if RPD is interested.

5.9.3   RESET Program

RPD's RESET program is overseen by a civilian coordinator who is a former RPD officer and former probation/parole supervisor. The coordinator position began in 2020 and was originally grant funded but has since been included in RPD's budget. According to the city's description of RESET, the program emerged from RPD's desire to develop "a holistic, comprehensive strategy to combat gun violence and violent crime in the community (City of Roanoke, n.d.)."

RESET walks began in 2021 and occur weekly. During these events, the RESET coordinator leads a team of community volunteers to visit neighborhoods after the areas have experienced traumatic events, such as a shooting. The volunteers walk the area; knock on doors; talk to residents; offer resources to those who may need them; and hand out informational materials, gun locks, and identification kits available through the National Child Identification Program. The RESET program has access to a variety of services, such as a mental health counselor, a clinician, and financial assistance, that are available through grant funding. The assessment team learned that these resources have helped the community in many ways. In one example, a resident's car windshield was shot out and she did not have funds to replace it. When this need was discovered through a RESET walk, the RESET coordinator was able to arrange to get the windshield replaced.

The location of upcoming RESET walks is posted online so that residents will know when a walk is coming to their area. If there is a homicide or major shooting incident that should receive a response that does not align with the timing of the next RESET walk, the RESET coordinator and CRB provide a response within 72 hours of the incident. They will not wait until the next available scheduled RESET walk but will instead have officers and the RESET coordinator walk the area and hand out RESET informational materials door-to-door or leave door hangers and materials. These responses do not

include the full team of civilian volunteers. RPD interviewees believe these impromptu responses are less successful than the scheduled RESET walks because the civilian presence is important for residents to feel comfortable opening their doors and engaging with volunteers.

The RESET program offers training and self-care for the civilian volunteers quarterly. Part of the training is about how trauma impacts the residents that the volunteers interact with. Another part of the training includes mindfulness and self-care techniques for the volunteers to help them process the vicarious trauma they experience as part of their work with the RESET program.

Services for Victims and Families

The RESET program also helps victims of violent crime and families of homicide victims outside of those individuals identified through the RESET walks. For example, the RESET coordinator sometimes receives referrals from RPD members, including investigators, about individuals they are working with who have experienced violence. When a referral is received, the coordinator contacts the individual and offers to connect them to therapy services that are available through grant funding. If the victims or families are not yet ready to receive support, the RESET team follows up in about 30 days and continues engaging for around 6 months before moving on.

The therapist notifies the RESET coordinator when therapy has been scheduled. The assessment team learned that many people have followed through with scheduling therapy through the RESET team, including several youth who were seeking therapy for the first time. The therapists available through RESET are culturally competent and work well with all age groups.

One example provided to the assessment team was of a mother whose son became paraplegic after being shot. After her son later passed away, the mother wanted to talk to the RESET coordinator to get his perspective as a Black male about what her son must have been going through while he was in, as she described it, a "helpless" state. The mother was referred to a Black female therapist and still continues with the therapy. She told the RESET coordinator that connecting her with the therapist was the best thing she could have done.

Interviewees said that the RESET program and its resources have been an immense help to members of the community who are hurting and may not know where to turn for support.

RESET Walks and Shooting Investigations

CROs participate in the RESET walks to provide security and to be on hand if a community member wants to share information for investigative purposes. CROs attempt to remain in the background and let the civilian volunteers knock on doors, in large part based on the desire to be careful when engaging with residents given the strong anti-snitching norm in the community. Civilian volunteers also hand out cards to collect names and contact information from residents, along with a brief narrative about what they wish to speak with an officer about. CROs are then able to come back to speak with residents or a resident can contact the CRO to set up a meeting. Although RESET is designed as a restorative program to bring healing to the community rather than an investigative tool, RPD interviewees said that on multiple occasions they have received investigative information while on RESET walks. One interviewee said that at least twice in the past year a shooting investigation has been solved based on information residents shared during a RESET walk.

RPD personnel reported receiving positive feedback from the community about the RESET walks. The community has expressed gratitude for the RESET team coming into the neighborhood, noting that often people just appreciate the opportunity to talk. The RESET coordinator has received follow-up calls from residents after walks to report concerns about individuals or other neighborhood problems. When the RESET coordinator receives this type of information, it is turned over to sworn officers to follow up on the information. When the residents share a complaint about an officer, such as one resident who was bothered after witnessing officers laughing at a crime scene, the RESET coordinator relays that information to a deputy chief.

There were some initial concerns that residents would not open their doors if RPD officers participated in the RESET walks. However, this fear did not arise. Instead, having officers on the walks has helped residents see the human side of police officers and demonstrates that officers are willing to engage in civil conversation.

Recommendations	**78**	**Continue to support the RESET program.** The RESET program, including the weekly walks and the availability of free mental health care, appear to have provided a wealth of positive benefits to the community and to RPD. Not only is RESET helping to address the needs of the community, including crime victims and their families, but it is also yielding useful investigative information. The importance of sustaining these efforts was a need mentioned by several RPD and CBO interviewees.
	79	**Consider having all RPD personnel (both sworn and civilian) who interact with victims/families and witnesses complete training about the impact of trauma and self-care methods provided to RESET volunteers.** Training should address how trauma impacts the brain and body, which in turn affects a victim's or witness's ability to recall details of an event or to communicate about an incident. Training will allow law enforcement personnel to better understand the behaviors of what they may perceive to be "difficult" victims and witnesses, which may be related to trauma. Consider an additional required training for all investigators about trauma-informed interviewing techniques.

5.9.4   *Victim and Witness Participation*

RPD personnel said that it is often challenging to obtain participation from victims and witnesses in shooting investigations. Interviewees noted that the Northwest area of Roanoke has an especially low level of participation due to high concerns about retaliation. As discussed in Section 5.3.2 (Follow-up Investigation), RPD detectives appear to do a good job of following through with leads and trying to solicit input from the community—a belief supported by RPD leaders—yet victim/witness participation remains a challenge and there is a strong anti-snitching culture within the community.

Combating the Anti-Snitching Mentality

Interviewees from RPD said that the "stop-snitching" mentality is addressed during the neighborhood forums described in Section 5.9.1 (Community Response Bureau). They said this topic is also discussed during the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program, which is taught by school resource officers in local schools. One interviewee shared a strategy they learned about at a conference, which emphasized that because the "stop-snitching" message is often perpetuated through social media,

it is important to push counter-messaging through the same platforms. Unfortunately, research is limited on what works to reduce community anti-snitching attitudes, though the NCCP team can provide RPD with promising programs and practices for combating no-snitching attitudes and addressing witness intimidation/retaliation. One important element is the protection of victims and witnesses who do participate in an investigation. Our case file review showed that the motive in two fatal shootings was related to sharing information with law enforcement (i.e., "snitching") (see Section 4). If offenders can harm victims or witnesses who participate in the criminal legal system, or victims and witnesses do not feel safe participating in investigations, then participation will remain difficult to obtain.

Recommendations	80	**Explore strategies to combat the "no-snitching" norm in the community.** Community members must be convinced that working with the police benefits the community and that doing so is safe. Strategies may include: • Bringing in CBOs as partners or leaders in these efforts. This is a critical component of any messaging directed at the community. • Convening a working group that includes CBOs and other community leaders to discuss strategies around this topic. • Partnering with community groups to develop forums and spaces to discuss anti-snitching norms. This involves listening to the community (especially young people) about their perceptions of this norm, the reasons it exists, and their suggestions to overcome it. Although dated, participants could refer to the resource called *The Stop Snitching Phenomenon: Breaking the Code of Silence* developed by PERF and funded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (Police Executive Research Forum [PERF], 2009)(PERF, 2009), which includes promising practices and potential solutions to address the stop-snitching phenomenon. • Working with community groups to distribute stop-snitching counter-messaging on social media platforms. To be effective, this counter-messaging should flood social media with an appeal to emotions, empathy, and perspective-taking (e.g., "What if it was your mom who was the victim? Would you be a snitch then?"). The counter-messaging should also avoid using the word "snitch" specifically.
	81	**Strengthen safety measures for victims and witnesses, including by providing relocation assistance.** The NCCP assessment team learned that fear of retaliation is a major contributing factor to a lack of victim or witness participation in shooting investigations. RPD should work with its partners in local government, the prosecutor's office, and the community to develop a strategy for better protecting victims and witnesses of violent crime. This strategy should include establishing dedicated funds for witness protection and relocation in addition to other actions. This effort may be best coordinated by the director of a victim services unit if RPD implements Recommendation 75, or the RESET coordinator if RPD does not implement a victim services unit or add personnel dedicated to homicide or major violent crime victims/witnesses. The NCCP team can support RPD in implementing measures to protect victims and witnesses and increase their participation in the legal system.

| | 82 | **Develop a protocol for RPD and its partners to better identify, record, respond to, and prevent acts of victim/witness intimidation. This includes assessing the level of risk for those who are threatened.**

RPD should identify a main point of contact to whom all acts of witness intimidation are reported, so that one person is responsible for documenting and tracking incidents and ensuring there is an appropriate response to all incidents.

Strategies that RPD should consider include:

- Using existing tools that have been developed for practitioners to develop protocols to identify and respond to victim/witness intimidation and to promote victim/witness safety.
- Increasing identification of potential victim/witness intimidation by:
  - Educating law enforcement, prosecutorial personnel, and victim-/witness-serving personnel about the various forms of intimidation.
  - Educating victims/witnesses about the various forms of intimidation and manipulation they may encounter and how and to whom it should be reported.
  - Checking in regularly with victims/witnesses. Be alert for signs of intimidation, such as increased apprehension or anxiety and increased reluctance to speak with law enforcement.
- Ensuring the collection and documentation of evidence related to victim/witness intimidation by:
  - Instructing victims/witnesses on how to preserve evidence of intimidation or harassment (including online and social media evidence).
  - Ensuring that communication on a victim/witness's personal device or computer is properly documented and collected according to departmental procedures.
  - Developing a process and point of contact to ensure that all instances of victim/witness intimidation are shared with and documented by RPD, including the type of intimidation act or threat that was committed and how the instance was identified by RPD or another reporting agency. |

Anonymous Reporting

RPD's Crime Stoppers program and other anonymous reporting options received a mixed response among people interviewed. Interviewees said that RPD has a text messaging service that community members can use to message crime tips or report incidents directly to the Investigative Operations Bureau. One interviewee said that RPD does have an anonymous tip line akin to Crime Stoppers, but there were mixed responses about how robust the tip line is. Interviewees from the community said they are not sure how much residents trust anonymous tip lines—or if they are even aware of this as a reporting option—and there is a narrative in the community that RPD investigators are not doing enough to protect the names of witnesses or others involved in cases. One RPD interviewee suggested forming a citizen group to allow for citizen-to-citizen reporting, which could then be passed on to law enforcement.

According to RPD personnel, the proliferation of video cameras has helped move investigations forward, even when victim or witness accounts are unavailable. They said that community members and business owners are largely willing to share their video footage for investigative purposes when requested to do so. Providing residents with more access to cameras and developing camera registry systems may be ways to work around the community's concern that sharing information will label them as snitches.

Recommendations	**83**	**Identify community groups and leaders to serve as intermediaries, or "civilian buffers," between the RPD and victims, witnesses, and members of the community who want to report information about crimes.** It is important to recognize the unique role that community groups can play in soliciting actionable information about shooting incidents. Many CBO leaders said that they do receive investigative information from community members they serve. RPD should create formal partnerships with these groups to increase opportunities for the community to provide investigative information. This includes working with CBOs to develop strategies to increase reporting, such as expanding messaging to the community about the importance of reporting and coordinating what CBO staff should do with information once it is reported. One strategy is to have the voices of those who have been impacted by violence, such as a family member whose loved one's homicide has not been solved, to message about how important reporting investigative information is to solving cases.
	84	**Educate RPD personnel and CBO leaders about tip lines, Crime Stoppers, and any other anonymous reporting options. Promote the use of anonymous reporting mechanisms as a safe way for community members to provide information regarding crimes.** Once they are educated about reporting options, CBO leaders could be advocates to promote the use of these options by others in the community. RPD should: • Update educational and awareness efforts about anonymous reporting options to include the message that no one's identity has ever been compromised due to using these options (if true) and that these options provide a safe, confidential way to report information and help address violence in the community. • Engage CBOs to promote Crime Stoppers at their events, as individuals affiliated with trusted CBOs can be effective messengers. RPD and CBO representatives could hand out cards with tip line information at community meetings or during community-based walks, such as the RESET walks. • Publicize the success of anonymous reporting options when they lead to information that helped result in case closures without compromising tipster identities.
	85	**Consider ways to increase the likelihood that investigative information will be captured on video in areas most impacted by violent crime.** This includes increasing access to technology such as doorbell cameras and internet capabilities for community members and expanding surveillance networks. The NCCP team can assist in making connections with peer sites that have explored options to increase access through providing free or reduced-cost internet and free cameras to residents and business owners. The NCCP team can also assist RPD in ensuring that increases in surveillance technology are well-received by residents.

5.9.5   Other Community-Based Initiatives

The RESET coordinator facilitates programs for youth, including a boxing program that RPD supports and a program that is facilitated through the YMCA that is designed to engaged youth aged 13 to 17 years about their education and connect with them with resources such as mentoring, tutoring, and court advocacy. The City of Roanoke recently received a grant to increase community-based interventions including a Hispanic outreach position. The goal is to focus on prevention and outreach rather than prosecution and enforcement. Some of the funds will also be used to purchase cameras for RPD's RTCC.

Group Violence Intervention/Community Violence Intervention

In April 2024, RPD initiated a GVI based on the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) focused deterrence model. NNSC conducted an 18-month study of fatal and nonfatal shootings in Roanoke and

found that 32% were gang or group related. The GVI coordinator has been in the position for about 4 months.

The GVI has a service arm that includes FEDUP, the Roanoke Department of Social Services, local schools, Roanoke's Juvenile Services Division, behavioral health providers, the Youth and Gang Violence Prevention coordinator, and the local hospital, which has a hospital-based violence intervention program that conducts outreach to gunshot victims to provide support and assistance for preventing retaliatory violence.

The Youth and Gang Violence Prevention coordinator oversees the city's Community Violence Intervention (CVI) team, which serves individuals who are at the highest risk for gun violence victimization or perpetration. Both the coordinator and the CVI are located in the city's administrative building; however, the coordinator reports to the GVI coordinator at RPD. It is important that the CVI maintain some distance from law enforcement so that the community will not view it as affiliated with the police, which could damage its trust and credibility with the people it serves. Interviewees said that a recreation center will eventually be refurbished in the Northwest area of Roanoke, and the Youth and Gang Violence Prevention coordinator and CVI will operate from there.

As part of the GVI, RPD does custom notifications with individuals who are involved in gang/group firearm violence. The department has not yet conducted a group call-in or notification session. During weekly strategy meetings, representatives from law enforcement, probation/parole, and prosecutors review gun incidents and identify individuals to notify. Interviewees said that the GVI has fostered more communication and collaboration among these criminal justice and service provider partners. To qualify for a custom notification, individuals must have no pending charges and must be currently involved in violence.

GVI notifications are conducted in person, typically at an individual's home. The notification team includes the GVI coordinator, an RPD captain or lieutenant (who delivers the message from law enforcement that violence will no longer be tolerated), and the RESET coordinator or Youth and Gang Violence Prevention coordinator (who deliver the message about hope and available assistance/resources). If the individual is on probation, their probation officer will also attend the notification session. If the individual is a juvenile, the GVI team attempts to engage their parent or guardian to offer additional support. Resource support for notified individuals is broad and can include mentorship, relocation assistance, academic or employment resources, and mental or behavioral health support.

According to interviewees from the community, RPD's Chief of Police understands that the boundaries between law enforcement and CVI programs need to be respected for CVI outreach workers to effectively connect and maintain trust with their clients. The assessment team learned that RPD patrol officers and investigators could use more education about the role of CVI and how it differs from law enforcement, as well as how CVI outreach staff operate using a case management approach with the individuals they serve. This would help RPD personnel better understand what information can be shared with them by CVI programs and why CVI programs are often unable to share information about specific individuals or incidents.

Recommendations	86	**Evaluate the impact of the GVI initiative in Roanoke.** Six custom notifications had been conducted at the time of this assessment. Five of the six notified individuals are accepting resources and none has since committed a violent offense. RPD should continue to examine the data to determine when a shift away from custom notifications to a group call-in is needed, or if there is a need to move away from addressing the gang/group dynamic and consider if another dynamic is driving violent crime.
	87	**Establish better coordination among the GVI, the RESET team, and the CVI team to ensure that efforts are not being duplicated but instead reinforce one another.** Consider allowing the Youth and Gang Violence Prevention coordinator to attend the weekly GVI strategy meetings where gun assaults are reviewed, or having a debriefing after the meeting where names of involved individuals are shared with the coordinator. This would help the CVI team intervene with individuals more quickly, as currently the CVI team is relying on social media to learn about shooting incidents and the individuals involved in them.
	88	**Build trust between the CVI team and RPD by educating patrol officers and investigators about the role of CVI.** Allow those who work in the CVI space to educate law enforcement personnel about the purpose of CVI work. This will help identify opportunities for RPD and CVI to collaborate and share information that is actionable for violence interrupters in ways that maintain the credibility of the outreach workers with the communities they are serving. The NCCP team can provide connections to peer sites where law enforcement and CVI programs have developed processes to better work together and share information.

RTI provided RPD with a detailed report as part of Project CLEARS that includes additional findings and recommendations based on data collection from RPD personnel in community-engaged positions, leaders of CBOs, and residents regarding their perceptions of RPD's level of community engagement, methods of communication and information sharing, and community participation in the investigative process. The CLEARS report also contains a detailed inventory of CBOs active in the gun violence response and prevention space in Roanoke.

6. Conclusion

The NCCP assessment of RPD's response to homicides and nonfatal shootings revealed that the agency is in the process of making many positive changes and is doing many things "right." The recommendations in this report are intended to build upon these efforts and help RPD strengthen its policies, ensure that personnel are properly trained, provide guidance on conducting investigations, and strengthen the use of crime analysts, forensic investigators, digital evidence investigators, and others who support criminal investigations. The NCCP team will work with RPD to determine which recommendations the department can address and will support RPD as it implements and evaluates these changes.

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