



National Case Closed Project

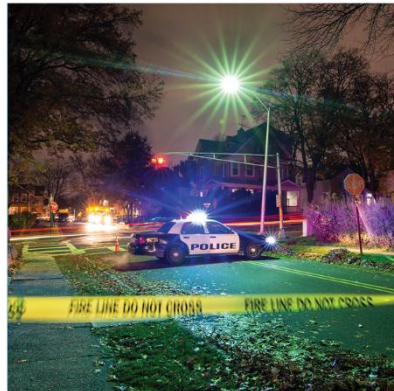
Response to Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings Assessment

Final Report

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Waco (TX) Police Department



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Shooting Response Assessment Overview	3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Violent Crime in Waco	3
1.3 Waco Police Department.....	3
2. Assessment Methods	5
2.1 Policy Review	5
2.2 On-Site Observation of Facilities and Equipment	5
2.3 Personnel Interviews	5
2.4 Case File Review	6
3. Assessment of Policies and Procedures	7
3.1 Policies and Procedures Recommendations	7
4. Case File Review Findings	9
5. Findings from the Site Visit	19
5.1 Agency Resources and Workload	19
5.1.1 Staffing and Organization.....	19
5.1.2 Personnel Experience, Training, and Accountability.....	21
5.2 Case File Documentation	24
5.3 Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings	25
5.3.1 Initial Crime Scene Response	26
5.3.2 Follow-up Investigation	27
5.3.3 Cold Case Investigations	28
5.4 Internal and External Communication.....	29
5.4.1 Internal Communication and Coordination	29
5.4.2 Coordination with External Partners	31
5.5 Physical and Firearms Evidence	32
5.5.1 Crime Scene Unit.....	32
5.5.2 Firearms and Ballistics Evidence	33
5.6 Digital Evidence	34

5.7	<u>Crime Analysis and Intelligence.....</u>	<u>35</u>
5.8	<u>Case Prosecution</u>	<u>36</u>
5.8.1	<u>District Attorney’s Office</u>	<u>36</u>
5.8.2	<u>U.S. Attorney’s Office.....</u>	<u>37</u>
5.9	<u>Victim Services and Advocacy.....</u>	<u>38</u>
5.9.1	<u>Victim Services Unit</u>	<u>38</u>
5.9.2	<u>Chaplains Group</u>	<u>39</u>
5.9.3	<u>WPD Social Worker</u>	<u>40</u>
5.10	<u>Community Engagement and Participation in Investigations</u>	<u>42</u>
5.10.1	<u>Community Outreach Unit.....</u>	<u>43</u>
5.10.2	<u>Neighborhood Engagement Team</u>	<u>44</u>
5.10.3	<u>Community Engagement in Practice</u>	<u>47</u>
6.	<u>Conclusion.....</u>	<u>55</u>
7.	<u>References</u>	<u>56</u>
	<u>Appendix A. Inventory of CBO Partnerships on Gun Violence Prevention and Response</u>	<u>58</u>

Executive Summary

In January 2025 the Waco Police Department (WPD) in Texas 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 WPD'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 WPD policies, a review of fatal and nonfatal shooting case files, on-site observations of facilities and equipment, and personnel interviews with WPD personnel and personnel within external partner agencies including prosecutors and leaders of community organizations.

The assessment team found that WPD has taken many positive steps to enhance shooting investigations and serve crime victims and the people of Waco. The agency is filled with talented and hardworking personnel who are committed to doing their jobs well. In that sense, WPD is doing many things "right." As discussed in more detail throughout this report, some of the agency's promising practices include:

- Having a full-time detective dedicated to working cold case investigations and using solvability factors to triage which cold cases to investigate.
- Developing strong partnerships with local and federal prosecutors and with federal law enforcement agencies, including participating in the Texas Anti-Gang (TAG) program.
- Having strong training and policies for Crime Scene Unit (CSU) personnel.
- Using the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) in shooting investigations.
- Providing training opportunities for personnel to maintain proficiency in digital evidence processing and analysis.
- Having an internal Victim Services Unit (VSU) that is on call 24/7 to respond to homicide scenes. Having VSU personnel attend death notifications.
- Demonstrating a commitment to building relationships with the community through outreach and engagement efforts led by the Community Services Division.
- Implementing a Peer Support Program to promote officer wellness.
- Sharing information extensively through the media (including social media) and having an active and engaged public information officer (PIO) with a media background.

The recommendations in this report are intended to help WPD 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 to bolster WPD's response:

- **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.
- **Agency Resources and Workload.** Recommendations focus on evaluating the divisions and units within the Investigations Command to ensure that their roles align with the agency's investigative priorities and needs. This includes examining the current case rotation and assignment system for homicides,

considering assigning homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations to the same unit, implementing formal case reviews, providing consistent training to detectives and supervisors, and assessing the tools and technologies needed to improve 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 by adopting a standardized table of contents for 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, exploring ways for detectives to 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.** The assessment team recommends building upon the CSU’s strengths by potentially expanding the unit, ensuring crime scene investigation (CSI) response to nonfatal shooting scenes, updating the CSU facilities and equipment, and revising how NIBIN leads are distributed and tracked.
- **Digital Evidence.** It appears that detectives effectively use digital evidence in their investigations. Recommendations for strengthening this area include creating a supervisor position for the Computer Forensics Unit and ensuring that the unit has the tools, technology, and personnel it needs to perform its job effectively.
- **Crime Analysis and Intelligence.** There are times when the talents and skills of WPD’s crime analysts are not being fully leveraged in homicide and nonfatal shooting cases. WPD should explore strategies for better integrating crime analysts into these investigations and ensuring strong coordination between analysts and detectives. The report also includes recommendations for investing in additional tools and technologies such as GIS mapping, license plate readers, and establishing a Real Time Crime Center (RTCC).
- **Case Prosecution.** WPD appears to have a good relationship with local and federal prosecutors. Leaders from these agencies should continue to promote strong coordination and communication by providing cross-training on issues like courtroom testimony and what makes a gun case eligible for federal prosecution.
- **Victim Services and Advocacy.** WPD has a VSU that is on-call 24/7 to respond to crime scenes. This report recommends expanding upon this helpful resource and working toward having the VSU respond to every shooting scene, including nonfatal shootings. The report also includes recommendations for responding to witness/victim intimidation and for better leveraging the Chaplains Group in shooting investigations.
- **Community Engagement.** The assessment team learned that WPD has a robust Community Services Division and that the community engagement efforts of the Community Outreach Unit (COU) and Neighborhood Engagement Team (NET) have been recognized and appreciated by many in the community. The report offers strategies for continuing this work, promoting the Crime Stoppers program, and expanding partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs).

1. Shooting Response Assessment Overview

1.1 Introduction

In January 2025, WPD 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 WPD'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.

WPD is also participating in Project CLEARs (Community–Law Enforcement Alignment to Resolve Shootings), an initiative supported by the philanthropy Arnold Ventures. This initiative, which is intended to complement the NCCP assessment, allows for a deeper dive into WPD's community engagement activities. Specifically, Project CLEARs supports additional input from CBOs and residents to guide increased community participation in gun violence prevention and intervention in partnership with WPD, with a specific emphasis on leveraging CBOs to increase victim and witness participation in violent crime investigations. Project CLEARs findings are incorporated into this report, especially in Section 5.10 on community engagement.

1.2 Violent Crime in Waco

WPD serves the City of Waco, Texas, which has a population of around 145,000 residents and covers an area of approximately 100 square miles. Over the past several years, Waco has experienced steadily declining violent and nonviolent crime rates. In 2024, the total number of criminal homicides (not including cases involving self-defense) was six, which was down from 10 in 2023. WPD solved five of those six homicides in 2024, resulting in a clearance rate of 83%. WPD attributes its strong homicide clearance rates to several factors, including a focus on prevention, intervention, and a robust investigative approach.

1.3 Waco Police Department

At WPD, all investigative units fall under the Investigations Command, which is led by an Assistant Chief. Within the Investigations Command is the Special Victims Division, the Criminal Investigations Division, and the Special Investigations Division, each of which is overseen by a commander.

The **Special Victims Division** is responsible for investigating major crimes of violence against persons, including homicides. The Special Victims Division consists of three units: Crimes Against Children, Family Violence, and the Special Crimes Unit (SCU), which is responsible for investigating homicides, cold cases, and a variety of other cases such as sexual assaults and fatal traffic crashes. Additionally, the unit provides investigative support to the Texas Rangers in criminal investigations related to officer-involved uses of deadly force that lead to serious bodily injury or death. There are currently six detectives working active cases in the SCU, and one who investigates cold cases. WPD's Computer Forensics and Victim Services Units are also located in the Special Victims Division.

The **Criminal Investigations Division** investigates all criminal cases involving assaults, fraud, property crimes, traffic offenses, and minor violations. The division includes the Assaults & Fraud Unit, which is responsible for investigating all nonfatal shootings. Also within the division are the Burglary & Auto Theft Unit and the Theft & Miscellaneous Unit. Additionally, WPD's Crime Analysis Unit is located within the Criminal Investigation Division.

The **Special Investigations Division** gathers intelligence related to illegal activities involving drugs, gangs, and organized crime. The division includes the Drug Enforcement Unit, Gang Unit, and Street Crimes Unit. The U.S. Marshals Task Force Officer (TFO), who works with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to apprehend dangerous fugitives and assists in high-profile cases, is also located in this division.

In addition to the Investigations Command, WPD also has a Patrol Operations Command and Support Services Command, each of which are led by an assistant chief. The Support Services Command includes the **CSU** and the **Community Services Division**, which houses the NET, SAFE Unit, COU, and Social Resource Unit. The COU oversees programs such as Citizens on Patrol and the Junior Police Academy that members of the community may join to learn more about WPD and how to prevent crime in their own neighborhoods. The NET serves as a liaison between the community and WPD.

2. Assessment Methods

As part of the NCCP, WPD 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, but data collection took place throughout the agency and some findings may be relevant to other units within WPD.

The WPD 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 WPD's response to fatal and nonfatal shootings
- On-site observation of facilities, equipment, and personnel interactions
- Interviews with WPD 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 WPD'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. WPD 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 WPD's shooting response while on-site, including through a guided tour of the department.

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

The assessment team first met with WPD command staff to develop an understanding of how fatal and nonfatal shootings are investigated, from the initial patrol response to case closure. As seen in **Table 2-1**, interviews were conducted with detectives and supervisors from the Special Victims Division, Assault & Fraud Unit, Gang Unit, and Street Crimes Unit. The team also interviewed Patrol Operations Command supervisors and officers, CSU personnel, WPD crime analysts, members of the Community Services

Division, VSU personnel, Computer Forensics Unit personnel, prosecutors from the McLennan County District Attorney's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas, and stakeholders from relevant CBOs. In total, the NCCP team interviewed 53 individuals as part of this assessment.

Table 2.1. Personnel Interviews Completed

Agency Affiliation	Role	Number
Waco Police Department	Command Staff	6
Waco Police Department	Special Crimes Unit Detectives & Supervisors	9
Waco Police Department	Assault & Fraud Unit Detectives & Supervisors	7
Waco Police Department	Crime Scene Unit	4
Waco Police Department	Crime Analysis Unit	2
Waco Police Department	Patrol Supervisors and Officers	4
Waco Police Department	Community Services Division/Victim Services Unit	7
Waco Police Department	Computer Forensics Unit	2
Waco Police Department	Gang Unit	2
Waco Police Department	Street Crimes Unit	1
U.S. Attorney's Office	Assistant U.S. Attorney	1
McLennan County District Attorney's Office	Assistant District Attorney	2
Various Community-Based Organizations	Leaders and Advocates	6
Total		53

2.4 Case File Review

Finally, the assessment team reviewed a random sample of investigative case files for 32 fatal shooting incidents and 24 nonfatal shooting incidents that were reported to WPD in the years 2020–2024. For each case, we recorded over 100 pieces of information about the crime and agency response to understand common features of shootings in Waco and the types of actions taken by WPD in response to them, including how these features and actions differ by the type of shooting (fatal vs. nonfatal).

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 WPD's policies and procedures that are related to homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. The assessment team found that the policies provided limited instructions on responding to a shooting scene. However, the training manuals and SOPs governing CSU and crime scene response were very comprehensive. The recommendations in this section are aimed at improving WPD's policies to provide more detailed instruction to WPD staff involved in the response to fatal and nonfatal shootings.

3.1 Policies and Procedures Recommendations

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

Recommendations	<p>Develop a comprehensive, user-friendly manual that includes all relevant policies, checklists, and other written materials that govern responsibilities related to homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations.</p> <p>The purpose of the manual is to provide detailed direction for all units and individuals at WPD 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 investigation, though there will be significant overlap and many similarities between the two.¹</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The manual and checklists described in this recommendation should address topics that include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
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¹ WPD could obtain some sample manuals, policies, and SOPs from other police departments to provide guidance on creating policies and practices that are consistent with best practices, WPD'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.

Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 WPD 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. • 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. <p>The NCCP team can provide WPD 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.</p> <div> <div>2</div> <div> <p>Provide each detective with a copy of the manual upon joining the SCU (investigating homicides) or Assaults & Fraud Unit (investigating nonfatal shootings).</p> <p>Personnel 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. WPD staff involved in homicide/nonfatal shooting investigations but who are not part of the SCU or Assaults & Fraud Unit (e.g., patrol officers) should also be provided with access to the manual.</p> </div> </div> <div> <div>3</div> <div> <p>Regularly review and update the manuals and other procedures every 3 to 5 years to ensure they are up to date.</p> <p>To ensure a regular review and update process, it should be clarified who at WPD will be responsible for overseeing this process including when it occurs in the calendar.</p> </div> </div> <div> <div>4</div> <div> <p>Include supervisory review requirements and guidelines in homicide/nonfatal shooting policies and manuals.</p> <p>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.</p> </div> </div>
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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 certain aspects of shootings in Waco, WPD's response to these shootings, including their initial response and follow-up investigations, and case outcomes. Case narratives for a random sample of 25 fatal shooting incidents, 24 nonfatal shooting incidents, and 7 incidents involving both a fatal and nonfatal shooting were provided to RTI for the years 2020–2024. 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.

Members of the assessment team reviewed case narratives for each of these 56 shooting incidents and extracted more than 100 pieces of information 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 WPD or its partners upon request. Table 4.1 provides WPD with an understanding of the types of shootings reviewed by the NCCP team, while Table 4.2 provides WPD with an understanding of its response to these shootings.

Table 4.1. Incident Characteristics, by Type of Shooting

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Total number of cases reviewed	24	32
Number of guns fired		
1	13 (54%)	23 (72%)
2	5 (21%)	6 (19%)
More than 2	3 (13%)	3 (9%)
Unknown	4 (13%)	0 (0%)
Type of gun used ¹		
Handgun	18 (75%)	29 (91%)
Rifle	2 (8%)	2 (6%)
Shotgun	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Unknown	5 (21%)	3 (9%)
Median number of rounds fired	4.0	5.5

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Location of shooting		
Street/outdoors	12 (50%)	16 (50%)
Inside residence	4 (16%)	4 (13%)
Inside vehicle	6 (25%)	8 (25%)
Other	2 (8%)	4 (13%)
Number of victims		
1	18 (75%)	24 (75%)
2	4 (17%)	7 (22%)
More than 2	2 (8%)	1 (3%)
Victim sex ¹		
Male	22 (92%)	31 (97%)
Female	5 (21%)	6 (19%)
Victim race ^a		
Black	13 (54%)	22 (69%)
White	3 (13%)	7 (22%)
Hispanic	8 (33%)	4 (13%)
Other	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
Median victim age (years)	23.0	24.0
Number of suspects at end of investigation		
1	7 (29%)	20 (63%)
2	2 (8%)	2 (6%)
More than 2	5 (21%)	7 (22%)
Unknown	10 (42%)	3 (9%)
Final suspect sex ^a		
Male	15 (63%)	28 (88%)
Female	1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Final suspect race ^a		
Black	13 (54%)	25 (78%)
White	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Hispanic	2 (8%)	6 (19%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Median final suspect age (years)	26.5	19.0
Primary relationship between victims and offenders		
Current/former intimate partner	1 (4%)	3 (9%)
Family member	1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Friend/acquaintance	6 (25%)	10 (31%)
Stranger	2 (8%)	6 (19%)
Rival gang/cliue member	5 (21%)	7 (22%)
Other relationship	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Unknown	9 (38%)	4 (13%)
Primary motive for shooting		
Domestic abuse	0 (0%)	3 (9%)
Rivalry over lover	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Conflict over money	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Drug-related	1 (4%)	2 (6%)
Gang-related	4 (17%)	5 (16%)
Robbery	2 (8%)	5 (16%)
Shot inadvertently	1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Self-defense	0 (0%)	3 (9%)
Argument, other	5 (21%)	6 (19%)
Unknown	11 (46%)	6 (19%)
Clearance status		
Open/inactive	14 (58%)	14 (44%)
Cleared by arrest or exceptional means	8 (33%)	18 (56%)
Unknown	2 (8%)	0 (0%)

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

Table 4.2. WPD Response Characteristics, by Type of Shooting

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Total number of cases reviewed	24	32
Number of patrol officers who responded to scene		
0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
1–4	7 (29%)	3 (9%)
5–9	10 (42%)	12 (38%)
10+	6 (25%)	17 (53%)
Unknown	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Patrol supervisor responded to scene		
No	5 (21%)	1 (3%)
Yes	19 (79%)	31 (97%)
Number of detectives who responded to scene		
0	20 (83%)	0 (0%)
1	3 (13%)	19 (59%)
2	0 (0%)	6 (19%)
3	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
4	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
5+	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Unknown	1 (4%)	3 (9%)
Investigative supervisor responded to scene		
No	20 (83%)	4 (13%)
Yes	1 (4%)	27 (84%)
Unknown	3 (13%)	1 (3%)
Evidence collected at scene		
No	5 (21%)	0 (0%)
Yes	19 (79%)	32 (100%)
Type of evidence collected at scene ^a		
DNA/bodily fluids	11 (46%)	29 (91%)
Latent prints	8 (33%)	22 (69%)
Pattern evidence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Trace evidence	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Suspect firearm	3 (13%)	11 (34%)
Bullets	3 (13%)	19 (59%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Type of evidence collected at scene ^a (continued)		
Casing	18 (75%)	29 (91%)
Clothing	11 (46%)	31 (97%)
Electronics	9 (38%)	29 (91%)
Digital	11 (46%)	25 (78%)
Drugs	4 (17%)	9 (28%)
Other	2 (8%)	3 (9%)
Victim statement obtained		
No or not applicable	0 (0%)	25 (78%)
Yes	24 (100%)	7 (22%)
Victim participated/cooperated in investigation during initial response		
No or not applicable	13 (54%)	27 (84%)
Yes	11 (46%)	5 (16%)
Number of third-party witnesses		
0	7 (29%)	3 (9%)
1	2 (8%)	1 (3%)
2	5 (21%)	4 (13%)
3	5 (21%)	6 (19%)
4+	3 (13%)	18 (56%)
Unknown	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Witness statement obtained		
No or not applicable	8 (33%)	3 (9%)
Yes	16 (67%)	29 (91%)
Witness participated/cooperated in investigation during initial response		
No or not applicable	12 (50%)	12 (38%)
Yes	12 (50%)	20 (63%)
A suspect identified at time of response		
No	13 (54%)	11 (34%)
Yes	11 (46%)	21 (66%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Suspect identification at time of response ^a		
Police identified	6 (25%)	12 (38%)
Victim or witness identified	8 (33%)	6 (19%)
Other identification	0 (0%)	4 (13%)
Unknown identification	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Identifying information on a suspect vehicle at time of response		
No	19 (79%)	23 (72%)
Yes	5 (21%)	9 (28%)
Number of days until first detective activity		
0	4 (17%)	31 (97%)
1	4 (17%)	1 (3%)
2	3 (13%)	0 (0%)
3+	7 (29%)	0 (0%)
Unknown	6 (25%)	0 (0%)
Investigator(s) contacted victim(s)		
No or not applicable	10 (42%)	25 (78%)
Yes	11 (46%)	7 (22%)
In person	6	7
Not in person	5	0
Unknown	3 (13%)	0 (0%)
Victim participated/cooperated in investigation after initial unwillingness to		
No or not applicable	22 (92%)	32 (100%)
Yes	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Detective contacted third-party witnesses identified at scene		
No or not applicable	14 (58%)	3 (9%)
Yes	6 (25%)	27 (84%)
In person	6	27
Not in person	0	0
Unknown	4 (17%)	2 (6%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Witness participated/cooperated in investigation after initial unwillingness to		
No or not applicable	23 (96%)	28 (87%)
Yes	1 (4%)	4 (13%)
Initial leads on motive		
No	11 (46%)	18 (56%)
Yes	13 (54%)	14 (44%)
Confidential informant(s) came forward with information		
No	23 (96%)	32 (100%)
Yes	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Specialized unit(s) helped with investigation ^a		
Fugitive	3 (13%)	15 (47%)
Gang/Narcotics	4 (17%)	6 (19%)
SWAT	1 (4%)	2 (6%)
K9	1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Crime analysis	0 (0%)	11 (34%)
Crime lab	18 (75%)	32 (100%)
Victim advocate	0 (0%)	18 (56%)
Public information officer	0 (0%)	3 (9%)
Other	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
External resources/partners helped with investigation ^a		
Federal law enforcement	5 (21%)	17 (53%)
Local/state law enforcement	4 (17%)	18 (56%)
Regional fusion/intelligence center	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Community-/faith-based organization	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Public tip line	1 (4%)	12 (38%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Technologies used in investigation ^a		
Hidden recording device	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
License plate reader	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Facial recognition	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Social network data	5 (21%)	22 (69%)
Gunshot detection	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(continued)

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

Incident Characteristic	Type of Shooting	
	Nonfatal	Fatal
Technologies used in investigation ^a (continued)		
Firearm/toolmark identification	15 (63%)	29 (91%)
Gun trace	4 (17%)	6 (19%)
Digital data	6 (25%)	25 (78%)
Video data	1 (4%)	2 (3%)
Cell phone location	3 (13%)	20 (63%)
Vehicle computer data	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
GPS ankle monitor data	2 (8%)	2 (6%)
Other	0 (0%)	3 (9%)
Social media investigated		
No	18 (75%)	10 (31%)
Yes	6 (25%)	22 (69%)
Suspect cell phone investigated		
No	22 (92%)	12 (38%)
Yes	2 (8%)	20 (63%)
Search warrant executed		
No	15 (63%)	4 (13%)
Yes	9 (38%)	28 (88%)
Community group/leader asked to help with investigation		
No	23 (96%)	28 (88%)
Yes	1 (4%)	4 (13%)
Investigator made further contact with patrol officer(s) who responded to scene?		
No	24 (100%)	25 (78%)
Yes	0 (0%)	7 (22%)
Suspect interviewed by an investigator		
No	20 (83%)	12 (38%)
Yes	4 (17%)	20 (63%)
Suspect confessed to the crime		
No	21 (87%)	21 (66%)
Yes	3 (13%)	11 (34%)

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

Several notable findings stand out in the information included in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. First, fatal shootings were similar to nonfatal shootings on several characteristics like the types of locations in which the shootings occurred, the number of victims in the shooting incidents, and the primary relationship between the victims and offenders. At the time of the initial response, fatal shootings appear to have been more solvable than nonfatal shootings, as there were more witnesses, more evidence, and more often an identified suspect in fatal shooting incidents compared with nonfatal shooting incidents. In addition to this difference in initial solvability, WPD's higher clearance rate for fatal shootings compared with nonfatal shootings is likely due to the difference in investigative resources that the department applies to the two offense types. For instance, Table 4.2 shows that more patrol officers, patrol supervisors, detectives, and detective supervisors responded to the scene of fatal shootings than nonfatal shootings. In fact, no detective responded to the scene in 20 (83%) of the 24 nonfatal shooting case files we reviewed. This is compared with the 32 fatal shooting cases we reviewed in which a detective responded to the scene in every incident. And while an investigative supervisor responded to 84% of the homicide scenes, this was the case in only 1 (4%) of the nonfatal shooting cases we reviewed. This lack of an on-scene response by investigators could partly explain the difference between the two crime types in terms of the amount of evidence collected and the number of witnesses identified during the initial response.

In addition to differences in personnel at the crime scene, fatal and nonfatal shootings differed in several other important ways that are related to WPD's investigation of the two crime types. In the cases we reviewed, fatal shooting investigators were more likely than nonfatal shooting investigators to leverage support personnel like crime analysts (34% of cases compared with 0% of cases) and victim advocates (56% of cases compared with 0% of cases) during the investigation, external resources like local and state law enforcement agencies (56% of cases compared with 17% of cases), public tip lines (38% of cases compared with 4% of cases), and community groups or leaders (13% of cases compared with 4% of cases), and were more likely to investigate social media (69% of cases compared with 25% of cases) and make contact with patrol officers who responded to the scene (22% of cases compared with 0% of cases). Additionally, a detective began working on the case within 1 day in every fatal shooting case we reviewed. This contrasts with the nonfatal shooting cases we reviewed, where a detective did not begin working on the case until 2 days later in 13% of the cases and 3 or more days later in 29% of the cases. In 25% of the nonfatal shooting cases we reviewed, the amount of documentation present in the case file made it impossible for us to determine when a detective began working on the case.

These findings suggest that fatal shootings receive a more intense investigation than nonfatal shootings do, and an investigation that is better documented, which are common findings among law enforcement agencies across the country. Importantly, these investigative differences could be addressed to improve WPD's nonfatal shooting clearance rate. Finally, in addition to the findings described in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, 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.

We found that among the 8 nonfatal shootings that were cleared by arrest or by exceptional means, participation by a witness or victim contributed the most to case clearance (6 cases), followed by audiovisual evidence (4 cases), ballistic evidence (2 cases), a fast response to the crime scene (2 cases), and social media intelligence (2 cases). Among the 18 cleared fatal shootings, the investigative components that most often seemed to have contributed to case clearance include victim or witness

participation in the case (18 cases), cell phone data (9 cases), audiovisual data (9 cases), and suspect vehicle information (8 cases).

The assessment team felt that more investigative attention would have been valuable in 16 (67%) of the 24 nonfatal shooting cases and in 12 (38%) of the 32 fatal shooting cases we reviewed. Among the investigative components that appeared to hold promise for producing new investigative leads in the nonfatal shooting cases we reviewed but that did not seem to have been sufficiently pursued by investigators, the most common include further follow-up with victims or witnesses (16 cases), appealing to the public for information (13 cases), further suspect follow-up (12 cases), involvement of a victim advocate (12 cases), and additional evidence collection or use during the follow-up investigation (7 cases). In the fatal shooting cases that could have benefited from additional investigative activities, these activities most often included further suspect follow-up (12 cases), further witness or surviving victim follow-up (11 cases), appealing to the public for information (9 cases), and additional evidence collection or use during the follow-up investigation (5 cases).

In the next section, we discuss findings from our in-person site assessment, which includes findings from interviews with agency personnel, personnel within partnering organizations, and community representatives and site observations. We note how these findings compare to findings from our case file analysis when appropriate.

5. Findings from the Site Visit

5.1 Agency Resources and Workload

5.1.1 *Staffing and Organization*

At WPD, criminal investigations are handled by detectives in one of three divisions within the Investigations Command: the Special Victims Division, the Criminal Investigations Division, and the Special Investigations Division.

The SCU, which is part of the Special Victims Division, is responsible for investigating homicides and a variety of other cases, including sexual assaults and fatal traffic crashes. The SCU has an on-call rotation system to cover evening and weekend hours. The detective who is on call will be assigned any cases that occur during their rotation, which results in an inconsistent distribution of homicide cases among detectives. For example, one interviewee said they were personally assigned eight homicide investigations 1 year, followed by a year in which they were assigned none. And the year that detective had eight homicide cases, there were other detectives who were assigned two or fewer cases. The assessment team heard from another detective who was assigned five homicides during a 2.5-month period.

Nonfatal shootings are investigated by the Assaults & Fraud Unit, which is part of the Criminal Investigations Division (CID). The Assaults & Fraud Unit also handles fraud cases and other property crimes. Interviewees said that the unit's supervisor attempts to assign nonfatal shooting cases to certain detectives and property crimes to others; however, there are no formal protocols for case assignments. Detectives do not typically respond to the scene of a nonfatal shooting unless the case is particularly complex. Instead, the preliminary investigations are usually handled by patrol officers, with the case later assigned to a detective. (See Section 5.3.1 for a more detailed discussion on the initial scene response.)

The assessment team learned that WPD's Gang Unit, which is led by a sergeant and falls under the Special Investigations Division, has also occasionally taken the lead on investigating nonfatal shooting cases. The Gang Unit's primary role is to provide intelligence gathering and sharing, and it is also tasked to assist the Narcotics Unit, the TAG) program, and the Texas Department of Public Safety, along with other local agencies as requested.

Recommendations	<p>Reevaluate the organization, roles, and responsibilities of the investigative units.</p> <p>WPD should reevaluate the divisions and units within the Investigations Command to ensure that their roles align with the agency's investigative priorities and needs. Although it may not be feasible for WPD to have numerous specialized investigative units, there may be an opportunity to better organize Investigations Command so that detectives within a single unit are investigating similar types of cases.</p> <p>At a minimum, it is recommended that WPD have one unit responsible for investigating crimes against persons (e.g., homicides, assaults, nonfatal shootings) and one responsible for investigating property crimes (e.g., burglary, theft, fraud). Within those units, attempts could be made to have detectives "specialize" in certain types of cases, such as shootings. Given that homicides and nonfatal shootings are often linked and involve the same perpetrators, victims, and circumstances, it is strongly recommended that WPD assign homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations to the same unit and have them work the cases together. To accommodate the addition of nonfatal shooting cases, a separate sexual assault unit could be formed to handle those cases.</p>
	<p>Consider revising the case rotation system for assigning homicides (and nonfatal shootings) in order to ensure more equitable distribution of cases.</p> <p>WPD should maintain its current on-call schedule for SCU, as it appears to work well for detectives. However, the on-call detective should not be assigned as the lead investigator for all homicides when that detective is on call. Instead, there should be a case rotation for homicides that would ensure each detective gets assigned one case before anyone else is assigned a second. In this scenario, the on-call detective would be responsible for handling the initial scene response and then would turn over the case to the detective who is up in the assignment rotation. And because some detectives would prefer to handle the scene of a case they are assigned, the detective who is next up for assignment should have the option to be notified and respond to the scene alongside the on-call detective.</p>
	<p>Rethink the role of the Gang Unit in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations.</p> <p>Having a member of the Gang Unit as the lead on a homicide or shooting investigation may be problematic, as that unit is short staffed and falls outside of the command of the SCU. Additionally, there is no clear system in place for when the Gang Unit is tasked with taking the lead on these investigations.</p> <p>That being said, members of the Gang Unit have a deep knowledge of local criminals, and this expertise could still be useful for homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. Rather than taking the lead on these investigations, members of the Gang Unit should be consulted to assist and provide expertise as needed. Consultation with the Gang Unit at certain times within a shooting investigation could be written into formal procedures and an investigative checklist to ensure consistent information sharing across detectives. For instance, every shooting incident should be reviewed by a member of the Gang Unit to see if there is a gang nexus. The Gang Unit supervisor should also be included on all NIBIN lead notices in order to strengthen information sharing and communication.</p>
	<p>Evaluate the tools and technologies available to detectives who investigate homicide and nonfatal shooting cases.</p> <p>WPD should review the current resources and determine what is needed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. For example, the assessment team found that detectives need a way to review phone or social media downloads that will not overwhelm their computers. The NCCP can assist WPD in considering options for enhancing detective equipment and technologies and/or determining how to shift these responsibilities to crime analysts or other personnel.</p>

5.1.2 Personnel Experience, Training, and Accountability

Detective Selection

The assessment team found that WPD’s formal detective selection process generally ensures that qualified applicants are chosen for detective positions. However, one concern is that detectives currently apply for a detective position within a specific unit, rather than to a general detective position. For example, if the SCU needs a detective, an agency-wide announcement goes out and all members of WPD can apply. The applicants are then selected based upon how they performed in the process. As a result, a patrol officer could potentially be selected to go directly to working homicides in the SCU, rather than starting the new detective career working property crimes or other nonviolent cases.

Recommendations

9

Consider revising the selection process to announce openings for general detective positions, rather than for each individual detective opening in specific investigative units.

WPD should consider putting out an announcement for the general position of “detective,” inviting all interested patrol officers to apply and complete the selection process. WPD could then rank the candidates and keep the applicant list active for 1 year and pull from the list as detectives are needed. For example, if a detective position opens in SCU, WPD could move a detective currently working property crimes over to SCU, then fill the property detective’s spot with a new detective from the list of qualified applicants. This would help ensure that detectives working violent crimes such as homicides and nonfatal shootings have existing investigative training and experience. It would also help alleviate the need for WPD to have multiple announcements and selection processes each year.

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 found that training was inconsistent among WPD detectives who investigate homicides and nonfatal shootings. For example, although some interviewees said they have attended individual training classes, such as death investigations and interview/interrogation courses, several have never attended an all-inclusive detective school or homicide training course. Some interviewees also said that they primarily learned about how to investigate cases from on-the-job training, rather than through formal classes.

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. At a minimum, basic detective training should include the following:

- Crime scene response, management, and processing
- Evidence recovery and submission
- Interview and interrogation
- Report writing and case documentation
- Writing and executing warrants
- Investigative follow-up actions
- Case prosecution
- Courtroom procedures
- Relevant laws and WPD policies
- Leveraging digital evidence such as license plate readers, cell phones, and social media
- Using resources such as the crime lab and crime analysts

The NCCP team can work with WPD to help identify training courses and curricula that best meet the department's needs.

Note that working sexual assault cases requires specialized training. WPD should ensure that any detective assigned to investigate sexual assaults receives training to ensure the investigation is handled in accordance with best practices.

Ensure that detectives who investigate homicides and nonfatal shootings, as well as their supervisors, receive complete and 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. Supervisors who oversee detectives investigating these cases should also attend advanced training courses.

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 WPD to help identify training courses and curricula that best meet the department's needs.

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.

12

This will help give hardworking and dedicated detectives the tools and experience they need to effectively investigate serious 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.

Detective Supervision and Accountability

It is important to have formal accountability systems in place to ensure that personnel are performing their jobs effectively and according to agency policy. The use of accountability mechanisms such as case reviews and performance evaluations does not imply that detectives are not dedicated, hardworking, or doing their jobs. Instead, these tools simply give agencies a way to consistently and fairly evaluate whether their operations are working the way they are supposed to.

One important accountability mechanism for sergeants is to hold 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, for discussing ongoing investigative strategies, and for identifying potential leads. They can also provide a basis for providing objective information for use during a detective's performance evaluation.

WPD does not currently have a policy that requires supervisors to hold formal case reviews with the detectives who investigate homicides and nonfatal shooting cases. The lack of formal case reviews was confirmed by interviewees and reflected in the assessment team's case file review, which indicated a lack of basic follow-up and/or documentation. (See Section 5.2 for a more detailed discussion on case file documentation.) A supervisory case review would determine if leads were addressed and not documented in the case file, or if leads were simply not addressed at all.

Implement a formal case review practice and systematic case review process between sergeants and detectives.

13

Supervisors should 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.

Recommendations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (e.g., community, federal, task forces) 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. <p>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.</p> <p>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 lieutenant 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.</p> <p>The case review requirements and guidelines should be stated in written policy.</p>
	14	<p>Require detectives to complete a comprehensive follow-up report for all homicide cases that remain unsolved after 60 or 90 days.</p> <p>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.</p>
	15	<p>Hold quarterly briefings between the SCU and command officials.</p> <p>It would be useful for the SCU supervisors and detectives who work homicide cases to present quarterly briefings to command officials. This would allow the command officials to keep abreast of the investigations and to see what resources are needed by the detectives.</p>

5.2 Case File Documentation

Maintaining thorough and consistent case files is important not just for improving investigations, but also for helping supervisors conduct case reviews (see Recommendation 13). As detailed in Section 4, the assessment team reviewed 56 of WPD's files related to homicide and nonfatal shooting cases that occurred between 2020 and 2024. The team found that the case file documentation was inconsistent and often incomplete, especially for nonfatal shooting investigations. Although the closed homicide cases appeared to be well-documented, the files for open homicide cases and nonfatal shooting cases lacked basic documentation about investigative follow-up. Additionally, even the nonfatal shooting files that included numerous follow-up reports regarding specific investigative work often failed to include a detailed synopsis report putting all the case information together.

The assessment team learned that WPD detectives are not required to submit a completed case synopsis to the records management system (RMS) for 30 days. As a result, detectives document their daily investigative efforts in a Microsoft Word file on their desktops, which they then cut and paste into the RMS after 30 days. Interviewees said that this approach has posed challenges because the desktop Word file is not accessible to others—including the detective's supervisor. Thus, during the first 30 days

of an investigation, the supervisor would have no way to review the case information if the detective was unavailable. An example of how this could cause problems would be if a detective neglected to collect video evidence in a case, and the supervisor was not aware of this until 30 days later. By then, it might be too late to correct the error as some videos may no longer be available.

Recommendations	16	<p>Include requirements for proper case documentation and case file checklists in the policy manuals governing fatal and nonfatal shooting investigations. Train investigators and their supervisors on these new requirements and protocols.</p> <p>WPD's policies should be adapted to include an updated checklist of documentation that must be included in detectives' case files, including information on the level of detail required, as well as the adoption of a table of contents for the Murder Book model to ensure consistent and complete case file organization (see Recommendation 17). 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, providing enough detail in their documentation, and completing all required investigative tasks.</p>
	17	<p>Adopt the complete "Murder Book" model, which was developed by the Los Angeles Police Department, as a standardized method to capture and retain case information.</p> <p>A structured Murder Book concept ensures 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.</p> <p>WPD should work with the District Attorney's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office when determining the information that must be documented in case files.</p> <p>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.</p>
	18	<p>Require detectives to complete synopsis reports documenting their investigative efforts and to immediately put the reports into RMS.</p> <p>This would allow supervisors to review a detective's case information in real time, rather than having to wait until after 30 days have passed.</p>

5.3 Investigating Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings

This section explores how fatal and nonfatal shootings are investigated by WPD and provides recommendations for strengthening practices through various stages 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 below, will help ensure that critical tasks are being performed throughout the duration of an investigation.

19

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. 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; that the Crime Analysis Unit, Gang Unit, and other relevant support units were consulted; and that key investigative steps were taken. The NCCP team can support WPD in obtaining or developing this checklist.

5.3.1 Initial Crime Scene Response

Patrol officers are typically the first to respond to scenes, including fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents. A patrol sergeant will also respond to shooting scenes to supervise and coordinate actions at the scene, such as marking potential evidence for collection.

The assessment team learned that detectives do not typically respond to the scene of most nonfatal shooting cases. This information was confirmed through the case file review, where we found that a detective responded to the scene in only 3 (13%) of the 24 nonfatal shooting cases were reviewed (see Section 4). The preliminary investigation is handled instead by patrol officers, with the case later being assigned to a detective. Detectives may respond to the scene if the case is particularly complex, but interviewees said that is the exception, not the rule. The assessment team learned that there has nonetheless been limited training for patrol officers on how to effectively perform these investigative tasks.

20

Examine ways to ensure that a detective responds to nonfatal shooting scenes, including those that occur during off-duty hours.

Enhancing the on-scene response to nonfatal shootings can potentially improve clearance rates for these crimes (Blanes i Vidal & Kirchmaier, 2018; Wellford et al., 2019). Given that nonfatal shootings are so linked to fatal shootings, it is good practice to have detectives get involved as early as possible. If WPD does not currently have the capacity to field a nonfatal shooting detective squad, the agency could consider at a minimum having an on-call rotation for all detectives (including those who typically work property crimes) to respond to nonfatal shooting scenes. The responding detective could at least start the initial investigation, obtain warrants if needed, perform other necessary tasks, and then hand off the follow-up to a nonfatal shooting detective.

Recommendations	<p>21 Provide additional training for patrol officers and supervisors on how to effectively respond to shooting scenes and conduct preliminary investigations of shooting cases.</p> <p>Currently, WPD patrol officers are often the ones conducting the preliminary, on-scene investigations of nonfatal shootings. They are being tasked to perform similar work that detectives would do, but they have received limited training on how to perform these tasks. Patrol officers and their supervisors should receive specific training on concrete tasks such as evidence collection, interviews and interrogations, and working with victims and witnesses on the scene. The assessment team learned there is a 1-day training for patrol on how to respond to homicide scenes, and this should be standard for all new patrol officers and enhanced to include nonfatal shooting scenes as well.</p> <p>In addition to providing specialized classroom training in these areas, WPD may consider having 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. WPD may consider temporarily transferring patrol officers into investigative units on a rotational basis in order to gain exposure. In addition to providing extra hands-on training, this would aid in officers' professional development and could potentially increase their future interest in becoming a detective.</p>
	<p>22 Ensure that the written procedures that govern homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations include detailed directions and checklists for all units and individuals who are responding to a shooting scene.</p> <p>In addition to the investigative checklist for investigators discussed in Recommendation 19, WPD policies should include detailed guidance and checklists for patrol officers and others who are tasked with responding to shooting scenes and/or conducting preliminary investigations. These checklists should include a list of each step to be completed at the scene and/or during the initial investigation.</p>

5.3.2 Follow-up Investigation

As discussed in Section 5.2 (Case File Documentation), the assessment team's review of homicide and nonfatal shooting case files revealed that many files lacked documentation about basic investigative follow-up and whether leads were ever addressed. It is unclear whether this is because the follow-up tasks were performed but not documented, because they were simply not performed at all, or a combination of both.

There were some cases that did appear to be well-documented, but in which the investigation seemed to end despite there being viable leads to follow. For example, in two cases detectives wrote a report indicating there were NIBIN hits that warranted further investigation if an "investigator chose to pursue." This suggests that it is the detective's choice to follow up on leads, which should not be the case. There should be a policy that directs the lead detective to follow up on all leads (including NIBIN leads) linked to the detective's case, and supervisors should ensure that policy is followed and that all leads are addressed.

Additionally, the assessment team learned that there is a perception among some personnel that the agency does not always put as much effort into investigating nonfatal shooting cases compared with fatal shooting cases, and in some cases, dissuades detectives from putting too much effort into investigations when there is a lack of victim cooperation in the investigation. There need to be policies and accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that detectives conduct thorough follow-up investigations, diligently pursue leads, and document their follow-up activities. Recommendations for addressing these

issues can be found throughout this report, including in Recommendation 1 (comprehensive policy manual), Recommendation 13 (supervisory case review), Recommendation 19 (investigative checklist), and Section 5.2 (case documentation). The policies and checklists detailed in those recommendations will help guide detectives as they conduct and document their follow-up investigations, and the supervisory case reviews will help hold detectives accountable for completing their tasks in all shooting cases.

Below are additional recommendations for strengthening follow-up investigations, including strategies for improving investigations involving uncooperative victims and witnesses. (See Section 5.9.1 for recommendations specific to the VSU, including protecting witnesses and victims from intimidation and retaliation.)

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 WPD 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.

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.

WPD has one full-time detective who is assigned to investigate cold cases. This function falls under the SCU, which also investigates homicides. The assessment team learned there have been 146 cold case homicides since 1973. At the time of this review, the cold case detective was working nine cold cases.

There is no exact time set for when WPD designates a case as “cold.” Generally, it occurs when all leads have been exhausted, typically 6 months to 1 year after the incident. The cold case detective uses solvability factors to triage which cases to work. The factors are based on a point system and assigned to a case, and the detective starts with cases that have the highest number.

The cold case detective had no prior cold case-specific training prior to taking on this role. The Texas Attorney General offers an annual training that the detective can attend. The detective sits in on the SCU meetings and can assist on active homicide investigations as needed. However, the detective is not part of the on-call schedule and does not get assigned as lead on new homicides. This system is useful because it allows the detective to maintain proficiency by working only on cold cases, without having to carry an active case load that would get in the way of working their cold cases.

Recommendations		Examine the possibility of assigning another detective to investigate cold cases on a part-time basis.
	25	WPD may wish to explore whether it can assign a second detective to work cold cases part-time. This could involve pulling a current detective from another unit, or, if allowed, hiring a retired detective on a part-time basis. This would help ensure that there is no gap when the existing detective is unavailable due to personal time, sick leave, and other reasons.
	26	Establish a trauma-informed protocol for notifying victims' friends and family members when a cold 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. WPD'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. WPD should explore and make available cold case-specific training opportunities in addition to the Texas Attorney General's annual training. If funding allows, this training should also be made available to an additional detective or detective sergeant to increase the number of people who have the knowledge to investigate cold cases. The NCCP team can assist WPD with identifying cold case investigator training needs and opportunities.

5.4 Internal and External Communication

5.4.1 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 collaboration and frequent information sharing.

Information Sharing with Patrol

Communication between SCU and Assaults & Fraud Unit 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.

The assessment team learned that it is an expectation for patrol officers that they investigate and take cases as far as they can for those that do not require an on-scene response by detectives. Cases that patrol initially investigates are included in the patrol supervisor's shift report that goes out to all supervisors in WPD. The shift report initiates investigations within investigative units. The assessment team learned that there is no formal communication policy between detectives and patrol and that the

quality of the communication with patrol varies by individual detective. Instead, all communication appears to be informal and self-initiated.

Recommendations

28

Strengthen formal information-sharing protocols between detectives and patrol officers beyond the initial crime scene response.

Examples of ways to strengthen coordination between detectives and patrol include:

- Having detectives conduct trainings at patrol lineups on investigative tasks (e.g., interviews/interrogations) and any other relevant areas where patrol officers need additional instruction. Supervisors should solicit input from both detectives and patrol officers on which topics to cover in these trainings.
- Ensuring that SCU and Assaults & Fraud Unit detectives attend roll calls on a regular basis to share information about ongoing homicide and nonfatal shooting cases and to hear from patrol officers about what is going on in the community. An SCU detective should be mandated to attend roll call after every homicide to brief officers and request assistance. This should occur even in closed cases, as patrol officers should be aware of potential retaliation factors.
- Requiring detectives to follow up with patrol officers who submit a supplemental report in a case for which they are lead. Detectives telling patrol officers how cases are resolved that they contributed to, and highlighting good work of responding patrol officers, can increase morale and working relationships.

Information-Sharing with Other Internal Units

As noted by personnel during the assessment visit, SCU and Assaults & Fraud Unit detectives are seeing overlapping offenders and victims across cases involving fatal and nonfatal shootings and other violence. Other units such as the Gang Unit likely also have overlapping individuals involved in cases. Therefore, it is important that units have opportunities to meet regularly to discuss cases, develop leads, and share information about potential offenders. Support units such as the VSU, CSU, Crime Analysis Unit, and external partners should be invited to regular case review meetings. Currently, information sharing between units is largely informal.

The Gang Unit is mostly located with the TAG unit, and this physical separation is not conducive to information sharing with other units within WPD. The Department of Public Safety, the McLennan County Sheriff's Office, smaller law enforcement agencies, and federal partners are located in the TAG space. The TAG unit also has its own crime analysts.

Recommendations to increase information sharing between shooting detectives and support personnel follow.

Recommendations	29	<p>Hold an internal weekly violent crime meeting.</p> <p>The SCU and the Assaults & Fraud Unit should hold a joint 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.</p> <p>Participants in the meeting should include SCU and Assaults & Fraud Unit detectives and sergeants, Investigations Command leaders, representatives from other investigative units (e.g., Gang, Family Violence, Narcotics), VSU, CSU 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 or community group leaders could be invited to discuss their areas of expertise.</p>
	30	<p>Ensure that all units are aware of and are using the gang tie enhancement to bonds.</p> <p>According to Gang Unit personnel, individuals with gang ties are eligible for a \$750,000 bond enhancement. However, personnel outside the Gang Unit may not be aware of the enhancement or using it as often as they could. Therefore, WPD should ensure that this enhancement is discussed during the weekly violent crime meeting as part of the case review process. Personnel across investigative units should be made aware of the enhancement and understand the evidence necessary to be presented to the court to apply the enhancement.</p>
	31	<p>Be sure that the PIO is notified when there is a shooting where someone is struck because the media will have inquiries.</p> <p>By informing the PIO in these cases, they can effectively handle media requests and appeal to the public for information. Appealing to the public for information was an investigative step that the NCCP team concluded was often missing from the case files they reviewed (see Section 4).</p>

5.4.2 Coordination with External Partners

The assessment team learned that WPD has a strong relationship with its federal partners, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Marshals Service, and U.S. Secret Service. They network and share resources and have a long history of working together.

WPD's NET, which will be discussed in greater detail in the Community Engagement section of this report, has a good relationship with the Waco Independent School District Police Department. However, these lines of communication may not always extend to investigators within the SCU and the Assaults & Fraud Unit. Additional information sharing may result in more leads in shooting cases and offers a way to build community trust in WPD and its violent crime investigators.

Increase information-sharing opportunities with the Waco Independent School District Police Department.

- 32** Although WPD's NET has good communication with the department, these lines of communication do not appear to extend to investigators within the SCU and Assaults & Fraud Unit.

5.5 Physical and Firearms Evidence

5.5.1 Crime Scene Unit

WPD's CSU is led by a supervisor and includes four full-time CSI technicians, a part-time NIBIN technician, one latent print examiner, and one laboratory manager. All CSU members, including the supervisor, are civilian WPD employees. The supervisor reports to the Assistant Chief in charge of the Support Services Command.

CSI shifts align with that of patrol officers. The CSU supervisor works days Monday–Friday but is on call 24/7 and responds to assist CSIs at homicide scenes. The lab manager is a trained CSI and can respond to calls if needed. They also assist with calls from the Texas Rangers and other law enforcement agencies.

The CSU has a well-written procedures manual and is striving to follow nationally recognized standards. The CSU also has a well-documented Training & Evaluation program that encompasses three phases: CSU Overview (6 weeks), Introduction (6 weeks), and Assessment (2 weeks). After the Assessment phase, new members are given additional training in any areas where more work is needed. Interviewees said that WPD is also good about having CSIs attend external training to gain and maintain proficiency. The fingerprint examiner also receives appropriate training.

The assessment team learned that CSU does not always get called out at night to respond to certain crime scenes, including nonfatal shootings. Additionally, WPD's General Order "Processing Crime Scenes and Responsibilities" does not list nonfatal shootings as a CSU responsibility in Section B-1, and Section B-3 does not specifically list nonfatal shootings as an incident to which CSU may respond when on duty to assist officers.

Strengthen the CSU response to nonfatal shootings.

- 33** WPD should explore ways to ensure that CSIs respond to the scene of nonfatal shootings. Expanding coverage to 24/7 as noted in Recommendation 34 would help to address this gap. WPD should update its CSU policies and procedures to reflect the importance of responding to nonfatal shooting scenes when possible. WPD may consider shifting staff from patrol to CSI to support this response to nonfatal shooting scenes. If this response is not possible, see Recommendation 21.

Recommendations	<p>34 Consider expanding the CSU unit to provide 24/7 CSI coverage.</p> <p>Currently, there is a period between 1 a.m. and 7 a.m. when there is no CSI coverage. If WPD would like to ensure that CSIs are available during this time frame, the agency would need to hire a minimum of two additional CSI technicians. This would also allow for CSIs to rotate into the lab when the lab manager is not available to prevent backlog.</p>
	<p>35 Consider obtaining forensic accreditation for the CSU.</p> <p>WPD should consider pursuing forensic accreditation pending a newer or improved facility. Forensic accreditation would provide a yearly external review of the CSU's policies and procedures. Obtaining accreditation would demonstrate a measure of adherence to standards and good practices for the forensic investigators.</p>
	<p>36 Update the CSU facilities and equipment.</p> <p>The crime laboratory needs a new building, as it is aged and most likely not up to the standards required for a forensic accreditation. Additionally, the crime lab facility is currently separate from where the CSIs have cubicles, which makes it less conducive to a coherent working environment. Fingerprint and NIBIN functions should also be put together within the crime lab.</p> <p>CSU also needs vehicle upgrades that should be taken into account the next time WPD purchases vehicles. The vehicle should be designed so that evidence (including biological evidence) is not in an open compartment with the CSI technician. WPD should also consider purchasing an updated shooting tank or, at the very least, conduct a safety examination on the one currently used.</p>
	<p>37 Cross-train an additional CSI to conduct latent print examination.</p> <p>Currently, the CSU supervisor is also the secondary print examiner. This is not ideal as it may cause conflicts if there is a difference of opinion with the examiner—plus the supervisor is already busy with performing management functions and being on call 24/7. WPD should cross-train a CSI in latent print examination to fill this secondary role.</p>
	<p>38 Consider incorporating yearly proficiency evaluations for the forensic investigators.</p> <p>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. The requirement for a yearly proficiency exam should be noted in the CSU SOPs.</p>

5.5.2 Firearms and Ballistics Evidence

WPD has a BrassTrax terminal and direct access to the NIBIN database on-site. This has helped contribute to a minimal to no backlog of entered cartridge casings. Most CSIs are trained in NIBIN entry, which also helps ensure timely processing. The assessment team also found that the CSU operating manual provides clear instructions regarding NIBIN entry.

Recommendations	<p>39 Ensure that NIBIN leads are emailed to all detective supervisors and crime analysts in addition to case detectives.</p> <p>The assessment team learned that currently NIBIN leads are emailed to the case detective but that they are only sent to the supervisor in cases that are unassigned. Leads should go to supervisors in all cases in order to ensure supervisors are up to date on the investigation and to promote accountability in following the leads.</p>
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Recommendations	40	Move the NIBIN lead tracking function to Crime Analysis. The Crime Analysis Unit should receive an email of all NIBIN leads and should be the unit primarily responsible for lead tracking. This approach would likely increase efficiency and effectiveness in noting trends and connections based on their training. This would likely necessitate the need for one or more additional analysts. See Section 5.7 for more recommendations regarding the Crime Analysis Unit.
	41	Consider adding a trained firearms examiner. WPD should consider adding a trained firearms examiner to its staff to further facilitate the processing of firearms related to fatal and nonfatal shootings.

5.6 Digital Evidence

WPD's Computer Forensics Unit is composed of two detectives and is part of the Crimes Against Children Unit, which falls under the Special Victims Division within the Investigations Command. The Computer Forensics Unit investigates computer systems, digital media, and cell phones to gather evidence related to criminal activities. This includes conducting cell phone data and analysis and DVR extractions.

The assessment team found that there are several positive aspects to the Computer Forensics Unit's operations. For example, members of the Computer Forensics Unit have been afforded the opportunity to attend numerous advanced training opportunities and to maintain proficiency in digital forensics. Additionally, the processing backlog is relatively small, with a turnaround time of approximately two weeks.

Recommendations	42	Create a supervisor position for the Computer Forensics Unit that could be filled by a trained digital forensics expert. The Computer Forensics Unit does not currently have a dedicated digital forensics expert as a supervisor. This limits career progression within the unit and threatens the loss of valuable knowledge if one of the detectives were to be promoted and then transferred from the unit. WPD should consider having a process for a trained digital forensics detective to be promoted to unit supervisor. WPD may also wish to consider adding civilian employees to the unit to retain an effective knowledge base.
	43	Ensure the Computer Forensics Unit has the resources it needs to effectively perform its function. Digital evidence plays an increasingly important role in criminal investigations, thus WPD must continually evaluate its digital evidence capacity and ensure it has the resources needed to keep up with the demand. For example, WPD should continue to search for and obtain the latest digital evidence software. WPD should also consider adding a third digital evidence examiner to handle the high volume of work and continuous training that is needed. WPD should consult with crime analysts when determining what updated software to obtain for examining social media.
	44	Consider implementing regular follow-up to collect video evidence. As a best practice, detectives should follow up to collect existing video from the person who possesses the video rather than instruct those individuals to upload relevant video to the WPD citizen link.

5.7 Crime Analysis and Intelligence

WPD's Crime Analysis Unit reports to the CID commander. It is composed of two analysts, with one primarily used for administrative-focused analysis and the other primarily tasked with investigation-related analysis, including data analysis from cell phones, trends, mapping, and imaging. Analysts also spend a portion of every month fielding requests from multiple outside sources, such as drafting reports for the Mayor's office and handling requests from the public, universities, and other sources. Although these functions are important, they limit the value that crime analysts can bring to shooting investigations.

Recommendations

45

Take steps to ensure that crime analysts are being effectively utilized in homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations.

WPD'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 can 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 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 shooting investigations include:

- Assigning an analyst to work homicide and nonfatal shooting cases. This would help improve investigative capabilities and information flow. This analyst could assist with things such as the link chart, social media searches, and NIBIN charts.
- Requiring detectives to consult with crime analysts at the early stages of homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. This step should be included in the policy manual and the investigative checklist detailed in Recommendations 1 and 19.
- Inviting crime analysts to attend case briefings, weekly violent crime meetings, and any other information-sharing opportunities so they can share information, explain how they can assist, and stay abreast of what is going on in 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. This is especially important given that the role of crime analyst is not well-understood among many WPD personnel, especially within patrol.
- 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.
- Assigning 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 TFOs, allowing investigators to focus on follow-up investigations rather than data analysis.
- Rethinking where crime analysts are physically located within WPD to ensure they sit where they can frequently and informally connect with investigative personnel, such as within or nearby an investigative unit.

The NCCP team can connect WPD with departments that are using crime analysts effectively in shooting investigations.

Recommendations	46	Strengthen mechanisms to provide internal feedback to crime analysts. WPD should encourage personnel who use the crime analysts' services to provide feedback in order to give the analysts greater direction and guidance and show them the value of their work.
	47	Add a supervisor position for the Crime Analysis Unit. The Crime Analysis Unit would benefit from adding a supervisor who would be able to assign tasks, help analysts manage their workloads, and aid in the career progression of analysts. This would be especially helpful given the numerous requests that come in from outside sources.
	48	Explore investing in the latest investigative technology and capacity. WPD should explore acquisition of technology related GIS mapping, social network analysis, and AI detection software. Crime analysts and investigators should be trained on any new technology.
	49	If resources allow, consider implementing a Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) to better aid investigations. The assessment team learned that Waco has numerous closed-circuit television cameras that are currently being used for traffic purposes that could also be used for an RTCC. An RTCC could provide WPD with real-time crime detection and provide a wealth of information for analysts and investigators to use. If desired, the NCCP could connect WPD with other agencies that have successfully implemented RTCCs that serve intelligence functions in shooting investigations.
	50	Consider implementing a license plate reader program to aid in investigations if resources and local regulations allow. If desired, the NCCP team could connect WPD with other agencies that have successfully utilized license plate readers for this purpose.

5.8 Case Prosecution

5.8.1 District Attorney's Office

The McLennan County District Attorney's Office (MCDAO) has approximately 34 prosecutors assigned to various duties, including prosecuting serious felonies and gang-related cases and working closely with WPD on fatal and nonfatal shootings.

The assessment team found that MCDAO enjoys a good working relationship with the WPD units handling fatal shootings (SCU) and nonfatal shootings (Assaults & Fraud). Interviewees said that the WPD personnel investigating these cases do an outstanding job and that communication between these investigators and MCDAO is excellent. Prosecutors are notified very quickly, often while the sergeant or detectives are on scene, about fatal shootings and can run through a basic checklist of tasks they would like performed. This early involvement typically yields good results down the road when it comes time for trial.

Two prosecutors are assigned to Waco's TAG unit, one of nine in the state of Texas. TAG co-locates WPD gang officers, MCDAO prosecutors, Assistant U.S. Attorneys from the Western District of Texas, and representatives from several other criminal justice agencies at the federal and state level. The TAG unit meets on a weekly or biweekly basis with MCDAO attorneys to discuss cases and unit activity. This

meeting keeps members of the TAG up to speed on new and ongoing cases and allows for information sharing among those in attendance.

Prosecutors reported that the CSIs and crime analysts do an excellent job on shooting cases, though they noted it would be helpful to add a trained firearms examiner and to conduct social network analysis in certain cases. Interviewees also mentioned that NIBIN has been a valuable asset in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes. Interviewees said that the detectives do a very good job of identifying and collecting digital evidence, but additional technology such as the latest GIS mapping technology and AI detection technology, along with training, would be helpful.

Interviewees noted that one area that could be improved is earlier identification of gang involvement in a shooting case. It was mentioned that in some instances, a shooting case may have been investigated for some time before a gang connection is discovered. Earlier involvement of the TAG detectives could improve investigative outcomes when a case is gang related, a fairly common occurrence.

Interviewees believe that detectives do an excellent job preparing their cases for trial. MCDAO has a process called boarding the case, where the lead detective presents the case to a group of prosecutors who can identify any potential issues prior to trial. This process was praised by all involved. Although TAG detectives routinely testify in court, not all detectives involved in fatal and nonfatal shootings testify as frequently as others. The assessment team heard that MCDAO is willing to provide testimony training, and any other relevant training, for WPD if requested.

Finally, there is very little formal protection or relocation assistance provided to victims and witnesses who participate in shooting investigations. Creating some form of witness protection or relocation assistance for cases that involve intimidation or retaliation is an area for improvement. The NCCP team can assist WPD in identifying ways to better protect victims and witnesses in shooting investigations.

Recommendations	51	Provide training to detectives on giving courtroom testimony for fatal and nonfatal shooting cases. Detectives who do not regularly testify in court should receive additional training on providing courtroom testimony. MCDAO is available and willing to provide relevant training upon request.
	52	Improve collaboration with TAG detectives to identify gang involvement early on in a case. Training for detectives and patrol on indicators of gang involvement by the TAG unit would facilitate information sharing and involve TAG earlier in potential gang-related cases.
	53	Consider creating resources for witness protection. Create resources for protection of victims and witnesses who experience fear, threats, or retaliation. Coordinate these efforts with MCDAO.

5.8.2 U.S. Attorney's Office

The U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO) for the Western District of Texas covers multiple jurisdictions, including Waco, which accounts for much of the violent crime in the district. The USAO has a good working relationship with WPD and MCDAO and praised both as accomplished criminal justice partners. As members of the TAG program in Waco, an assistant U.S. attorney is co-located with the WPD TAG

unit; an MCDAO assistant district attorney along with personnel from the Texas Department of Public Safety; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; FBI; DEA; and U.S. Marshals Service. Interviewees said that this co-location has been a very positive model for information sharing and coordination of effort and resources. The USAO attends weekly or biweekly meetings with the TAG unit and also works closely with narcotics detectives.

The USAO regularly takes gun and drug cases as part of a disruption strategy that is designed to disrupt gang and drug activity by taking appropriate cases federally and removing individuals driving violent crime from the community. These cases are typically prohibited persons in possession of a firearm, which may yield a significant federal sentence depending on the circumstances of the case. The USAO indicated that it is available to train WPD personnel upon request on the federal eligibility of firearms cases, which could be helpful for newer detectives handling shooting cases as well as patrol officers.

Recommendations	54	Consider expanding training opportunities with the USAO. WPD should work with the USAO to provide training for newer detectives and patrol officers on federal eligibility of state gun cases.
	55	Continue robust participation in the TAG program. Co-location of WPD gang officers, MCDAO and USAO attorneys, along with other state and federal agencies has been a very positive and should continue.

5.9 Victim Services and Advocacy

5.9.1 Victim Services Unit

WPD has an internal VSU that is composed of three full-time advocate positions, including the supervisor, and 14 volunteers. The Peer Support Program for WPD officers is also under the VSU. VSU staff members and volunteers are on call 24/7 to provide on-scene crisis intervention and any other assistance at the crime or accident scene. The three full-time advocates handle crime scene response from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays, while volunteers are on call for nights and weekends.

For fatal shootings, patrol response varies in terms of when they involve the VSU. Some patrol officers call the VSU immediately, whereas others may wait before contacting VSU. When on the scene at a fatal shooting, the VSU helps to control the crowd and console upset family members and others so that WPD officers can focus on other investigative tasks. For fatal shootings, it is also required that a VSU advocate attend the death notification. The VSU does not respond to the scene of nonfatal shootings.

The VSU is often the point of contact for families that are seeking additional information during the investigative process. Sometimes a VSU advocate is the only person that families can reach and therefore the VSU tries to locate the detective assigned to the case to get updates for the family. The VSU reaches out to victims of other crimes, and it reviews reports for certain incident categories (e.g., homicide, aggravated assault, sexual assault, and major crimes against persons) to ensure that a victim advocate is connecting with victims across these incidents.

Interviewees said that VSU's limited resources means that it must make intentional decisions about where to focus its efforts. For example, VSU is considering whether to have an advocate position

dedicated to specific units, such as one to the Family Violence Unit and one to the SCU. If there were additional staffing, the VSU could provide more advocacy and victim service support, which would include adding nonfatal shootings and serious assaults. VSU personnel identified a need to do more to intervene and support gang-related shootings, as it will be just a matter of time until the shooting turns fatal due the high level of retaliatory violence in gang-involved incidents. Additionally, many of these cases lack victim and witness participation, which dedicated victim advocates may be able to address.

The assessment team found that it would be useful for patrol officers and detectives to receive additional education on the types of support and services that the VSU can provide to victims and families. The VSU trains at the academy for 1.5 days and then regularly attends roll calls. The VSU also did a year of ride-alongs with patrol officers during a period when there were a lot of gang-related shootings. The VSU would like to revisit the ride-along approach but would need additional personnel to do so.

One reason it is important for patrol officers and detectives to understand the VSU's services is to help them dispel rumors and counter misinformation within the community. For example, interviewees said that many community members do not fully understand the victim compensation process. There is a misperception that VSU can pay for funerals, and some community members believe that the VSU can pay for nearly everything that a family needs. These family members—already under a great deal of stress—are then disappointed or frustrated when they learn that VSU is limited in its ability to financially help families due to limited funds and restrictions on what it can provide. This realization may create a lack of trust in WPD. Other community-based groups in the area are also low on funds to assist crime victims, but the VSU does try to connect families with groups that can help. Giving patrol officers and detectives this kind of information would assist them in helping families and victims understand what VSU can and cannot do.

In terms of assistance with victim and witness retaliation, the VSU fields calls about retaliatory incidents and fears, but there is not much it can provide in terms of actual support. These incidents should be documented and strategies for assistance should be considered such as providing temporary relocation assistance.

Interviewees mentioned there is a lack of collaboration between WPD's VSU and the advocates at the prosecutor's office or those at the McLennan County Sheriff's Office. Leadership across those agencies would need to meet to discuss enhancing their collaboration, as currently it appears that the agencies' respective victim support efforts are territorial and siloed. Interviewees said that building relationships with these agencies to collaborate on victim service efforts would be beneficial. Warm handoffs between these agencies in shooting cases is likely to increase victim and witness engagement throughout the progression of a case.

5.9.2 Chaplains Group

WPD's Chaplains Group sits under the Community Outreach Division. Interviewees said that the five chaplains in the group could be better utilized, as they rarely come into the department and people do not know them. The assessment team found that the chaplains need to be more present in the department to build relationships and so that personnel will know who they are and what service they can provide. This could be accomplished by attaching the Chaplains Group to the Peer Support Program to assist that team or by offering the group as a resource for on-call and on-scene response.

5.9.3 WPD Social Worker

WPD's social worker position has been in place for 4 years. The social worker focuses on individuals who are repeat law enforcement contacts. Many of these individuals have mental or behavioral health concerns. The goal is to help reduce frequent system engagement and change the behavior of repeat individuals through assessment and referral to appropriate services. The social worker has expanded partnerships with other local agencies to respond to these individuals in cases where an individual's actions are not criminal. The social worker is on several community-wide initiatives that require interagency collaboration such as the Heart of Texas Threat Assessment Team, the Behavioral Health Network, and the Suicide Prevention Coalition.

The social worker does not respond to fatal and nonfatal shootings but works closely with the SCU as they investigate cases for emergency detention. The assessment team found that there was a strong relationship between the social worker and the SCU.

The social worker provides training within WPD about mental and behavioral health issues, and WPD has been active about providing gun locks and firearm safety education to the community. Through the social worker, WPD is currently working toward a partnership with a local shooting range to allow people to voluntarily surrender their firearm if they feel unsafe with it due to suicidal ideation or other concerns. The range would hold the firearm for three months or until the individual who surrendered it was ready to retrieve it.

Recommendations	56	Consider expanding the Victim Services Unit. The assessment team found that although the VSU manages to do a lot with little resources, it is currently stretched thin. Based on the case volume and Waco's population, it would be useful to hire an additional two full-time service providers for the VSU, bringing it to a total of five. Expanding the unit would allow VSU providers to respond to nonfatal shootings and other serious assaults, which they currently do not have the capacity to do.
	57	Ensure the VSU is notified about all fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents. Victim service providers need timely information about an incident so that they can begin working on a strategic plan for the victim and plan their initial outreach. Finding out about the incident a day or 2 later is too late for an effective response.
	58	Work toward having the VSU respond to every shooting scene. Ideally, a victim service provider would respond to every shooting scene. Immediately following the crime is one of the most traumatic times for a victim, co-victim, or third-party witness. Additionally, it is also the time when a victim or witness may be most likely to share information about what they witnessed to a supportive, trusted official. By being at the scene, a victim service provider can immediately begin building trust with a victim or witness, which experience shows will increase their likelihood of remaining engaged with detectives and prosecutors throughout the case. To ensure a consistent response, <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both the Investigations Command and VSU policies and procedures should state the circumstances under which the VSU should respond to the scene.• Officers and detectives should receive training on the services that victim service providers can provide at the crime scene.• Contacting the VSU should be included in the investigative checklist described in Recommendation 19.

Recommendations	59	<p>Educate patrol officers and detectives on the role of the VSU and what it can and cannot do.</p> <p>Community members may be receiving misinformation about what the VSU is able to offer. Ensure that patrol and officers understand the victim compensation process generally so they can let victims and families have a better idea of what to expect when they work with the VSU.</p>
	60	<p>Have VSU personnel train personnel in Assaults & Fraud Unit about trauma, the current (lack of) protections available to shooting victims and witnesses, the reasons for a lack of victim and witness participation in investigations, and effective methods for building trust with victims and witnesses.</p> <p>The assessment team heard that detectives sense a lack of interest from leadership in thoroughly investigating nonfatal shooting cases that lack victim or witness participation/cooperation. This is extremely problematic as it results in violent offenders remaining in the community to inflict harm again and can lead to retaliatory violence if victims and witnesses do not feel the police can protect them from future violence. VSU personnel often have training and skills that they can share with detectives to encourage them and provide them with skills to thoroughly and successfully investigate these cases.</p>
	61	<p>Consider dedicating a personnel position to oversee the Peer Support Program.</p> <p>The Peer Support Program appears to be a positive program that is currently overseen by the VSU supervisor. If there was a position dedicated to managing the program, the supports offered could be expanded.</p>
	62	<p>Develop a protocol for WPD and its partners to better identify, record, respond to, and prevent acts of victim/witness intimidation. This includes assessing the level of risk to those who are threatened.</p> <p>WPD 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.</p> <p>Strategies that WPD should consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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 WPD, including the type of intimidation act or threat that was committed and how the instance was identified by WPD or another reporting agency.

Recommendations	63	Incorporate the Chaplains Group alongside the VSU to reach out to families. Currently the VSU reaches out to families and provide case updates, but sometimes families need spiritual support. Therefore, a chaplain may be more beneficial in this role.
	64	Consider a forum to allow surviving families to be educated about their cases and the criminal justice process more broadly. The assessment team can provide a peer support contact for WPD to learn from other NCCP/CLEARs sites about what this could look like. Examples have included “talk-back” events where families have been invited as a group into a closed-door session with law enforcement and prosecutors to discuss the investigative process and ask questions or participate in one-on-one meetings between investigators and families, which include a survivor support acting an intermediary to explain processes and provide support to the family.
	65	Build relationships with local survivor-led CBOs such as the Montrell Phenix Sr Cease the Violence Foundation to bring in survivor voices to investigative practices. These groups can review policies, practices, and trainings to inform about what survivors need to help them navigate and feel supported throughout the investigative and prosecution process. (For more details on partnerships with CBOs, see Section 5.10 – Community Engagement and Participation in Investigations.)
	66	Improve communication and collaboration between victim advocates within WPD and those within the prosecutor’s and sheriff’s offices. Leaders from WPD and other criminal justice agencies, particularly the District Attorney’s office and McLennan County Sheriff’s Office, should explore strategies for improving collaboration between advocates and ensuring that coordination exists from the beginning to the end of a case to include warm handoffs as the case moves to prosecution.
	67	Improve communication between the VSU and the Gang Unit. The Gang Unit does not currently work with the VSU. Given the large number of fatal and nonfatal shooting cases that involve gang members, it would be useful to strengthen coordination between VSU and the Gang Unit.

5.10 Community Engagement and Participation in Investigations

As part of WPD’s participation in Project CLEARs, the assessment team conducted interviews with community-engaged or community-facing WPD officers and professional staff, as well as leaders from CBOs leading gun violence prevention and response efforts. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand existing community partnerships and engagement practices.

Interviewees both internal and external to WPD favorably described the WPD Chief of Police’s commitment to community engagement. They noted WPD’s several strengths in this area, including the work done by the COU and NET, along with communication and engagement efforts to share information and build relationships with the community.

The assessment team learned that witness participation in homicide cases in Waco was greater than for nonfatal shooting cases, and that victims in nonfatal shootings often do not cooperate with investigations. In response to questions posed to CBO leaders and WPD 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. This section will highlight opportunities for WPD to improve community engagement, including feedback from both WPD personnel and CBO leaders.

5.10.1 Community Outreach Unit

WPD's COU has three officers and a civilian coordinator and falls under the Community Services Division. The COU coordinates the Citizens Police Academy, Citizens on Patrol, the Police Explorers program, the Junior Police Academy, the Chaplains Group, the Crime Stoppers program, and events such as the Back to School Bash and National Night Out. The COU also provides crime prevention training to the community at workplaces, homes, and businesses.

The Citizen on Patrol program's goal is to enlist private citizens to volunteer time to patrol their neighborhoods and report suspicious activity to WPD. While on patrol, volunteers have access to a car provided by WPD, which is equipped with a police radio to WPD dispatch so that volunteers can call in information. According to WPD interviewees, the Citizens on Patrol program is not well utilized as it seems like volunteers have been reluctant to participate in the program.

The Police Explorers program is open to youth aged 14 to 20 who are interested in a career in law enforcement or a related field. The program has proven useful for recruitment to WPD and other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as for the victim services volunteer pool.

The COU coordinates various community events, often in collaboration with the NET. These events provide opportunities for residents and WPD personnel to come together and build relationships, or for WPD to bring resources into communities along with community-based partners.

Crime Stoppers

The Crime Stoppers program, which is part of COU, has won national awards. Interviewees said that Crime Stoppers receives numerous tips and is perceived to be an effective program.

The Crime Stoppers liaison has established a group for Patrol Commanders so that when the liaison receives a tip from the public about criminal activity, the information is shared with the Patrol Commanders group, which can then share the information with sergeants to get word out to patrol officers on the streets. The Crime Stoppers liaison gets an immediate cell phone notification when a new tip comes in, which allows the liaison to contact dispatch immediately for urgent situations. The liaison often gets tips after the WPD's PIO shares information with the community through press releases and social media.

One concern is ensuring that investigators get tip dispositions back to the Crime Stoppers liaison so that they can close out cases. As seen with other NCCP/CLEARs sites, many tipsters do not retrieve their rewards. This suggests that tipsters may be motivated by factors other than the financial incentive and that they value the anonymous method of sharing information.

The Crime Stoppers liaison is part of a countywide group, which has a monthly information-sharing meeting. When the liaison encounters information from other agencies that would be good to publicize on Crime Stoppers, the liaison will offer to do so, which helps other agencies. Through a local billboard company, the Crime Stoppers program has access to a free billboard where they can publicize cases. WPD's Crime Stoppers program's slogan is "Tippin' ain't Snitchin," which is an attempt to counter the anti-snitching mentality that may be held by some community members.

Recommendations	68	Continue the Police Explorers program. This program has helped with officer and professional staff recruitment, community engagement, and education and awareness.
	69	Consider whether the Citizens on Patrol program should be disbanded or revamped in to increase community participation.
	70	Work with local CBOs to promote Crime Stoppers. Educate CBOs about how the program works and maintains tipsters' anonymity to gain their buy-in. CBO leaders can then vouch for Crime Stoppers to the community and encourage people to use it or invite the Crime Stoppers liaison to their community meetings or events to share program information.
	71	Promote timely disposition of Crime Stoppers tips. To assist with timely disposition of Crime Stoppers tips, allow the Crime Stoppers liaison to educate each unit about the Crime Stoppers program and what is needed monthly from investigators about tip disposition. Be sure that supervisors are holding investigators accountable for dispositions.

5.10.2 Neighborhood Engagement Team

The NET, which also falls under the Community Services Division and is composed of four officers plus a sergeant, was down one officer at the time of this assessment. Every neighborhood has its own assigned NET officer.

NET officers attend neighborhood association meetings and do proactive problem-solving with residents. The NET can focus on priorities identified by the community and helps residents develop ideas to solve specific problems. The NET brings in resources and information to residents and businesses which include trainings and education about crime trends, scams, and situational awareness. The NET is also involved community activities and programs, such as afterschool programs and Police Athletic League. There is a separate police department for the city's school system, the Waco Independent School District. There is good communication between NET and Waco Independent School District Police Department.

The NET's largest event is the Community Opportunity Event (COE) directed toward young adults. The COE was initiated due to an increase in shootings involving suspects and victims aged 12 to 30. NET detectives came up with the COE to bring resources and opportunities to those individuals at risk for gun violence. At the first COE event, 80 people attended. The number of attendees jumped to 3,000 this past year. The COE has partners available to provide immunizations, health screenings and health information resources, job and college and other educational opportunities, opportunities to learn about all branches of the military, mentoring, and tutoring. The COE is advertised through the radio, flyers, WPD's podcast, and word of mouth. The COE is a good way for WPD to build relationships with CBOs by inviting them to participate and table at the event.

NET officers are sometimes involved in shooting investigations, but this is largely an informal process. There is no protocol for NET officers to engage with homicide or nonfatal shooting investigations, but NET officers often take it upon themselves to speak to the lead detective to see what is needed if an incident occurs in their geographic area of coverage. In general, NET officers like to provide the community with whatever information they can to help residents feel safe following a homicide or shooting incident. This information is typically shared during neighborhood association meetings. In general, community members reach out to NET officers because they trust them. Patrol officers do not always have time to engage with residents in the way that NET officers can. NET officers and their unique skillset and community relationships could be better utilized for shooting investigations.

When asked about officer engagement at community events and activities, the assessment team learned that patrol officers are motivated to attend community events through overtime pay, which is a good practice. Patrol officers do a good job engaging with the community at events and officers across the unit are also eager to teach during the Citizen Police Academy and Explorers program.

The NET has also had a unique LGBTQ+ liaison position since 2022. The purpose of the position is to establish, maintain, strengthen, and enhance the relationships between WPD and the LGBTQ+ community. The LGBTQ+ liaison has relied on training and resources from Out to Protect, a national nonprofit with the sole purpose of building relationships between law enforcement and communities. WPD is currently working on accreditation through Out to Protect and would be the first law enforcement agency in Texas to earn the accreditation. WPD's liaison serves on the LGBTQ Liaison Network Leadership Team through Out to Protect and also serves as an LGBTQ+ liaison for the City of Waco.

At WPD, the liaison provides 8 hours of LGBTQ+ awareness training annually for recruits coming out of the academy and hopes to provide more annual training department wide. The liaison is also working on adapting the LGBTQ+ training, which was created for law enforcement, to provide training to anyone in the community, including businesses and residents. The liaison has provided trainings with patrol about how to interact with people who identify as LGBTQ+. The liaison has also updated WPD's hate crimes policy and received training on the importance of documenting incidents that may have LGBTQ+ bias or discrimination so that there is a documentation of the pattern of behavior, if needed, to meet the elements of a hate crime.

The LGBTQ+ liaison attends and plans for a number of events including Pride Month in June, a women in public safety symposium, and the Waco COE that NET leads. The liaison has also conducted community outreach to gather LGBTQ+ residents' perceptions of safety. The liaison has created a survey to gather data and developed a group of community stakeholders who have connections with the LGBTQ+ community to see what WPD and the city can do to be more inclusive. The LGBTQ+ liaison also serves as a direct point of contact for community members if they have issues.

When asked about the impact of the position, the liaison has heard from the LGBTQ+ community that their view of police has changed due to this position. The community has reached out to the liaison to express its appreciation for the position and the liaison's work. For LGBTQ+ community members who have fears or concerns about the police, the liaison has brought them in for tours of the WPD headquarters and has dedicated time to helping address community fears of police.

Internally, feedback for the liaison has also been positive. WPD personnel have reached out to the liaison for advice or resources when working with LGBTQ+ communities. The liaison is also available to assist on scenes or with investigations that may have an LGBTQ+ connection. The liaison is also on call 24/7 to talk to a shooting suspect or victim as needed. VSU has called the liaison at times to ask for advice, especially related to transgender identities, or for assistance with definitions, such as “deadname,” a term used to describe referring to a transgender or nonbinary person by their birth name rather than their chosen name. The liaison hopes to establish and leave a solid foundation for this position, including a selection process to hire the next liaison, to ensure a good fit.

Recommendations	72	Continue to support the COE under NET and consider how to use this event to expand partnership opportunities with CBOs. WPD should explore how it can use the COE to develop partnerships with CBOs that the agency may not already be partnering with. For example, CBOs such as the Montrel Phenix Sr Cease the Violence Foundation are looking for ways to partner with WPD and build awareness of the organization.
	73	Educate WPD personnel on the value of the COU and NET and their roles in strengthening community trust and participation in investigations. Educational efforts should clearly draw direct lines between strengthening community engagement, building community trust, improving community participation in investigations, and helping close cases.
	74	Strengthen communication between NET and detectives in the SCU and the Assaults & Fraud Unit. WPD should consider establishing information-sharing protocols and practices between NET and SCU/Assaults & Fraud detectives to identify ways to better leverage the NET’s unique skills, community knowledge, and relationships for crime problem-solving and investigative purposes. Officers in community policing units have strong relationships with residents, and they engage with residents in ways that promote trust and relationships. They can assist with investigations by helping to locate individuals of interest, soliciting information from the community about incidents, gathering video evidence from residents and businesses, and assisting with search warrants and canvassing. NET detectives may be able to access information that residents may not be willing to share with other officers with whom they do not share the same level of trust. Consider whether investigators should attend neighborhood association meetings alongside NET detectives at least once per year to establish connections, or in situations where an investigator is seeking information about an incident that occurred in the neighborhood. The NET should be invited to attend violent crime briefings, and consultations with NET detectives should be on the checklist of investigative tasks required by detectives (Recommendation 19).
	75	Ensure that detectives are aware of the LGBTQ+ liaison and utilize the liaison’s services if needed. The LGBTQ+ liaison is available 24/7 to support a shooting investigation that may have an LGBTQ connection.

5.10.3 Community Engagement in Practice

The assessment team developed a Typology of Community Engagement for Policing (shown in **Figure 5.1**) to inform data collection and organize findings from Project CLEARs. As noted, community engagement is important for building trust within the community (both residents and CBOs), which in turn can increase the likelihood of community participation in investigations.

As shown in Figure 5.1, a law enforcement agency's level of community engagement can be described as a pyramid with five levels. As community engagement increases, there is increased community voice, more shared decision-making power between the community and law enforcement, and increased collaboration between the community and law enforcement.

The base level of the pyramid is Information/Reassurance. Here, the law enforcement agency provides information to the community; information sharing occurs in one direction—from the law enforcement agency to the community. As the level of community engagement increases, information sharing by the community to law enforcement also increases.

The next levels are Monitoring/Accountability, Strategic Consultation, and Partnership/Cooperation. The top of the pyramid is Empowerment. At this highest level, the community takes ownership of identifying issues of concern and driving decision-making about strategies, with law enforcement support, to address those issues. Ideally, WPD's community engagement strategies could help move the community up to the level of Empowerment (where appropriate)—that is, to actively involve CBOs and community residents in leadership and decision-making in gun violence response and prevention. Findings from the CLEARs assessment will be discussed according to the typology.

Figure 5.1 Law Enforcement Agency's Level of Commitment Engagement



Typology adapted from Myhill, A. (2012). Community engagement in policing: Lessons from the literature. National Policing Improvement Agency. [Community engagement lessons-libre.pdf](#). See also the International Association for Public Participation. (2018). *IAP2 spectrum of public participation*. https://iap2.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2018_IAP2_Spectrum.pdf

Information/Reassurance and Monitoring/Accountability

At the Information/Reassurance and Monitoring/Accountability levels, WPD's PIO plays an important role. The PIO runs WPD's social media platforms and attends community events. WPD's social media was described as "active," using Facebook, Instagram, X, and a podcast. Social media posts include information about events, highlighting stories from within the community, news releases about fatal incidents, crime trends, and reminders/public service announcements.

WPD issues press releases to share information with the community about shootings incidents specifically. If there is a shooting, a press release is made when there is a mass casualty (three or more victims) or a fatality. If WPD is seeking a suspect, the press release will conclude with the Crime Stoppers contact information. Some people reach out with direct messages to WPD through Facebook or other social media platforms to share information for investigations. When this occurs, the PIO forwards the information to the detective assigned to the case. The CID has its own Facebook page in addition to WPD's Facebook page. CID posts often include a photo from surveillance footage when it is looking for a suspect. Three detectives and the PIO have access to the page. Because the CID posts so frequently, it has a separate page to avoid inundating the main WPD Facebook page.

Another information-sharing method used by WPD is a podcast called *Waco PD on the BEAT*, which is hosted by the PIO. The podcast used to air weekly, but the frequency was reduced due to other job responsibilities and has been on pause since 2024. Interviewees within the WPD shared about times they have been featured on the podcast and viewed the podcast as a way to keep the community apprised of events and WPD operations. The PIO suggested a cadence for the podcast of 1–2 times per month.

One of the strengths of the current PIO is having a background as a news reporter at a local news station. Having worked with the media, the PIO knows the types and format of information that the media wants. In the past, WPD's PIO was a full-time role assigned to a sworn sergeant. The current PIO has been able to build trust as a civilian within the department by going through trainings alongside officers, sitting with the current recruit class, doing ride-alongs, participating in active shooter training, and immersing within different units to build relationships and learn about what the units do. The PIO also stressed to officers the goal of putting information out to the community and not wanting to interfere with or jeopardize investigations. Therefore, the PIO works closely with officers in crafting the information that goes out to the public. The PIO reports directly to the Chief of Police, which is an advantage because it allows for consistent messaging from the chief to the community and helps ensure that information is released in a timely manner.

WPD also frequently shares information with the community through the NET at neighborhood association meetings, which was described earlier. On request, the PIO sometimes attends neighborhood association meetings, such as if there is a period of high crime or specific incidents of concern that the community would like to discuss. At these meetings, the PIO provides information about what WPD is doing to address issues, which helps with the Monitoring/Accountability level.

Providing information to the community through social media helps with accountability because WPD provides information and updates to the community about incidents and outcomes. Following a recent year with an increase in shootings, a public service announcement series was developed that included statistics, visuals, and a video from the Chief of Police with a call to action. In the video, the chief

described what WPD is doing to address the violence along with a list of steps the community could take to help WPD.

For critical incidents, such as an officer-involved shooting, the Chief of Police will do a news conference to make a statement to the community and provide relevant information that can be released. The PIO's role at shooting scenes is to set up a media staging area and share information with the media as it becomes available. The PIO can go into the computer-aided dispatch system to release general information about incidents such as time, location, and call type, and then will call the sergeant or commander to get additional details to relay to media on scene or over the phone. The PIO also provides education to the media to let them know what they can and can't do. For example, the PIO had to tell the media that they could not livestream a SWAT response because of safety issues.

The PIO provides training to officers about the media. Although the training is informal, a formal training is something that could be developed. Training for officers is provided through the Training Unit, which has the PIO provide an hour-long training on the PIO's role and what officers can and cannot do related to the media. Although officers are supposed to call the PIO prior to media engagements about major incidents, they do not always do so.

Strategic Consultation and Partnership/Cooperation

At the Strategic Consultation and Partnership/Cooperation levels, WPD should ensure that the community has opportunities and methods to share their priorities with WPD and then problem-solve together. The NET provides strategic consultation opportunities to the community through its community engagement activities and neighborhood association meetings. However, WPD should consider additional opportunities that will allow residents to share their priorities as some may be unable or unwilling to attend neighborhood association meetings in person.

One strategy is for WPD to expand its coordination and partnerships with CBOs. Currently, there are no meetings that bring CBOs together to discuss priorities with one another and WPD. These types of meetings would allow for strategic consultation and partnership building, but the assessment team learned that there are few CBOs focused on gun violence response and prevention. One CBO leader interviewed stated that CBOs often do not want to serve or otherwise become engaged with individuals who are involved with gun violence and that some programs have blacklisted individuals who have history of aggression.

The assessment team identified CBOs to participate in Project CLEARs interviews through a media scan and direct referrals from WPD. Representatives from three of these CBOs (Montrell Phenix Sr Cease the Fire Foundation [MPCVF], Prosper Waco, and the Klaras Center) were interviewed.

Based on a media scan, a local **Students Demand Action** group held its first meeting in February 2025 (Herber, 2025; Roker, 2025). Students Demand Action is a student-driven, grassroots movement that advocates for gun control and works to reduce gun violence in schools and communities. During the first meeting, the group reviewed statistics for gun-related deaths and gun laws in Texas compared with other states. The group hopes to grow its membership from students across schools in the Waco area. According to the cofounders, the group was started "because we are constantly seeing people our age impacted by gun violence, especially in schools, and we believe our generation has the power to create

meaningful change by using our voices.” The group’s goal is “to create a space where students from across the community can come together to make a difference.”

There are two nonprofit organizations in Waco that were started by surviving family members who have lost loved ones to homicide. One is **MPCVF**, which was identified through the media scan and participated in an interview. The foundation was previously unknown to WPD prior to the CLEARs assessment, though CID command staff were aware of its cause. The organization started in 2019 and was prompted in part by the fact that the founder’s son, who was killed by gun violence, left behind four children. As a grandparent to those four children, the founder realized that it was hard to provide for the grandchildren with their father absent. She started the organization to give back to mothers and fathers who have lost their sons to gun violence.

MPCVF has led several community-based events in Waco to support families impacted by gun violence, including a walkathon in 2023 in partnership with HER Skin, a Texas nonprofit dedicated to empowering women who have faced trauma (Lamparski, 2023). A portion of the proceeds benefited three Waco women who lost their sons to gun violence. MPCVF has organized a Christmas giveaway over the past 4 years, with money raised through fundraisers. MPCVF has also held a Mother’s Day brunch to build community and let other mothers know they are not alone in their loss. The founder stated that she would like to do more, but needs more active involvement from the community, and acknowledged that her social media account has not been active. She wants to improve her social media presence. There is no current partnership between MPCVF and WPD, but this is an opportunity that could be explored, which could bridge relationships with other surviving families of gun violence in Waco. MPCVF is considering starting a support group for mothers impacted by gun violence.

Another CBO, **Love Like Austin**, identified through the media scan, is a nonprofit that was started by a mother who lost her son in a homicide that remains unsolved (Rajkumar, 2025). The organization is aimed at helping other families who are also seeking justice. Love Like Austin was identified in the media scan, but it was not interviewed as part of the CLEARs assessment.

The **Parents Against Crime Coalition (PACC)** Panel was featured on a WPD podcast episode in 2022, but it is unclear how active the organization is currently. According to its website, PACC focuses on brainstorming and discussing issues related to crime prevention, parental involvement, and community collaboration (Parents Against Crime Coalition Panel, 2025). The organization was established to involve parents and families in the process of addressing critical needs that impact crime, including poverty, discrimination, unstable homes, addiction and drug use, behavior problems at home and school, coping with stress, educational resources for children, training needs for parents and families, and the unusually high number of minority youth referred to alternative schools and in-school suspension. PACC has a board and an advisory committee that is committed to the organization’s mission and vision. PACC develops collaborations and seeks individuals, law enforcement agencies, educators, juvenile justice programs, other nonprofits, schools, agencies working with youth and families, businesses, and other entities to join in helping reduce crime and build stronger families through its organization. To ensure that PACC successfully contributes to crime reduction in the community, it uses a holistic approach as it develops and implements programs serving parents, youth, and families in the community. PACC implemented the Village Life-skills Program to assess participants and teach families problem-solving skills, goal setting, interpersonal communication skills, and conflict management.

Three additional CBOs interviewed as part of the CLEARs assessment were Prosper Waco, Health of Texas Behavioral Health Network (HOTBHN), and the Klaras Center for Families. **Prosper Waco** partnered with WPD on a Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative grant for Department of Justice funding. The grant was awarded but later returned. Prosper Waco also supports the social worker position at WPD.

HOTBHN has been intentional about working with local law enforcement, including WPD and the McLennan County Sheriff's Office, to better integrate services and decrease barriers to accessing mental and behavioral health services. HOTBHN provided examples of several efforts where it has partnered with WPD or engaged in strategic consultation with the department. These included the Public Safety Access Points project, which was aimed at reducing law enforcement response to 911 calls that could be better addressed through a social worker or mental health approach. The HOTBHN also facilitated a sequential intercept model mapping process in partnership with WPD and others, which allowed the organization to visually identify where individuals with mental or behavioral health needs would interface with law enforcement and criminal justice systems to prevent further involvement in those systems. HOTBHN is part of the Behavioral Health Leadership Team along with WPD, local hospitals, and other partners that works to address capacity at the jails and hospital emergency departments. HOTBHN is also actively involved in jail diversion programs and works within the juvenile detention center. It reviews the daily census at those facilities to identify any potential clients to help them access mental or behavioral services. They also screen those clients with Adverse Childhood Experiences tool. Additionally, HOTBHN provides training for WPD on crisis intervention and mental health first aid.

Klaras Center for Families, which is a youth-focused service organization within HOTBHN, operates the Gang Awareness Prevention and Safety (GAPS) program geared toward justice-involved youth aged 10 to 26 and the McLennan County Gang Collaborative, which is co-led by WPD. GAPS is a preventive program that provides education. WPD officers have assisted with providing education and awareness, which is a great opportunity for officers to build relationships with community youth. Klaras Center also runs the Gang Reduction Intervention Program (GRIP), which focuses on youth who are on juvenile probation or in juvenile detention and are involved with gangs. The goal is to provide wraparound services to those youth and their families. Klaras Center staff work closely with the WPD social worker on these initiatives that focus on justice-involved youth. The Klaras Center is implementing SMART, a new mentoring program targeted at youth who are justice involved. The program is currently aiming to match mentors in the community with clients who are mentees. The program coordinator is attending meetings in the community to find mentors (e.g., churches, schools, civic clubs). There may be opportunities for WPD staff to serve as mentors.

The assessment team was able to attend a meeting facilitated by the Klaras Center to partner with WPD on plans for an upcoming juvenile drop-in center to divert youth from juvenile detention centers. The Klaras Center received grant funding to implement the center. During the meeting, the Klaras Center and WPD staff engaged in strategic consultation so that both organizations could share priorities and then formulate partnership plan to ensure that youth who are picked up by patrol for issues like running away or truancy have a safe place to be dropped off until their guardians can get them. The center will also include access to multiple resources that will be co-located at the center. WPD command staff and the social worker were both present to provide plan input.

The HOTBHN staff's perception is that it has been long time since there has been a negative interaction between WPD and its clients. In the past, when the staff had seen negative interactions, they were able to call WPD command staff and those issues were addressed right away. This indicates that WPD has been responsive to HOTBHN's staff, which helped to build trust between the two organizations. Staff said that communication and trust is key, and that communication with WPD has been great. HOTBHN staff also gave kudos to the latest administration and admitted that years ago there were challenges working with WPD and that some staff didn't want to have to work with WPD. However, there have been major improvements and staff attribute changes to the commitment to community engagement that WPD has shown from the top of the organization down. HOTBHN staff also discussed the importance of the social worker role within WPD, which has made a difference according to staff.

Empowerment

At the Empowerment level, several WPD interviewees, including those from the NET and COU, discussed ideas around helping the "community to police itself" or helping the "community be able to meet its own needs." These approaches allow the community to develop and implement solutions themselves, with guidance and support as needed from WPD.

Recommendations	<p>Ensure that WPD personnel contact the PIO if they plan to do a media engagement about major incidents.</p> <p>76 Although it is included in the agency's media policy that officers reach out to the PIO, they do not so consistently. The goal is not to stop officers from doing media engagements, but rather to ensure awareness and coordination so that messaging is consistent. If it is a minor case, an officer doesn't need to contact the PIO. For major incidents, the PIO needs to be informed because the media will want to follow up for additional information.</p>
	<p>Conduct an inventory of CBOs doing gun violence prevention and response work, starting with those that have been identified through the Project CLEARs assessment and included in the Appendix of this report.</p> <p>A formal inventory of community groups involved in gun violence prevention and response, or public safety more generally, would establish a pool of potential community partners available to assist WPD with identification of priorities and to develop strategies. WPD should formally acknowledge that the police cannot address the issue of gun violence alone—the community is a necessary partner in the effort and community groups are the experts who hold the knowledge and power to address the issues related to victim and witness participation and engagement.</p> <p>77 These efforts should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting intentional outreach to these CBOs to establish relationships and learn about what every CBO does and how WPD can engage with them. CBOs may have opportunities to have officers engage with their programs. • Gathering input from CBOs about their interest in convening CBOs for a collective meeting to network with one another and have an opportunity to meet with WPD for strategic consultation purposes. • Ensuring that MPCVF and other CBOs identified through the inventory are invited to table at the annual COE led by the NET. • Encouraging patrol officers to identify the CBOs in their area and make in-person visits to build connections. Be sure these efforts are documented and accounted for in performance reviews.

Recommendations	78	<p>Consider ways that WPD or the Chaplains Group may be able to support MPCVF with its implementation of a support group for mothers who have lost children to gun violence.</p> <p>Having the Chaplains Group available to support was a recommendation made by a WPD member during the assessment interviews.</p>
	79	<p>Expand the PIO team by adding part-time personnel or interns.</p> <p>There is a sergeant who assists with PIO activities when the PIO is out of the office, but the sergeant does not have the capacity to assist in the day-to-day operations. Expansion would allow the PIO to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus more on recruitment efforts through videos and promotional opportunities • Institutionalize media training for officers • Devote more time to training local media partners • Develop communication plans for various types of incidents so that they are available if incidents occur • Forge new relationships with CBOs
	80	<p>Consider ways to make neighborhood association meetings more accessible to residents because this is a main method of information sharing with the community.</p> <p>Consider virtual attendance options or recording important pieces of information shared at those meetings to make available to residents to view later on. Guidance from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (International Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.) suggests the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating in languages and formats understood by community members • Rotating meetings between different locations, days, and times • Providing virtual participation options • Communicating frequently via email, social media, and community events • Soliciting information from diverse communities to find the best way to relay information to those communities
	81	<p>Develop a citizen advisory or oversight board for monitoring and accountability purposes.</p> <p>Studies about effective citizen advisory boards suggest that citizen oversight agencies that oversee the police do lead to a reduction in racial disparities in policing outcomes, but only when they have both a broad scope of authority and sustained local governmental support in terms of human and budgetary resources (Ali & Nicholson-Crotty, 2020).</p>
	82	<p>Consider ways that community members and CBO leaders can share information about their concerns and priorities, including from those who hold supportive, neutral, and critical viewpoints (International Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.).</p> <p>Take stock of the opportunities and venues available. Consider town hall meetings where CBO leaders and residents can discuss specific topics of concern with WPD. Through understanding community priorities, it will lay the foundation for a collaborative model for the co-creation of programs, policies, and strategies by WPD and the community, which is important to elevating to next level of community engagement in the typology. Follow-up is needed on suggestions and recommendations provided from the community through regular communication, so that the community can learn about the impact of any strategies that have been implemented. It will be important for WPD to consider who is responsible for discussing priorities, how to reach most of the community who are not actively participating in community meetings, and how to make sure that priorities and decisions are reflective of the entire community.</p>

83

Incentivize the community-based work of WPD officers and other personnel.




Find ways to give kudos, credit, or acknowledgment, or to document community engagement efforts. It is a best practice to include community engagement as part of the evaluation process. When performance appraisals include community engagement indicators, officers will be less likely to feel that these efforts are “add-on” duties as opposed to part of their core role (Myhill, 2012). It is also a good practice that officers are offered overtime pay to attend community events. Even if incentives are not necessarily monetary or financial, 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 WPD.

6. Conclusion

The NCCP assessment of WPD's response to homicides and nonfatal shootings revealed that the agency has taken many positive steps toward improving its investigative practices. The recommendations in this report are intended to build upon these efforts and help WPD 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, victim services, and others who support criminal investigations. The NCCP team will work with WPD to determine which recommendations the department can address and will support WPD as it implements and evaluates these changes.

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Appendix A. Inventory of CBO Partnerships on Gun Violence Prevention and Response

Group Name	CLEARs Interview?	Group Type	Overview	Area of Focus	From LEA	Media Scan	Other CBO Leader	Raising Awareness	Providing GV Prevention	Youth-Focused Prevention	Formal Responses to Shootings	Resources for Victims and Families	Anti-No Snitching Efforts	Violence Interruption	Gaining Witness Participation	Promoting Crime Stoppers
Prosper Waco	Yes	Nonprofit	A collective impact organization helping to establish partnerships across nonprofits with shared goals to improve the community's health and financial stability	Citywide	Yes			No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Klaras Center for Families	Yes	Nonprofit	Organization that provides a variety of mental and behavioral health services and supports, including juvenile justice-focused and jail diversion efforts; participates in multidisciplinary partnerships	Citywide	Yes			No	Yes; hosts a SMART mentoring program and jail diversion program for youth	Yes; SMART mentoring program, jail diversion program, GAPS, GRIP	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Montrell Phenix Sr Cease the Violence Foundation	Yes	Nonprofit	A local nonprofit providing programming and support to families that have been impacted by gun violence	Citywide		Yes		Yes; hosts events for family victims of gun violence	No	No	No	Yes; provides support and mentorship for family victims	No	No	No	No
Health of Texas Behavioral Health Network (HOTBHN)	Yes	Nonprofit	Organization that works with local law enforcement, including WPD and the McLennan County Sheriff's Office, to better integrate services and decrease barriers to mental and behavioral health access	Citywide	Yes			No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No