



National Case Closed Project:

Tracking Nonfatal Shootings and Other Violent Gun Crimes in Your Law Enforcement Agency

The National Case Closed Project (NCCP) is a Bureau of Justice Assistance initiative that supports law enforcement agencies nationwide in improving their violent crime clearance rates, especially for fatal and nonfatal shootings cases. The project provides agencies with customized training and technical assistance and tailored recommendations developed through comprehensive site assessments to assist them in implementing evidence-based practices for improving clearance rates.

This NCCP brief provides guidance and information for law enforcement agencies that want to better collect, track, and analyze nonfatal shooting incident data to improve gun violence prevention and investigative outcomes. Law enforcement agencies can better understand and combat this serious form of violent crime by effectively measuring and incorporating information about nonfatal shooting incident and other violent gun crimes into their operations. Additional resources focused on enhancing law enforcement's initial

response and subsequent investigation of these incidents, including engaging with agency and community partners, are available at the [National Case Closed Project website](#).

In this brief, we define a nonfatal shooting as a criminal incident where a weapon with a powder discharge is fired at a victim with criminal intent and a victim suffers a nonfatal penetrating wound from the firearm's projectile (Hipple & Huebner, 2018; Huebner & Hipple, 2018; McGarrell et al., 2019). These offenses are distinguished from other forms of nonfatal gun assault where the victim is not wounded by the firearm's projectile, including pointing a firearm at someone but not discharging it, shooting at someone or into an occupied dwelling or vehicle but not hitting a person with the projectile, or striking someone with a firearm as a blunt force object. Incidents that lack criminal intent are also excluded (e.g., self-inflicted or accidental gunshot wounds). **Table 1** provides examples of the types of incidents that meet and do not meet this definition of a nonfatal shooting.

Table 1. Offenses That Meet and Do Not Meet the Definition of a Nonfatal Shooting

| Meets the Definition of a Nonfatal Shooting | Does Not Meet the Definition of a Nonfatal Shooting |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After a physical fight, an offender pulls out a handgun and shoots the victim in the back. The victim survives the incident. | An individual shoots a victim with a projectile fired from a gun without a powder discharge, such as a BB gun or airsoft gun. |
| A victim is nonfatally shot while hunting with a friend. After an investigation, it is determined that the individual was intentionally shot. | A victim is accidentally shot by a friend while the friend is handling a firearm. |
| An individual's vehicle is shot at while she is occupying it and one of the bullets strikes the victim's hand. | An individual's vehicle is shot at while she is occupying it, but the victim is not struck by the bullet. |
| In a drive-by shooting, a victim is struck by a bullet while inside their home and survives the gunshot wound. | Following an argument, an offender shoots a victim in the head, killing them. |

Importance of Tracking Nonfatal Shootings

Nonfatal shooting incidents are a severe and widespread form of violence that communities across the United States are struggling to address. Data from some cities suggest that nonfatal shootings are about 3 to 4 times as common as fatal shootings (Hipple et al., 2020). Furthermore, clearance rates for nonfatal shooting incidents have remained consistently low across the country, with some law enforcement agencies clearing between 10% and 20% of their nonfatal shooting cases each year (e.g., Philadelphia City Council, 2022). Despite their severity and frequency, there is no national data system to determine exactly how often these incidents occur (Hipple, 2022; Roman, 2021). Nonfatal shootings are often not systematically measured and tracked at the local level, resulting in a significant gap in knowledge within and across jurisdictions that, if filled, could be used to inform gun violence prevention and response practices.

“In Durham, NC, and many other communities, fatal and nonfatal shootings are similar in composition, including circumstances, motives, and characteristics of victims and shooters. Whether the victim lives or dies in a criminal shooting is largely a matter of chance. In addition, there are incidents in which a weapon is discharged but nobody is struck by a projectile—a much more common event than a gunshot wound. Victim and witness cooperation is often a significant factor in determining whether an arrest is made, and the perpetrator is held accountable in court. Tracking these criminal events is not only crucial in understanding the degree and nature of violent crime occurring in the community but goes to the very heart of procedural justice and police legitimacy.”

— Jason Schiess, Analytical Services Manager, Durham Police Department (NC)

Specific benefits to systematically collecting nonfatal shooting data include:

- **Benefit 1:** Informing comprehensive gun violence prevention and response strategies by providing a better description of the characteristics of gun violence in a community.
- **Benefit 2:** Uncovering any unique causes and characteristics of nonfatal shooting incidents compared with fatal shooting incidents and other aggravated gun assault incidents, which might necessitate a custom prevention or response strategy.
- **Benefit 3:** Enabling law enforcement agencies to track shooting lethality by area and person characteristics, which can inform violence prevention and response efforts (Sadler et al., 2022).
- **Benefit 4:** Alerting law enforcement agencies to retaliatory and cluster shootings to promote early intervention efforts.
- **Benefit 5:** Improving data used to evaluate the strategies and programs designed to reduce shootings.
- **Benefit 6:** Examining nonfatal shooting case outcomes over time, including the use of exceptional clearances.
- **Benefit 7:** Enabling agencies to regularly report and update the community about the prevalence and trends in both fatal and nonfatal shootings.
- **Benefit 8:** Supporting state, regional, and national efforts to better understand and address fatal and nonfatal gun violence, including through public safety and public health collaborative initiatives. An example of one such initiative is the Violence Intervention and Preventive Health Initiative (Boston Public Health Commission, 2022).

Establishing a Nationwide System to Track Nonfatal Shootings: How Improvements to NIBRS Will Help

Currently, crime data recorded by law enforcement agencies holds the most promise for providing systematic, national data on nonfatal shootings (Roman, 2020). The move to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) as the nationwide standard for crime reporting creates new possibilities for consistently tracking nonfatal shootings regardless of the state or jurisdiction where the crime occurred. The FBI plans to add a "gunshot wound" victim injury code to the NIBRS

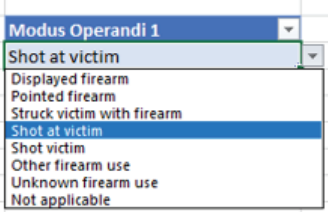
specification within the next few years, which will provide a consistent way for law enforcement agencies to denote that a victim was shot. At the same time, the agency will also add an indicator to signify whether a firearm was discharged that will help distinguish shooting incidents from incidents where a firearm was present but not discharged (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022). Importantly, law enforcement agencies may find value in measuring and tracking additional forms of gun crime that are not included in NIBRS, such as whether a gun crime was a drive-by shooting or whether a firearm was pointed at a victim but not fired.

Recommendations for Tracking Nonfatal Shootings

The NCCP has developed a set of recommendations for measuring, tracking, and analyzing nonfatal shootings based on lessons learned from collaborating with law enforcement agencies and communities across the country. These include the following:

1. Select a definition of nonfatal shootings to be used across your agency, such as the one provided in this brief.
2. Meet with diverse stakeholders such as investigators, crime analysts, elected officials, and community representatives to identify data and information priorities for measuring violent gun crimes. For example, stakeholders may agree that simply tracking nonfatal shooting incidents is sufficient, or they may decide to measure additional types of violent gun crimes such as whether a gun was pointed at a victim in a threatening manner but not discharged, whether a victim was struck with a firearm, or whether a victim was shot at and not struck by the projectile.
3. Collaborate closely with crime analysts and research partners when deciding how to measure and track nonfatal shootings. These individuals work directly with data and know how to measure things in a way that reduces the amount of missing and inaccurate information, increases data entry consistency, and improves data access and dissemination. **Table 2** provides examples of different forms of measurement along with benefits and limitations associated with each approach.
4. Assess your agency's record management system (RMS) capabilities to determine how your RMS can track and store nonfatal shootings data while also understanding that functionality will vary across vendors. Stand-alone methods of documentation and tracking are prone to neglect and can be difficult to maintain in a systematic manner, thus law enforcement agencies should work closely with their RMS providers to add their nonfatal shooting and any other firearm-related offense measures into their RMS.
5. Train relevant staff on how nonfatal shootings should be defined and recorded to ensure accurate numbers are collected. These staff include patrol officers, investigators, supervisors, crime analysts, and records office personnel, among others. This instruction can be accomplished through roll call and in-service trainings, formal correspondences, and meetings.
6. Regularly assess/audit the quality and completeness of nonfatal shooting data to ensure these incidents are being recorded in a consistent manner. For example, victim status can change (e.g., after a nonfatal shooting victim dies, it is revealed that the victim accidentally shot themselves), so it is important to update records.
7. Incorporate nonfatal shooting data into crime prevention and response strategies and use these data to evaluate gun violence prevention and response practices and programs.
8. Provide routine updates to the community on the prevalence and trends in fatal and nonfatal shooting incident.

Table 2. A Review of Different Ways to Measure Nonfatal Shootings in an Agency RMS

| Measurement Type | Example | Pros | Cons |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yes/no indicator (e.g., gunshot wound option in victim injury type; nonfatal shooting checkbox) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Victim shot in incident? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is easy to implement and use Will be included in future update to NIBRS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not measure other types of violent gun crime in an incident |
| Unstructured response field (e.g., open-ended modus operandi variables) | Modus Operandi 1: <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Vic shot in leg</div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Places low burden on staff to enter information Can capture infinite types of gun crimes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results in inconsistent data entries Is difficult and time consuming to analyze |
| Structured response field (e.g., set choice list of modus operandi variables) |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results in consistent data entries Is easy and quick to analyze Can capture multiple types of gun crimes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Places slightly bigger burden on staff to enter information Captures only what is included in the available response options |

Conclusion

There are multiple benefits to law enforcement agencies measuring, tracking, and analyzing data on nonfatal shootings and other forms of nonfatal gun assault. This NCCP brief discusses these benefits and provides recommendations to law enforcement for developing an effective way to do so. The NCCP, which is a Bureau of Justice Assistance initiative that supports law enforcement agencies nationwide with improving their response to violent crimes, can provide additional information and support to law enforcement agencies that would like further assistance with implementing a method of recording and using information about shootings. For additional information, please visit <https://www.nationalcaseclosed.org>.

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More Information

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

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