

POLICY, PRACTICE, & PROCEDURE

Assessment Report

for the

Bridgeport, Connecticut Police Department

Prepared By

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Bridgeport Police Department – *Phase 1 Report*

The primary goal of the Bridgeport Police Department (“BPD”) is to create safe communities wherein all residents can confidently reside free from the threat of crime and violence. While a critical component of successful policing is identifying and arresting those who have broken the law and endangered public safety, modern police leaders emphasize the goal of deterring and reducing crime through proactive, collaborative, and positive relationships with the community they serve. Crime reduction, as opposed to criminal apprehension, is the primary focus of community policing. At the forefront of everything, a Bridgeport Police Officer does, must be an unwavering commitment to abiding by the constitutions and laws of the United States and the State of Connecticut.

The Bridgeport Community shares this same goal of creating safe living and working environments free from crime and criminal threats, through a police force that respects the civil rights and civil liberties of all individuals. Communities in Bridgeport also aspire to express a meaningful voice in policing policy and process, with their input respected and incorporated into policing practices as appropriate. To achieve this common goal of creating safe communities, police and communities must forge an effective partnership. The BPD requires support and input from the community to maximize its delivery of professional, yet compassionate, policing services, and the community must welcome police presence and protection. Unfortunately, as is the case nationwide, there are communities in Bridgeport where the connection between police and community is less than optimal, and the desired level of mutual respect and cooperation does not presently exist. Restoring a relationship of trust and building this connection is the challenge the Community and BPD mutually face.

About 21CP Solutions, LLC

21CP Solutions’ mission is to help law enforcement agencies and communities effectively tackle the challenges of delivering safe, effective, and constitutional policing in the 21st Century. We assist cities and their

police departments in employing best practices for effective, community-focused policing that builds trust.

We are a diverse group of national experts in public safety. We are police chiefs who have turned around troubled police departments and have worked to renew the community's confidence in their agencies. We are social scientists and academics who have spent careers understanding what works in policing and public safety. We are lawyers and community leaders who have overseen some of the country's most successful police reform efforts. And we are all professionals who have worked in, with, and for communities to drive safe, effective, and constitutional policing.

21CP is an outgrowth of many of its consultant's experiences on President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Building on the Task Force's work, several members formed 21CP in 2015 to assist local law enforcement agencies and communities with implementing strategies for ensuring officer and public safety, constitutional policing, and authentic partnerships between communities and law enforcement. Jurisdictions from California to Connecticut and Seattle to Baltimore have turned to 21CP to help address their most difficult public safety and policing challenges.

21CP Solutions was engaged by the City of Bridgeport's Office of the City Attorney to review current BPD policies, procedures, training, and community engagement efforts. This review included, but was not limited to, a thorough examination of the BPD Internal Affairs Investigative operations to aid the department in identifying possible areas for enhancement in technology, training, best practices, policy, and procedures.

Further, 21CP provided the City and the Police Department with recommended action items to promote improved leadership, supervision, and training. As part of our information gathering, we conducted a comprehensive review of BPD policies and procedures and attended multiple site visits. During our analysis, we met with members of the clergy, community organizations, elected officials, youth, police union officials, training officers, BPD leadership, internal affairs investigators, police recruits, newly promoted sergeants, and veteran officers.

There are various substantive areas 21 CP identified where the BPD might successfully improve its operations, such as Building Trust, Community Policing/Engagement, Use of Force, Training, Policy Updates, Communications, Officer Wellness, Staffing, and Facilities. This report will briefly focus on each of these areas and provide recommendations for potential improvement.

1. BUILDING TRUST

Building trust and legitimacy in the communities it serves is essential to the BPD to create safe and healthy neighborhoods. Building trust promotes mutual respect and legitimacy through a commitment to procedural justice, transparency, accountability, and acknowledgment of past and present obstacles. It also requires police officers to view their role as that of guardians of individual civil and constitutional rights, rather than just enforcers of the law and apprehenders of criminals.

Recommendations:

1.1 The BPD and the Bridgeport Community should engage in an ongoing open and honest conversation regarding the current state of policing in the City and the community's aspirations for change.

1.2 The discussion should include opportunities for the police and community to collaborate on efforts to make the City safer and what traits and characteristics the community believes make for a competent police officer.

2. COMMUNITY POLICING / ENGAGEMENT

During 21 CP's visits to Bridgeport, we met with several community organizations. Tension clearly exists between police and communities of color. Several issues surfaced during a large community forum attended by 21CP Partner Charles Ramsey and BPD Chief Perez, hosted by *Bridgeport Generation Now*. This meeting included a broad cross-section of community organizations. Some of the common themes that emerged from the meeting included: perceptions of poor police relationships with youth, a lack of transparency/trust, and rudeness or insensitivity on the part of some officers.

The BPD has made demonstrable progress in addressing some of these concerns by maximizing the value it places on community policing. Areas of emphasis include Captains brain-storming directly with the department's Deputy Chiefs, and Chief Perez in creating and applying innovative techniques (1) for patrol and (2) for more productive department-wide training. Patrol Captains implemented a plan called "Safe Neighborhoods" or "Safe Neighborhood Walking Details," a strategic program that allocates more officers to walking patrols with additional officers assigned to patrol cars. Officers share their cellphone numbers and business cards with local merchants and residents to introduce themselves and build working relationships within the community. A strategic vision for "building long-term community-based partnerships in policing" is the goal. Re-building trust particularly in communities of color is essential to achieve long-term success. There is, however, a concern that current BPD staffing levels pose a serious challenge to achieving full permanent implementation of an effective community policing strategy.

Recommendations:

2.1 The BPD should establish a community policing/engagement strategy that reflects best practices in all areas of its operation, including but not limited to racial and social equity concerns.

2.2 The plan should be structured and staffed to ensure successful implementation and the capacity to be sustained on a long-term basis.

3. USE OF FORCE

An area of concern in many police departments nationwide is the legal and appropriate use of physical force. Use of Force training has evolved over recent years to include an emphasis on de-escalation. Reality-Based Training (RBT) is situational scenario-based training geared toward testing and improving officer judgment. The traditional use of force continuum emphasized levels of force that increased based on the actions of the suspect. There was a minimal emphasis placed on methods effective at de-escalating the situation to minimize the need to resort to high levels of force to resolve a situation. Current training, which emphasizes de-escalation, also focuses on field tactics that maximize the officer's use of time, distance, and cover to minimize the necessity for the application of physical force, particularly deadly force.

Recommendations:

3.1 The BPD should implement a robust reality-based training program that focuses on de-escalation and field tactics.

3.2 The BPD should establish an after-incident review and debriefing process for all incidents involving the use of force to ensure the force used was necessary, proportional, and proper.

3.3 The City should authorize a uniformed and civilian personnel staffing study to determine the appropriate number of police officers and support staff required to provide quality police services today and for the foreseeable future, including a robust community policing strategy to build trust and legitimacy in communities across the City.

4. TRAINING

The BPD has modified officer training and assignment methods to ensure optimum productivity and effectiveness.

Recommendations:

4.1 Departmental training should address current issues affecting the BPD recruit, and in-service training must include current societal topics relevant to both the department and the community it serves.

4.2 Training should consist of a focus on fair and impartial policing, use of force, procedural justice, handling of mass public demonstrations (including flash mobs), and community policing.

4.3 Training should emphasize that to ensure management from the top down is strong, the development of the next generation of police leadership is essential. The BPD should prioritize a robust first-line supervisor, middle management, and senior leadership training.

5. POLICY UPDATES

Bridgeport City Attorneys have been working proactively with the Bridgeport Police Department in the comprehensive review, development,

and revision of department policies to maintain and reflect current and emerging police practices.

The BPD envisions these updates for policy and policing as advancing the professional needs of officers, technology, and the public. The BPD is also working towards becoming accredited, which will ensure all policies and procedures reflect modern best practices in policing.

Recommendations:

5.1 The BPD should post on-line the current policies and procedures manual for public information.

5.2 The BPD should consider publishing on-line any proposed draft amendments to its policies and procedures on-line to receive community input before final adaptation.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

The BPD should have an active and robust internal and external communications strategy. 21CP's conversations with police officers and members of the community evidenced a lack of clear communication from departmental leadership to the rank and file and members of the community concerning mission, goals, strategies, tactics, plans, projects, and initiatives. During a community forum attended by 21CP Partner Charles Ramsey, there was an apparent lack of adequate public knowledge relating to current BPD policies and procedures.

Recommendations:

6.1 The BPD should have a robust presence on social media and conduct regular community forums to maximize its reach into the diverse communities it serves.

6.2 The Chief and members of his senior command should facilitate regularly scheduled focus groups with police officers and supervisors to gain a better understanding of issues affecting their ability to perform their jobs most efficiently.

7. WELLNESS PROGRAMS FOR OFFICERS

Recognizing that mental health, stress (both job-related and personal), and emotional well-being have a demonstrable impact on the overall health of officers, the department has adopted professional programs to support its officers. These officer wellness and safety programs and initiatives have the end-goal of enhancing the quality of police services to the community served.

Recommendations:

7.1 The BPD should continue endorsing practices that support officer wellness and safety.

7.2 The BPD should educate all officers as to the value-added that is available to them from its wellness and safety programs and initiatives.

8. FACILITIES / EQUIPMENT / TECHNOLOGY

Those BPD facilities that are in disrepair or less than optimal conditions negatively impact officer morale. Patrol vehicles should all be equipped with Mobile Data Terminals, in-car cameras, and replaced before the expiration of their useful service life.

Recommendations:

8.1 The current police facilities (headquarters and police academy) are outdated and in need of repair or replacement. They need upgrading to be modern, technologically advanced facilities capable of providing quality training and support for officers and community members.

8.2 High mileage vehicles need replacing promptly, and a regular fleet replacement cycle should be adopted and adhered to by management.

8.3 All patrol vehicles should be outfitted with mobile data terminals and in-car cameras.

8.3 All uniformed officers should be issued and receive training in the use of Body-Worn Cameras.

8.4 All uniformed officers should be provided with CEW's (Tasers) and receive training on the policy and proper use of the weapon.

8.5 To effectively respond to emerging crime trends and patterns, the creation of a Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC) that: has access to, and can analyze in real-time, calls for service, monitor CCTV, and take advantage of Shot Spotter like technology.

9. STAFFING

The BPD requires full staffing in accordance with the current adopted Table of Organization. With only 365 officers – the department should benefit from more patrol officers to continue to improve its community policing efforts, reduce overtime expenditures, and reduce officer stress and *burnout*. To provide the most effective policing services to the community it serves, the BPD's workforce should, and currently does, reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of that community.

Recommendations:

9.1 The BPD should authorize a professional staffing study to determine the target number of officers needed to provide top-quality police services.

9.2 The staffing study should also include a review of the current structure of the department and provide advice on restructuring the organization and its command, as warranted.

9.3 The BPD should utilize aggressive recruitment to ensure its workforce continues to have a make-up that reflects the diversity of the community it serves.

CONCLUSION

The BPD has made substantial progress in many areas of its operations under current departmental and city leadership. However, admirable these achievements are, more is required to fully modernize a department that serves Connecticut's most populous city. Additional work is warranted in several areas including community engagement, building trust and legitimacy in all communities, training, leadership development, and organizational structure. The City of Bridgeport is committed to taking the necessary steps to improve the operation of the BPD to provide safety and security for all its residents. The Bridgeport Police Department must ensure that all of its members adhere to department policies, procedures and training and are held accountable for their actions.

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