

Safer communities, trusted law enforcement

Why data and analytics are key to improved outcomes, community relations and accountability



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Safety is a universal human need. And citizens rely on their law enforcement and government agencies to help keep them safe. While government agencies set broad policies related to safety, law enforcement officers must act on those policies to maintain safe communities.

But factors such as officer-involved violence, racial injustice and bias, the opioid crisis and social unrest have upended the public's feeling of safety and disrupted trust in organizations that are designed to keep us safe. This situation was exacerbated in 2020 as the pandemic brought significant new health and economic burdens.

While we aren't always sure of the relationships between broad situations and specific outcomes, we can look at the facts. [In the US, for example](#), overall crime has steadily decreased since the 1990s. Yet in 2020, the homicide rate exceeded the highest rates ever recorded in the high-crime era of the late 1980s and early '90s. It's possible that 2020 is an outlier. But for whatever reasons, more than 50 cities of varying sizes across the US saw an average 35% jump in murder from 2019 to 2020.

As stressors increased, more people turned to drugs. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics](#) found that the number of overdose deaths increased more than 18% from the 12 months ending in June 2019 to the 12 months ending in May 2020. This reflects the largest number of drug overdose deaths ever recorded over a 12-month period.

Communities across the US are calling for help and demanding change. Elected officials are searching for ways to address these legitimate concerns. Law enforcement agencies are looking for ways to reform and restore faith in public safety. What innovative approaches will work to create sustainable change?

Learn from the data: What the police really do

Just as we examine facts to come to terms with what's happening in the world around us, we should look at the facts around law enforcement to understand what needs to change, and why. A first step is to find out [what law enforcement officers do](#) on a day-to-day basis.

Because the police are measured by how they deter and respond to crimes, it seems logical to think they spend their time fighting crime. Yet the data shows that most of what police officers do is not related to crime. And combating violent crime is only about 4% of the work the police across the US do.

In the US, less than 15% of police work is spent on law enforcement activities. Instead, the police spend at least 85% of their time engaged in community care activities such as assisting vulnerable people and providing other services - many related to homelessness, mental health and addictions.

To drive long-term change, law enforcement leaders must know these facts - and their implications - and share the information with elected officials and communities.

The police spend at least 85% of their time engaged in community care activities. Many are related to homelessness, mental health and addictions.

Officer performance measures: What's wrong, what's missing, what has changed?

Most police departments measure outputs, such as open warrant sweeps or traffic enforcement details. They also measure outcomes, such as number of people arrested or number of summonses issued. But rarely do departments measure the impact of those activities. For example, was the overall volume of crime or traffic accidents reduced?

Whether officers are conducting enforcement activities or community care, their interactions at times result in officers using force. By looking at all the circumstances around these interactions, police departments can achieve a better understanding of performance as well as factors that affect community relations. With a deeper level of data analysis, they can see the impact of individual interactions.

Consider what happened when one city police force began implementing the terms of a consent decree. They started by capturing the required use-of-force data. But they soon realized this only reflected a tiny portion of their work.

Next, they began capturing data about encounters the police had with people in serious mental health crisis. The results were a shock. It turned out that over the course of a year, the city's police officers encountered people in serious mental health crisis approximately 10,000 times. Drilling down, the data showed that people were armed in only about 8% of those cases. And police officers used force in only 2% of the cases - primarily low-level force (soft takedowns or tight handcuffs). Officers only used serious force in about 1% of these situations.

The police department had not been capturing this type of data prior to the consent decree. Consequently, no one realized the huge commitment they were making to citizens facing mental health dilemmas.

This is just one example of why traditional measures of performance - and related training efforts - are no longer sufficient. Instead of just evaluating use-of-force and adverse incident data, nontraditional data from many sources needs to be identified, combined and analyzed, then surfaced to policing organizations, communities and government leaders. Data analysis should be followed by developing policies that inform comprehensive strategies for training, supporting and measuring today's police. Public trust and community safety are at stake - because understanding the outcome of interactions can lead to a better understanding of the impact on the community.

What is officer readiness?

A readiness approach focuses on making sure individual officers and their agencies are prepared to respond optimally in a multitude of situations. This requires keeping a pulse on:

- The community's needs.
- Each officer's mindset, experience and training needs.
- Recent encounters, stressors and trauma.

The case for readiness

One approach to driving sustainable change in how we address public safety concerns revolves around the concept of “readiness.” A readiness approach focuses on making sure individual officers and their agencies are prepared to respond optimally - in a holistic sense - across a multitude of situations. This requires keeping a pulse on the community’s needs as well as each officer’s mindset, experience, training needs, recent encounters, stressors and trauma.



Several factors contribute to community trust in law enforcement, officer wellness and public safety.

How does readiness begin? And what does it entail? Readiness requires understanding a broad scope of issues, including:

- **The community’s needs.** Populations and trends vary greatly, so it’s important to understand the unique needs of the community in which a police force operates. For example, some cities have a high number of people addicted to opioids. Others have fewer addiction challenges but more issues with assaults. These differences affect decisions around recruitment, training, resource deployment and more.
- **Level of officer preparedness.** Officers are expected to serve roles ranging from social worker to crisis counselor to detective. They need well-rounded training to know when (and how) to de-escalate situations versus when to take stronger actions.
- **Routine stressors of the job.** Police officers face job-related and personal stress that has short- and long-term effects on their mental and physical state - and their ability to properly address volatile situations. Helping them prepare, cope with and adapt to these stressors requires an ongoing commitment from law enforcement agencies and government leaders.
- **Effects of severe trauma.** Police officers encounter some situations that pose an immediate risk to their lives. It’s crucial to evaluate how this type of severe trauma may affect an officer’s mental state and response to volatile situations.
- **Advance warning of officer risk.** There are performance and behavioral indicators leading up to an officer being involved in an adverse incident. To avoid these situations, it’s crucial to use continuous monitoring to identify officers entering a category of risk. This allows time to arrange the necessary training and counseling.

Performance and behavioral data provide law enforcement agencies with insights to understand the full context surrounding officer readiness. With holistic insights, agencies can give officers the type of support they need to remain positively engaged with their communities and to perform optimally as they guard public safety.

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- The community’s needs.
- Level of officer preparedness.
- Routine stressors of the job.
- Effects of severe trauma.
- Advance warning of officer risk.

Using data and analytics to build a readiness plan

To comprehensively support law enforcement officers from recruitment to retirement, agencies must first identify, collect and combine all the pertinent data, then conduct continuous analysis to reveal hidden insights in near-real time. The results should be used to set baselines for concrete plans of action that enhance both officer readiness and public safety. Based on these insights, police officers can be trained appropriately, measured accurately and held accountable.

Much of the data that provides insight into officer performance and community interactions already exists. But the data is spread across many systems:

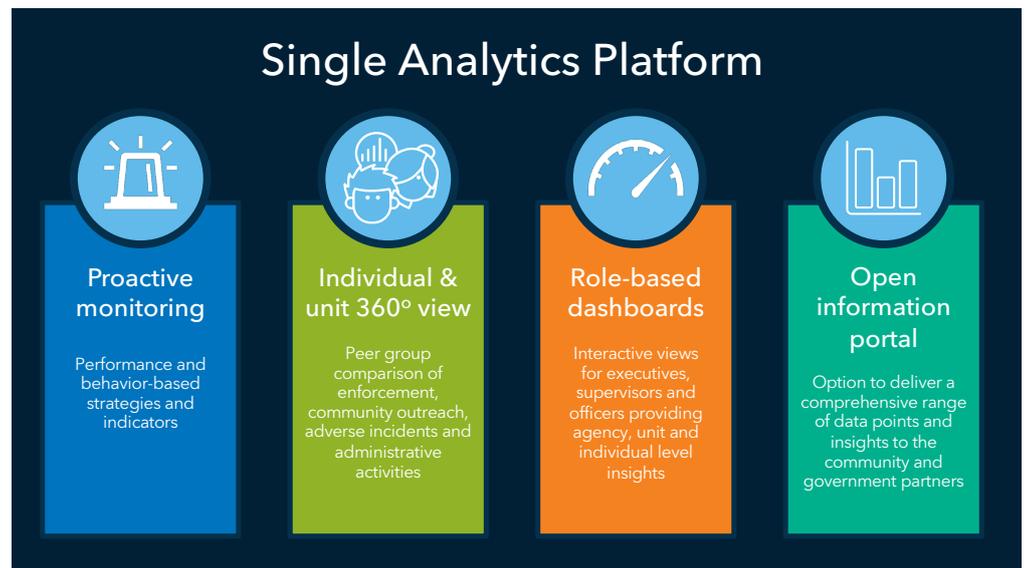
- Records management systems include data on arrests, citations and other field incidents.
- Dispatch systems include data about calls for service and officer responses.
- Other systems store disciplinary, complaint and training data, along with commendations and citizen feedback.

Capturing, integrating and evaluating these broad data sets helps to identify both risky and positive performance and behavioral indicators. This includes indicators that lead to excellent job performance - and those that reveal patterns of negative behavior and bias. By capturing such details early, department leaders have a chance to intervene, prevent adverse incidents and improve outcomes. They can also use these insights to refine plans for future readiness efforts.

With a comprehensive performance and wellness ecosystem in place, leaders will be able to:

- Evaluate and improve policies and practices for recruitment, hiring, training and retention.
- Develop transparent, data-driven methods of documenting and addressing adverse incidents, such as complaints, use-of-force data, and errors by police.
- Quickly and accurately identify high-risk situations.
- Implement effective early intervention measures.
- Build strong support systems for the workforce and a sustainable, optimal work environment.

With SAS®, agencies can use a single analytics platform to capture and share the information needed to ensure safer communities and trusted law enforcement.



A shared data approach promotes safety, transparency and trust

Working with SAS, law enforcement can integrate and analyze diverse data sets to enhance officer readiness, identify risks, improve department performance, inform policies and share information with the public. This holistic approach feeds a variety of data into models to deliver a complete and realistic view of officer readiness. Police interaction trends – along with relevant data, decisions and actions – are easy to share publicly.

Our approach works because it:

- **Enables proactive monitoring.** At any time, you can look at (then adjust) performance and behavior-based strategies and indicators.
- **Shows an individual and unit-level 360-degree view** so you can do peer group comparisons of enforcement, community outreach, adverse incidents and administrative activities.
- **Provides role-based dashboards** with an interactive view for executives, supervisors and officers. These views reveal agency, unit and individual-level insights.
- **Delivers an open information portal** to support transparency and trust. You have the option to deliver a comprehensive range of data points and insights to your community and government partners.

Trust starts with law enforcement openly sharing key metrics and information with the public. At the same time, law enforcement leaders must take bold steps to ensure officer well-being, increase positive engagement with the public, and create a desirable work environment that includes recognition of model officers. This is the sustainable way forward.

To learn more about how SAS can help you ensure public safety while reestablishing a culture of trust, visit [Law Enforcement Solutions From SAS](#).

Learn more about [Law Enforcement Solutions From SAS](#)

