

SHRINK THE BEAST:

A Framework for Transforming Police

NICJR★
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform



The killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police was the match that lit a fire that has been building in our communities for a long time. Nationwide demands for not just reform, but complete transformation of policing have put pressure on local jurisdictions across the country to make rapid and real change.

Since its founding, the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) has worked to reform the juvenile and criminal justice systems through a process of Reduce – Improve – and Reinvest. This framework can also be effective in transforming policing. In the past 15 years, the U.S. juvenile justice system has been reduced by more than half. Youth correctional facilities have been shuttered and investment into community services has increased. While there is certainly more progress to be made, the movement to transform policing can learn a great deal from criminal justice reform.

NICJR's framework to Shrink the Beast focuses on three areas: reducing the footprint of law enforcement, significantly improving what remains of policing, and reinvesting the savings from smaller police budgets into community services.

Reduce

One of the most significant structural reforms we must advance in policing, already happening in the criminal justice arena, is shrinking its scope. Officers are asked to do too much with too few resources. The warrior mentality that police are indoctrinated with, starting as early as the first day of the police academy, does not allow them to handle many of those responsibilities well. It is time for an alternative response network for all non-violent calls for service. Similar to the community-based organizations that provide diversion programs for youth and adults who would otherwise end up in the justice system, a new infrastructure of community safety and problem-solving responders, with expertise in crisis response, mental health, and de-escalation techniques, must be developed. Such a network should be vast and well equipped, including 24-hour on-call community crisis response and outreach workers. The resulting reduced police force would then focus primarily on responding to serious violence. Small, but promising examples of this model already exist:

- > **In Oakland, CA**, non-profit organizations employ street outreach workers and crisis response specialists who respond to shooting scenes, intervene in and mediate conflicts, and sit down with young adults who have been identified as being at very high risk of violence to inform them of their risk and offer them intensive services. These City-funded efforts have been credited with a [50 percent reduction in shootings](#) and homicides in the city.
- > **In Eugene, OR**, Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets ([CAHOOTS](#)) responds to more than 22,000 requests for service annually with its Crisis Intervention Workers. This represents nearly 20 percent of the total public safety call volume for the metropolitan area.
- > **In Austin, TX**, the [Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team](#) is equipped to respond to 911 calls where callers indicate that a mental health response, not police, is needed.
- > **In Albuquerque, NM**, where the police have been involved in numerous unjustified killings, the Mayor has proposed creating a [new non-law enforcement public safety agency](#) that will respond to non-violent calls.

Steps To Reduction



Create a robust alternative emergency response network with mental health workers, crisis intervention specialists, and street outreach workers – the Community Emergency Response Network (CERN).



Significantly reduce police patrol divisions which are currently primarily responsible for responding to 911 calls. Police will instead focus on responding to serious and violent incidents, a small percentage of all current calls.



CERN Crisis Intervention Specialists would respond to all other calls.



Traffic policing should be replaced by technology to the maximum extent possible.



Violence reduction teams should be created or remain intact: Patrol and investigation units focused on reducing gun violence. Like all remaining police personnel, these units must be trained in and adhere to strict use of force and Procedural Justice policies.



Investigation Units should also remain intact.

Improve

The primary challenge in police agencies is culture. Many have described it as a warrior culture. Adrenaline-filled young officers want to “knock heads” during their shifts; the “us vs them,” military occupation syndrome. We must confront and transform this destructive culture. Policing should focus on protection and service to the community.

Improving the smaller police departments that remain, after taking the steps to reduction outlined above, includes three components: policy, training, and accountability. Implement new policies including restricting the use of force, mandating verbal de-escalation, community policing, and eliminating stop and frisk. Implement high quality and frequent training on these newly developed policies. And, most importantly, hold all police personnel accountable for adhering to and demonstrating these policies in action.



Steps To Improvement

- 1 Increase hiring standards to screen out candidates with any signs of racial bias, interest in the warrior culture, or those who have been fired or forced to resign from previous law enforcement positions.
- 2 Prioritize hires of those who grew up in the city and/or live in the city.
- 3 Make deliberate efforts to have the police force representative of the community it serves.
- 4 Revise use of force policies to limit any use of deadly force as a last resort in situations where a suspect is clearly armed with a firearm and is using or threatening to use the firearm.
- 5 All other force must be absolutely necessary and proportional.
- 6 Provide thorough, high quality, and intensive training in subjects including:
 - New use of force policy
 - Verbal de-escalation
 - Bias-free policing
 - Procedural Justice
- 7 Transparency: Provide regular reports to the public on stops, arrests, complaints, and uses of force, including totals, demographics, and aggregate outcomes data.
- 8 Effectively use an early intervention system that tracks various data points to identify high risk officers and implement discipline, training, and dismissal where necessary.
- 9 Use aggressive, progressive discipline to root out bad officers.
- 10 Rescind state and local laws that provide undue protection to police unions and prohibit effective and efficient disciplinary action.

Reinvest

A smaller footprint of law enforcement should result in a reduced police budget. Resources should be shifted away from the police department to the CERN and other community-based intervention initiatives, including Credible Messengers/Life Coaches, social workers, and mental health service providers.



The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) is a non-profit organization providing technical assistance, consulting, research, and organizational development in the fields of juvenile and criminal justice, youth development, and violence prevention. NICJR provides consultation, program development, technical assistance, and training to an array of organizations, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and philanthropic foundations.

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