

SALINAS POLICE DEPARTMENT

From Traditional Policing to Community Policing



SUMMARY

After experiencing an exceptionally violent five-month period in 2014, the Salinas Police Department (SPD) knew it needed a change. Chief Kelly McMillan requested assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to give the SPD guidance in developing and implementing a community policing philosophy. Eighteen months after the report was issued in 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice discontinued the COPS program, but the SPD persevered in following the roadmap that the report provided. As of January 2021, the SPD has addressed 97% of the findings and recommendations with support from the City of Salinas.

GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS

Civil Grand Jury – Monterey County Civil Grand Jury

COPS – Community Oriented Policing Services

COPS Office – the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services of the U.S.

Department of Justice seeks to advance the practice of community policing by law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources¹

CRI-TAC – Collaborative Reformation Initiative Technical Assistance Center provides technical assistance to law enforcement agencies on a wide variety of topics that is tailored to the individual agency²

CRI-SPD report – Collaborative Reform Initiative, An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department – the report issued by the COPS Office in 2016

DOJ – U.S. Department of Justice

FTO – Field Training Officer

OIS – Officer Involved Shooting – the discharge of a firearm by an on or off duty police officer whether accidental or intentional

PCAC – Police/Community Advisory Committee

SPD – Salinas Police Department

UOF – Use of Force – refers to a broad set of guidelines defined by individual law enforcement agencies to determine when and what level of force to use in a given situation

BACKGROUND

The City of Salinas experienced four officer-involved shootings (OIS) over the span of five months in 2014. For a city that averaged one OIS each year, this was unusual.³ The suspects were Hispanic males, two of whom may have had mental health issues. While investigations determined that all the shootings were considered justified, the deaths of these four men further frayed the fragile trust between the community and the Salinas Police Department and triggered protests against the SPD.

¹ <https://cops.usdoj.gov/aboutcops>

² <https://cops.usdoj.gov/collaborativereform>

³ Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department, p. 9

In 2015, Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin sought the help of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to improve the relationship between the SPD and the community. The COPS Office offers a program, the Collaborative Report Initiative for Technical Assistance (CRI-TA), that helps law enforcement agencies with organizational transformation around specific issues.⁴ Participation in the program is voluntary and requires a long-term commitment formalized by a signed agreement between the COPS Office and the SPD.

The COPS Office agreed to help, and from June to August 2015 a team conducted a comprehensive assessment of the SPD. The goal was to "improve the SPD's responsiveness and accountability to the community, taking into account national standards, promising practices, existing research, and community expectations."⁵ The result of the assessment was a report titled, "Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department" (CRI-SPD report). The report's recommendations are meant to instill the philosophy of community policing into the SPD's daily operations. The recommendations provide a roadmap for the SPD but leave the method of achieving completion up to the department.

After the CRI-SPD report was published in March 2016, the COPS Office was to work with the SPD to implement the recommendations and monitor its progress over the next 12 months.⁶ In December 2016, newly appointed Chief of Police Adele Fresé reported that 6% of the CRI-SPD report recommendations had been completed. She began working with the COPS Office consultants closely in early 2017. By June 2017, Police Chief Fresé reported to the Salinas City Council that 40% of the recommendations had been implemented (Appendix A).

The partnership between the COPS Office and the SPD was expected to continue through the entire process of change, which typically lasts several years. However, the DOJ made significant changes to the CRI-TA effective September 15, 2017⁷ that

⁴ https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/technical_assistance.pdf

⁵ CRI-SPD, p. 1

⁶ CRI-SPD, p. 121

⁷ <https://www.prisonerresource.com/departments-of-justice/doj-rolls-back-obama-program-aimed-fixing-police-problems/>

precluded continued participation by the COPS Office in the SPD's journey towards community policing. Despite this unexpected withdrawal by the COPS Office, Police Chief Fresé said that the SPD would continue to make progress on community policing.⁸



Salinas Police Department

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The civil unrest occurring across the U.S. in the summer of 2020 cast a spotlight on traditional policing and its limitations. Although community policing is not a new concept, questions about whether it is a viable alternative to traditional policing as well as the difficulty of transitioning from traditional to community policing remain.

In a review of those questions, the Civil Grand Jury discovered that the SPD had continued on the process of shifting from traditional policing to community policing using the CRI-SPD report as a roadmap. We were concerned about how far the SPD had

⁸ https://www.montereycountyweekly.com/blogs/crime_blog/salinas-police-re-commit-to-community-policing-after-doj-cancels-program/article_7bb350f2-9a6e-11e7-a4fe-132f2f7433c5.html

made it in the transition process, particularly after finding out that the COPS program had been discontinued.

To assess the SPD's progress in going from a traditional policing model to a community policing model, the Civil Grand Jury conducted interviews with SPD personnel and performed internet searches of documents, agendas, meeting minutes, newspaper articles, and training materials.

DISCUSSION

The DOJ COPS Office issued its report, *Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department* (CRI-SPD), in 2016. The report contains 61 findings and 110 recommendations covering six categories: Use of Force, Officer Involved Shootings, Community Collaboration, Internal and External Communications, Resource Allocation, and Training.

Transitioning from traditional to community policing does not happen overnight. It is a journey with twists and turns and the occasional speed bump or detour. The SPD's journey had a rocky start. Its progress in addressing the CRI-SPD report's findings and recommendations was stalled early when Police Chief Kelly McMillin retired and little to no work was done on the recommendations until the new Police Chief, Adele Fresé, was hired in November 2016.

Resistance to change is an inevitable speedbump when any new program is rolled out and the SPD was no different. However, a sincere desire among the SPD leadership to re-establish trust with the community and reduce crime helped to reduce the resistance.

Use of Force (UOF)

As much as the term "Use of Force" (UOF) has been in the news, it is interesting to note that according to the National Institute of Justice, an agency of the DOJ, there is no definition for UOF that is universally accepted.⁹ In general, UOF "becomes necessary and is permitted under specific circumstances, such as in self-defense or in defense of

⁹ <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/overview-police-use-force>

another individual or group.”¹⁰ It is up to each police department to provide guidelines to help their officers determine when and what level of force is necessary in a given situation.

The CRI-SPD report contained 23 findings and 42 recommendations regarding UOF policies, procedures, and training items:

Finding: The SPD’s policies 300 (Use of Force), 308 (Control Devices and Techniques), and 309 (Conducted Energy Device) are too vague in the description of use of force decision-making guidance, oversight, and accountability. **(1)**¹¹

Recommendation: Overall, the SPD should revise policies 300, 308, and 309 to be more specific and more in line with policing best practices. In doing so, the SPD should consider all of the following recommendations for this finding. **(1.1)**¹²

Recommendation: The SPD should update and revise policies 300, 308, and 309 to describe the appropriate level of force to be applied under various circumstances. **(1.4)**

Recommendation: The SPD should include and emphasize the importance of de-escalation in its UOF policies. **(1.5)**

Recommendation: Specific de-escalation training should be administered, at a minimum, annually. **(1.6)**

Recommendation: To maintain transparency with the community after a UOF incident, the UOF policies should clearly state what types of information will be released to the public, when, and in what situation in accordance with applicable state law.² **(1.7)**

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The bold whole numbers in parentheses refer to the CRI-SPD finding.

¹² The bold decimals in parentheses refer to the CRI-SPD recommendation.

Finding: The SPD does not follow its own policy and practice for the use of written statements or recording of suspects and witnesses of UOF incidents. **(18)**

Recommendation: When possible, the SPD should include audio recordings of suspects, witnesses, and officers as part of the UOF investigation. **(18.1)**

Finding: The supervisor investigating the UOF incident is not consistently gathering all the facts from officers. **(19)**

Recommendation: SPD supervisors should interview all officers who were involved with or at the scene during a UOF incident or indicate why officers were not interviewed. **(19.1)**¹³

The SPD revised policies 300, 308, and 309 to address the findings and recommendations. In implementing the revised policies, the SPD had to overcome resistance to change, refocus its manner of service from traditional policing to community policing, and ensure that UOF training included de-escalation techniques. Officers are trained in de-escalation techniques that include a 19-step mental checklist for deciding the appropriate level of force needed.

The Civil Grand Jury's review of documents and interviews with SPD personnel substantiated that SPD achieved 100% compliance with the UOF findings and recommendations in the CRI-SPD report.

Officer Involved Shootings (OIS)

As with UOF, there is no universal standard for what constitutes an Officer Involved Shooting (OIS). The Police Data Initiative defines an OIS "as the discharge of a firearm, which may include accidental and intentional discharges, by a police officer, whether on or off duty."¹⁴

¹³ CRI-SPD, pp. 2-3

¹⁴ <https://www.policedatainitiative.org/datasets/officer-involved-shootings/>

The CRI-SPD report had six findings and seven recommendations in the OIS category. Key findings and recommendations include:

Finding: The SPD does not have a practice or policy to require all OISs and in-custody deaths to be investigated by an outside agency. **(24)**

Recommendation: The SPD should adopt the practice of retaining an outside independent agency to investigate all officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths. **(24.1)**

Finding: The SPD is limited in its ability to use less lethal weapons. **(26)**

Recommendation: The SPD should train and outfit all first-line supervisors (sergeants) with less lethal shotguns. **(26.1)**

Finding: The administrative investigations (i.e., internal affairs investigations) of the OISs were not completed in a timely manner. **(27)**

Recommendation: The SPD should establish a 30-day timetable for all administrative reviews (i.e., internal affairs investigations) that are completed after an OIS incident has been reviewed and adjudicated by the Monterey County District Attorney's Office. **(27.1)**¹⁵

To address the findings and recommendations, the SPD instituted the policy that all OISs are referred to the Monterey County District Attorney's office for review and internal adjudication. This review and adjudication must be completed within 30 days after an OIS.

Properly charged Electronic Control Weapons (ECW) are important because they give officers a less lethal force option in any given situation. The SPD procedure for testing ECWs was revised to align with TASER International recommendations. ECWs are now regularly charged and tested.

The Civil Grand Jury's investigation substantiated that the SPD achieved 100% compliance with the OIS findings and recommendations in the CRI-SPD report.

¹⁵ CRI-SPD, pp. 3-4

Community Collaboration

Community policing is a philosophy that requires buy-in from all Department members, from rookie to veteran police officers. It also needs community involvement and interaction, which helps to build trust between the SPD and residents of Salinas.



At the Crescita Early Education Center

The CRI-SPD report had 10 findings and 18 recommendations in the Community Collaboration category. Following are some key findings and recommendations:

Finding: The SPD lacks a unified, overarching community-collaborative policing philosophy and strategy. **(30)**

Recommendation: The SPD should develop a community-collaborative policing strategy. **(30.1)**

Finding: The SPD is not training its members regularly on implicit bias, cultural awareness, or procedural justice. **(32)**

Recommendation: The SPD should provide training such as the Fair and Impartial Policing training for all members of the department, including civilian staff. **(32.2)**¹⁶

Officers interacting with community members were encouraged to offer help as appropriate, to listen, to address individuals respectfully and, when possible, to explain what is happening. Calls for service that might not receive an immediate response because of other higher priority public safety calls receive follow-up telephone calls within 20 minutes to explain why there is a delayed response.

As part of its outreach, the SPD developed programs designed to build trust and invest in the needs of the community. Following are some of the programs implemented in an effort to improve community collaboration:

- The SPD offered their presence to all local schools. Initially, however, not every school welcomed the idea of officers' presence on their campus, although this is slowly changing as the SPD continues to improve its relationship with the Salinas community.
- School programs developed by the SPD include a self-image and identity program for young women, a driver safety class, job interview preparation, "Why'd You Stop Me?", and Salinas Police Awareness, Responsibility, and Knowledge (SPARK).
- Sergeants are required to be in the field. Officers are back on foot patrol and on Enduros (off-road motorcycles), and are conducting door-to-door visits to check on Salinas residents.
- The SPD has a mascot, a pet dog named Buddy, who accompanies Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) officers visiting homeless encampments. The HOT officers help homeless individuals access services that are available to



¹⁶ CRI-SPD, pp. 4-5

them.¹⁷ Buddy plays a key role in this outreach effort by humanizing the contact interactions.

- The Charro¹⁸ Uniform Program was developed to unite the community by recognizing the rich culture and history of Salinas' Mexican heritage.¹⁹ The program was jointly created by the SPD and the recently formed Police Foundation. It has achieved global recognition from the media.



SPD Officer in Charro Uniform

- The SPD has increased the number of Spanish-speaking sworn officers and civilian staff to improve communication as well as outreach efforts.

The Civil Grand Jury's review of documents and interviews with SPD personnel substantiated that SPD achieved 100% compliance with the Community Collaboration findings and recommendations in the CRI-SPD report.

Internal and External Communications

Ineffective communication can be as detrimental as non-existent communication. The need for a well-thought-out and implemented communications plan that considers internal and external stakeholders at all levels is vital for the smooth operation of any organization.

The CRI-SPD report had five findings and ten recommendations covering Internal and External Communications. Following are some key findings and recommendations:

¹⁷ <https://www.cityofsalinas.org/our-city-services/police-department/news/salinas-pd-continues-homeless-outreach>

¹⁸ "Charro" is a Mexican horseman or cowboy

¹⁹ <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2019/07/25/police-don-mexican-charro-suits-to-connect-with-community/>

Finding: Internal communication is inconsistent and, in some cases, nonexistent. **(40)**

Recommendation: SPD staff meetings should be held monthly and meeting minutes or summaries shared with all SPD members as appropriate. **(40.1)**

Recommendation: The SPD should develop a consistent system to enable communication with department members at all levels of the organization. **(40.4)**

Finding: The SPD does not have a formal process for communicating with various external community groups or organizations. **(44)**

Recommendation: The chief of police should share more information with the Police/Community Advisory Committee (PCAC), which is another outlet for enhanced communications with the community for both positive and negative information. **(44.1)²⁰**

Based upon discussions with SPD leadership, the Civil Grand Jury learned that assistant chiefs and commanders now have formal weekly meetings. The executive staff has established quarterly meetings with all civilian staff with an emphasis on developing a more effective working relationship. The meetings between the Chief of Police and command staff with the Salinas Police Officers Association are now collaborative and address key issues and concerns of officers. The department has developed an employee focus group representing each unit and division within the department that meets monthly with the Chief of Police and executive staff. These meetings include an agenda and minutes from the meeting.

The SPD has created an e-newsletter housed on the department's intranet site which is disseminated via email.

²⁰ CRI-SPD, p. 5

The Civil Grand Jury's investigation substantiated that the SPD achieved 100% compliance with the Internal and External Communications findings and recommendations in the CRI-SPD report.

Resource Allocation

Having the right resources available, both people and equipment, is necessary for a law enforcement agency to serve its community. While the assessment provided by the CRI-SPD report was not a proposal of a staffing study, it did provide the impetus for several critical changes in the allocation of staff and the provision of additional fiscal resources.



SPD swears in seven new officers

The CRI-SPD report had 10 findings and 19 recommendations to address the theme of Resource Allocation. Following are some key findings and recommendations:

Finding: The SPD Currently follows a minimum staffing model for patrol resource deployment. **(45)**

Recommendation: The SPD should update its staffing model using various contemporary data sources, including calls for service crime reports and input from officers and supervisors and the community. **(45.1)**

Finding: The SPD does not have an adequate crime analysis capability. **(47)**

Recommendation: The SPD should hire at least one experienced full-time crime analyst. **(47.1)**

Finding: The SPD has no formal systematic accountability process that focuses on crime prevention and crime reduction, performance evaluation, and resource allocation. **(48)**

Recommendation: The chief of police and his executive staff should conduct regular accountability meetings. **(48.1)**

Finding: The SPD lacks a comprehensive crime reduction approach. **(54)**

Recommendation: The SPD should develop and implement a comprehensive crime reduction approach that includes evidence-based crime reduction strategies, community partnerships, problem solving, and accountability (e.g., Stratified Policing). **(54.1)**

Recommendation: The SPD's crime reduction strategy should include specific and quantifiable performance measures with regular reporting of goal attainment and overall strategy progress. **(54.2)²¹**

The SPD hired a consultant to conduct a study on staffing and workload and is in the process of changing from three shifts to four shifts in patrol. The department hired a crime analyst to increase its crime analysis capability. The SPD also developed and implemented a crime reduction approach in line with CRI-SPD recommendations.

Since 2016, substantial financial resources have been allocated to the SPD in annual budget appropriations to facilitate and implement the programs and initiatives described in this report. These financial resources came from the City of Salinas general fund and were not program grants from either Federal or State sources.

²¹ CRI-SPD, p.6

The Civil Grand Jury's review of documents and interviews with SPD personnel substantiated that SPD achieved 100% compliance with the Resource Allocation findings and recommendations in the CRI-SPD report.

Training

The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) sets minimum selection and training standards for California law enforcement. While it is a voluntary program, participating agencies can avail themselves of several benefits and services provided by the Commission so long as they agree to follow the standards set by POST.²²

The CRI-SPD report had 7 findings and 14 recommendations relating to the SPD training program. Following are some key findings and recommendations:

Finding: The SPD does not have a consistent process to track or review training lesson plans or individuals who attend training. **(55)**

Recommendation: The SPD should create and establish an accountability process to systematically track and save all training lesson plans and track individuals' attendance. **(55.1)**

Finding: The SPD's Training policy 208 indicates that a training plan will be developed and maintained by the Training unit. **(56)**

Recommendation: The SPD should follow its policy 208 and develop a training plan that at a minimum addresses changes to the law, state-mandated training, and critical issues training. In addition, the SPD's training plan should include relevant training for SPD's civilian staff. **(56.1)**

Finding: The SPD's FTO²³ program provides training in the use of force but does not incorporate community-policing training throughout its objectives. **(59)**

²² <https://post.ca.gov/About-Us>

²³ Field Training Officer

Recommendation: The FTO program should infuse the concepts of community policing throughout the training objectives. **(59.1)**

Finding: The SPD does not provide regular training on interactions with persons with mental disabilities and is not adhering to SPD policy 418, “Mental Illness Commitments.” **(61)**

Recommendation: The SPD should develop and implement a Peace Officer Standards and Training-approved training curriculum for all SPD sworn personnel and those civilian personnel dealing with the community directly in the response and handling of situations involving persons with mental challenges, those with mental illness, or individuals in crisis and deliver annually. **(61.1)²⁴**

To address the findings and recommendations, the SPD developed and implemented a plan for tracking lesson plans and attendance at trainings as well as a plan for holding individuals accountable for attending the trainings. The department revised its various training programs to align with the CRI-SPD report recommendations and trained relevant personnel using the revised curricula.

Four of the 14 recommendations are listed as “In Progress” by the SPD. The recommendations involve forming a training committee that incorporates community partners and the Police/Community Advisory Committee (PCAC), developing a comprehensive training plan and communicating it with the department, conducting a training needs assessment, and reviewing all UOF incidents for training-related purposes. These four recommendations have a target completion date of July 2021.

CONCLUSION

Today, the SPD is an example of community policing at its best as evidenced by being the recipient of the 2019 James Q. Wilson Award for Excellence in Community Policing for its program, “Community Policing in a Challenging Environment.” The award honors

²⁴ CRI-SPD, p.7

law enforcement agencies in California who have adopted the Community Policing philosophy and are doing an outstanding job in their communities. It is given by the Regional Community Policing Institute-California, a national network of training centers that provides training on region-specific community policing issues.



SPD Chief Adele H. Fresé

FINDINGS

- F1. The CRI-SPD Report recommended that the Salinas Police Department develop programs that engage the community through in-school activities and interactions with their officers. The Civil Grand Jury believes that by implementing this recommendation the SPD has strengthened the relationship between the Police Department and the community.
- F2. The Salinas Police Department has developed a Use of Force oversight committee and has adopted policies that involve a multi-step process of de-escalation before using force. The Civil Grand Jury believes that the SPD's incorporation of these less than lethal intervention strategies into their daily practice has enhanced the safety of the community and the officers.

- F3. A new procedure was implemented to require that officer involved shootings and use of force incidents resulting in death be referred to the Monterey County District Attorney's Office for review and internal adjudication within 30 days from the incident. The Civil Grand Jury believes that this practice leads to greater transparency.

INVITED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and 933.05, the Civil Grand Jury invites responses as follows:

- Salinas Police Department (F1 – F3)

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Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Civil Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

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3. Monterey County Weekly – September 16, 2017
[Salinas Police Re-Commit to Community Policing after DOJ Cancels Program](#)

4. Santa Cruz Sentinel – July 25, 2019
[Police wear Mexican charro suits to connect with community](#)
5. [Salinas Police Department Policy Manual](#)
6. [Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department](#)

APPENDICES

- A. Staff Report to the Salinas City Council – June 6, 2017
Collaborative Reform Update