

National Public Safety Partnership

Introducing the Community of Practice for Crime Analysts



This document introduces the Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) rationale and plan for developing a National Community of Practice for Crime Analysts (CoPCA) as part of its National Public Safety Partnership (PSP) initiative.

The concept of community of practice (CoP) derives from the collaborative work of cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger.¹ In their book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, they posit that learning should be more than simply the acquisition of knowledge by an individual. Optimally, learning is a social and iterative process whereby knowledge is co-constructed among individuals. The situated learning process implies that learning, skill-building, and professional development are optimized by engagement in a community of practice, essentially active learning through participation within a group that shares a common interest, passion, or mission.

Many crime analysts are familiar with the basic community of practice concept, particularly if they actively participate in the International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA) or state and regional crime analysis associations. Similarly, analysts who are engaged in genuine problem-solving approaches within their agencies will appreciate the value of teamwork and situated learning.

Developing a community of practice "for crime analysts by crime analysts" will build on the established PSP foundation. It will also leverage the existing staffing structure of PSP and processes for identifying needs and accessing training and technical assistance resources.

Many crime analysts working with agencies participating in PSP may already understand the structure and goals of that program; others may be less familiar. Before turning to a discussion of the PSP CoPCA plan and resources, some general background about PSP would be helpful.

What is the National Public Safety Partnership (PSP) Initiative?

PSP is an innovative framework designed to enable BJA to enhance its support for local law enforcement agencies experiencing high rates of violent crime. Historically, 27 sites have participated in the PSP program, including the original pilot sites that were part of PSP's predecessor, the Violence Reduction Network (VRN), which was launched in 2014. PSP sites are depicted in the map.



¹ Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger, 1991, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

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The PSP approach is built around cooperation and collaboration, and it adopts the core principles of a community of practice. The federal team assigned to PSP is committed to helping participating jurisdictions leverage their current strengths, identify gaps, and obtain resources to fill those gaps through training and technical assistance (TTA) and peer-to-peer networking. Individual PSP sites that have particular strengths in addressing and preventing violence are often leveraged to assist other sites in adapting those tactics or strategies to their own jurisdictions through peer-to-peer support among PSP sites.

BJA has assigned a PSP site team to each jurisdiction. These PSP site teams work closely with local stakeholders to coordinate project services and to support enhancement of sites' violence reduction efforts. The constellation of local stakeholders that actively work with the PSP site teams vary across cities. Across all PSP cities, however, key stakeholders include representatives of the municipal police department, the local prosecutor's office, and the U.S. Attorney's Office, as well as federal law enforcement personnel working out of regional offices, typically the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS).

Each PSP site is guided by a seasoned Strategic Site Liaison (SSL), often a retired law enforcement executive with an established track record of implementing violence reduction strategies. Each SSL is assisted by a U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Program Office Champion, who serves as a point of contact for the site to effectively navigate access to DOJ programmatic resources. Each site is also assigned a Law Enforcement Champion, who serves as the point of contact to facilitate access to DOJ law enforcement resources.

Program Office Champions are senior staff members from BJA or other DOJ grant-making components with extensive knowledge of available federal training and technical assistance resources and existing grant opportunities. Besides BJA, DOJ program offices participating in PSP include the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), and the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW). More information about this innovative program can be found on the [PSP website](#).

Rationales for Developing the Community of Practice for Crime Analysis

BJA recognizes that crime analysis is a vital component of each site's effort to reduce violent crime. There is considerable consensus among both academics and practitioners that effective crime analysis can lead to crime prevention and reduction.^{2, 3} However, it is also clear that there are a wide variety of crime analysis practices and capacities across law enforcement agencies in the United States. Not all crime analysis programs are equally resourced. Minimal educational and experience requirements for beginning analysts also vary widely, as do budgets for crime analysis and access to training.

BJA fully recognizes that crime analysis capacity and resources vary by PSP site. As with the general PSP approach, BJA will leverage the CoPCA to help crime analysts identify their agencies' strengths and limitations, and their training and technical assistance resources.

² Santos, Rachel Boba, 2014, "The Effectiveness of Crime Analysis for Crime Reduction: Cure or Diagnosis?" *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 30 (no. 2): 147-168.

³ Carl, Matthies and Tina Chiu, 2014, *Putting a Value on Crime Analysts*, New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

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The rationales for developing this CoPCA are straightforward. The CoP principle parallels the cooperative nature of the PSP itself. Analysts with less experience and agencies with less capacity can benefit from the experience and expertise of other PSP agencies. It will serve as a safe and dedicated venue for analysts to share their successes and challenges. The CoPCA will provide PSP crime analysts their own dedicated space to engage in situated learning and networking opportunities. Ultimately, it will provide a vehicle to ensure that the perspectives and contributions of crime analysts are fully integrated into agencies' operations.

BJA is committed to two core missions for the CoPCA:

- Helping crime analysts realize their full potential through targeted training and technical assistance and through peer-to-peer networking and support.
- Helping ensure that crime analysts are fully empowered and leveraged as critical team members within their agencies and actively engaged as full partners in local efforts to reduce violent crime.

Vehicles for Supporting the PSP Community of Practice for Crime Analysis

To establish and support the CoPCA, BJA has committed to provide the following meetings and resources.

Annual Meeting – An annual meeting of PSP crime analysts and crime analysis supervisors will be held to support training and peer-to-peer exchange. The first annual meeting will be hosted by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Police Department on April 16 and 17.

Quarterly Webinars/Conference Calls – These calls will focus on topics identified as needs by PSP crime analysts and crime analysis supervisors. They will feature presentations from PSP analysts and other subject matter experts. These calls will be interactive, providing PSP crime analysts opportunities to discuss challenges and share ideas on how to overcome them.

IACA Conference Sponsorship – Crime analysis is a rapidly evolving profession; in order remain effective, it must keep pace with the latest analytic tools and best practices. To support professional growth, a limited number of scholarships will be provided to PSP crime analysts to attend the International Association of Crime Analysts Annual Training Conference. The 2018 conference will take place in Newport Beach, CA from September 17 to 21.

Direct Participation in PSP Annual Summits – As discussed above, crime analysts should be considered key stakeholders and active participants in each PSP site's effort to reduce violent crime. To reinforce their value and their contributions to their agencies' mission to reduce violent crime, a selected number of crime analysts from PSP sites will be invited to the 2018 PSP Annual Summit.

Building on an BJA's Existing Foundation

PSP sites have already leveraged BJA's existing resources to support crime analysis and data analytics; the CoPCA will continue to leverage them. Available resources include:

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[BJA National Training and Technical Assistance Center](#) - *Crime Analysis On-Demand: Tailored Training and Technical Assistance*

BJA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (BJA NTTAC) helps jurisdictions achieve safer communities by facilitating the delivery of strategically focused TTA to criminal justice agencies nationwide. BJA NTTAC connects state, local, and tribal justice agencies in need of assistance with subject-matter experts and specialized resources to address public safety needs. BJA NTTAC has identified expert providers that help law enforcement agencies collect and use data more effectively in their crime-reduction efforts. Through these services, law enforcement agencies nationwide have addressed analytical gaps and enhanced their crime analysis capacities.

[Building Analytical Building Analytical Capacity](#) - *Crime Analysis Workshop for Chief Executives*

Supported by BJA funds, the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) provides a free, two-day workshop in which agency teams—including executives, commanders, and analysts—create customized action plans to address specific crime analysis challenges within their departments. This workshop assists the teams in identifying ways to support actionable analysis within their own departments and to use that analysis to drive operations. As part of the workshop, attendees will receive the comprehensive guidebook “Building a Model Crime Analysis Capability: 50 Steps for Law Enforcement Professionals.” Free follow-up technical assistance is available to all participating agencies.

[BJA Crime Analysis Toolkit](#)

In partnership with the Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR), BJA is currently developing a publicly available crime analysis toolkit. To inform the development of the toolkit, BJA is working with three law enforcement agencies—Charlotte–Mecklenburg Police Department (PD), Cleveland PD, and Tempe PD—that collectively use an array of diverse and cutting-edge approaches to crime analysis. BJA sought to include agencies with demonstrated proficiencies in crime analysis, as well as agencies that have real-time crime centers and are engaged in regional crime analysis capacity building. The web-based toolkit brings together materials developed by the three sites. The toolkit will be continually updated with products from participating agencies, as well as with publicly available resources relevant to crime analysis.