

HOMICIDE PROCESS MAPPING

BEST PRACTICES FOR INCREASING
HOMICIDE CLEARANCES

DAVID L. CARTER, PH.D.



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David L. Carter, Ph.D.

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Dear reader:

One homicide victim is one too many. Yet we also understand the challenging and quite complex nature of homicide investigations. Homicide, homicide investigations, clearance rates, and productive communication with the public are all critical concerns for law enforcement and communities nationwide. And despite recent across-the-board improvements in homicide clearance rates, we know that we can do better.

How are some agencies so successful in their homicide investigations? What are the ingredients for successful homicide investigations? What can law enforcement executives do to support homicide investigations, investigators, and the communities they serve?

To answer these questions, the U.S. Department of Justice, through the Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), partnered with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) to gather data, evidence, and best practices from several law enforcement agencies around the country in an effort to share their successes with you.

As a result, I am pleased to announce two similar, yet complementary, publications that represent BJA's ongoing commitment to reducing crime and violence through evidence-based and results-driven efforts. One publication details effective investigative practices; the other focuses on the administrative environment necessary to support successful homicide investigative outcomes. Together, they will assist law enforcement executives and homicide units in effectively managing homicide investigations.

The first publication, *Homicide Process Mapping: Best Practices for Increasing Homicide Clearances*, provides insight into "what works" in homicide investigations and identifies effective approaches and key elements of practice for managing these investigations. The resulting "process map" is offered as a guide for increasing clearances in U.S. law enforcement homicide investigations.

The second publication, *10 Things Law Enforcement Executives Can Do to Positively Impact Homicide Investigation Outcomes*, looks beyond clearance rates to offer a starting point for executives to extend their support of homicide investigations, investigators, and their communities.

Each component highlighted in these publications—administration and investigation—is essential for effective policing. I encourage you to read both publications. They can be found at the BJA, IACP, and IIR web sites: www.bja.gov, www.theiacp.org, and www.iir.com.

I want to thank the IACP and IIR for their work in producing such practical and relevant publications. BJA, IIR, and IACP have a longstanding relationship and a shared interest in promoting promising practices in law enforcement. It is our sincere hope that every law enforcement agency in the nation can improve homicide investigations by adopting practices identified in these publications.

Sincerely,

Denise E. O'Donnell
Director

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Executive Summary

Since 1990, the number of homicides committed in the United States has dropped over 30 percent.¹ While this is a positive trend, it is somewhat counterbalanced by another trend: in the mid-1970s, the average homicide clearance rate in the United States was around 80 percent. Today, that number has dropped to 65 percent—hence, more offenders are literally getting away with murder.²

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP), recognizes that the problem of violence in the United States requires a multifaceted approach. In a coordinated initiative of projects, BJA has examined the manner in which trends in violence are identified by law enforcement for tactical purposes,³ reviewed how cutting-edge analysis and the integration of resources can disrupt trends in violent crime,⁴ and examined two decades of violence-reduction initiatives to determine what works.⁵ Based on lessons learned, new initiatives are explored, such as the Law Enforcement Forecasting Group (LEFG), which produced a paper on the importance of the analytic process for crime control (tactically) and resource allocation for crime reduction (strategically).⁶ Collectively, the lessons from these initiatives—and other initiatives by BJA and companion OJP components—provide guidance on new avenues to explore.

Based on the findings from these projects, one of the focal points in violence suppression initiatives that BJA explored was the most efficacious method to manage homicide investigations. Two paths were used toward this end. The current project on Homicide Process Mapping focused on investigative practices. A companion project by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), *10 Things Law Enforcement Executives Can Do to Positively Impact Homicide Investigation Outcomes*, focused on the administrative environment in support of homicide investigations.⁷ Both are essential for successful investigations.

The purpose of this project was to identify best practices in homicide investigations that will result in an increase in homicide clearance rates. To accomplish this goal, seven

¹<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0312.pdf>.

²<http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/wellford.pdf>.

³Police Executive Research Forum (2013), *Compstat: Its Origins, Evolution, and Future in Law Enforcement Agencies*, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, <https://www.bja.gov/Publications/PERF-Compstat.pdf>.

⁴The Center for Community Safety (2013), *Winston-Salem Intelligent-Led Policing: A Blueprint for Implementing*, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, <https://www.bja.gov/Publications/WSSU-PB4-WinstonSalem-ILP.pdf>.

⁵Michigan State University and University of Illinois at Chicago (2013), “Promising Strategies for Violence Reduction: Lessons From Two Decades of Innovation,” *Project Safe Neighborhoods Case Study Report #13*, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, https://www.bja.gov/Publications/MSU_PromisingViolenceReductionInitiatives.pdf.

⁶Law Enforcement Forecasting Group (2012), *Increasing Analytic Capacity of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies: Moving Beyond Data Analysis to Create a Vision for Change*, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, <https://www.bja.gov/Publications/LEFGIncreasingAnalyticCapacity.pdf>.

⁷International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) (2013), *10 Things Law Enforcement Executives Can Do to Positively Impact Homicide Investigation Outcomes*, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, <http://www.theiacp.org>.

geographically representative law enforcement agencies were identified that had at least 24 homicides in 2011 and had a clearance rate of 80 percent or higher. In addition, because the first 48 hours of a homicide investigation are critical, the project identified critical tasks in the first 48 hours of the investigation that increase the probability of a clearance. The selected agencies, both municipal and county, were the Baltimore County, Maryland, Police Department; the Denver, Colorado, Police Department; the Houston, Texas, Police Department; the Jacksonville, Florida, Sheriff's Office; the Richmond, Virginia, Police Department; the Sacramento County, California, Sheriff's Department; and the San Diego, California, Police Department.

Each site was visited by two experienced homicide investigators and a police researcher who conducted interviews and reviewed documents. Interviews were conducted with the homicide commander, homicide supervisors, homicide investigators, and other personnel who each department believed were important in aiding successful homicide investigations. Following the collection of all information, the findings were broken down into strategic and tactical issues. Each of these is discussed in this report from a policy implementation perspective. This is followed by a summary of homicide investigation best practices that at least two agencies reported using. The report concludes with a process map that identifies critical investigative tasks to be performed in the first 48 hours after a homicide is reported. The process map is the product of a detailed analysis and integration of the processes used by the agencies in this project.

While many factors contributed to successful homicide investigations, including some creative practices, there was one overarching factor: all of the agencies visited had laid a strong foundation of trust with the community and a strong foundation of cooperation and information sharing with other law enforcement agencies. Without this foundation, success will be limited.

Introduction

The United States has experienced tragic mass homicides—such as Newtown, Connecticut, and Aurora, Colorado—that focus national attention on the crime. However, receiving much less national attention is the fact that on average there are more than 40 homicides occurring on a daily basis in the United States.⁸ This number surpasses the deaths that occurred in these horrific mass incidents. Although over the last several years the numbers of homicides nationwide have continued to drop, the numbers of victims still remain high (16,799 homicides in 2011) (Cooper and Smith, 2011). Moreover, another disturbing trend has emerged. While the frequency of homicides is decreasing, clearance rates have also dropped (to less than 65 percent on average);⁹ hence, fewer homicide offenders are being identified and arrested.

Although the national clearance rate average has continued to drop, some individual law enforcement agencies have excelled in clearing homicides, with clearance rates of 80 percent and higher. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) wanted to understand how some agencies were so successful in their homicide investigations. Was it because of personnel? Training? Budget? Technology? Management? Investigative Techniques? Forensics? Equipment? While it was suspected that all of these factors played a role, there was no clear answer. However, if the ingredients to successful homicide investigations could be identified, then a recipe of good practices could be articulated so that other law enforcement agencies could model their investigative procedures in order to help increase the successes of their investigations.

Beyond the techniques and resources used in a homicide investigation, it has been learned that a fast, effective response to a homicide call can play a significant role in the success of an investigation—particularly in the first 48 hours after the police are notified of a homicide. Are agencies with higher clearance rates performing unique investigative tasks in the first 48 hours? What are the critical successful and/or unique tasks that must be done in the first 48 hours which will increase the probability of an arrest? Although many of these investigative tasks are known, their specific sequence and method of performance can be less clear depending on the facts and circumstances that are known in the early stages of the investigation.

Finally, are new techniques and practices that are based on broader developments of policing—such as community policing, intelligence-led policing, evidence-based policing, or Compstat—making homicide investigations more successful? While it is suspected that a combination of these factors contributed to successes in homicide investigations, the details and applicability have not been documented.

To answer these questions, BJA initiated the Homicide Process Mapping project. The intent was to identify high-performing geographically represented law enforcement agencies to learn what made them investigative successes.

⁸<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/violent-crime/murder>.

⁹<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/clearances>.

The Application of Process Mapping to Homicide Investigation

The concept of process mapping has its roots in the scientific management movement of the early twentieth century. The principles were essentially to:

- Study and understand the nature of the work to be performed and find the best way to perform the tasks of the work.
- Select the best persons to perform the work and train them on the most efficient way to perform the tasks.
- Measure the success and productivity of the work to ensure that the intended accomplishments are being achieved (Taylor, 1910).

As scientific management evolved, greater attention was given to the sequence and flow of tasks in the processes required to accomplish the work. In order to more easily visualize these tasks, flowcharts—or process maps—were developed. The process maps provide direction, accountability, and a method to assess task performance.

The use of process mapping became even more refined in the 1960s to 1970s with the growth of computers. Flowcharts were used to plan each instruction and computation in software development. This detailed expansion of the practice in software development was reciprocated to its roots in management, thereby permitting more sophisticated application to complex business tasks.

A homicide investigation consists of a complex array of tasks that must be performed, initially, over a short period of time, often under significant stress. The tasks are further complicated because they must meet a range of legal standards, conform to scientific integrity for later forensic analysis, or require dealing with challenging human relationships. Other tasks are influenced by external pressures—such as the community or elected officials—to ensure that the tasks are performed quickly, accurately, and successfully.

Project Goal and Perspective

This project focuses on the capabilities of the investigating agency to successfully clear criminal homicide cases. A homicide is “cleared” when the offender(s) has(have) been identified and there is a disposition of the offender related to the specific homicide in question, through either a “clearance by arrest” or a “clearance by exception.”¹⁰

¹⁰An offense is cleared by arrest or solved for crime reporting purposes when at least one person is (1) arrested, (2) charged with the commission of the offense, and (3) turned over to the court for prosecution (FBI 2004:79). If an individual has committed multiple homicides and is arrested for each of those homicides, then all of those homicides are cleared by the arrest of one individual. Only an arrest, not a conviction, is required to clear the case for Uniform Crime Reporting purposes. A case may be declared as “exceptionally cleared” if all four of the following questions can be answered in the affirmative:

1. Has the investigation definitely established the identity of the offender?
2. Is there enough information to support an arrest, a charge, and a formal charging of the suspect with a criminal homicide offense?

A clearance rate is the percentage of all reported criminal homicides within a jurisdiction that have been cleared by arrest and exception combined. Obviously, clearance rates among law enforcement agencies vary widely for a variety of reasons, ranging from the facts of the case to the capabilities of the investigating agency.

Why are some agencies more successful at clearing homicides than others? One important reason is capability. There are a number of steps in the investigative process that are essentially standard practice, ranging from the collection and analysis of forensic evidence to interviewing witnesses and suspects. Evidence from this project suggests that there is a continuum of competence in performing these tasks that will influence their effectiveness. Why are some agencies more competent than others? There appears to be a variety of reasons: a stronger professional fabric, the investment of time and effort to build trust within the community, a willingness to challenge the status quo in performing investigative tasks, and a professionally developed and trained investigative workforce are certainly among the reasons. Resources can also contribute to greater success; however, this is also often an excuse—it is not only the amount of resources but also how the resources are used. Stated simply, some agencies just do the job better.

Can effective investigative practices also prevent homicides? The evidence suggests “yes” in some cases. Effective investigations can eliminate repeat offenders and reduce the number of retaliation homicides. Although prevention is not the direct goal of homicide investigators, it can be an important artifact of a substantively strong investigation.

This project seeks to define strategies and tactics that can be employed by a law enforcement agency to increase the number of homicides that are cleared by arrest.

Methods

The baseline criterion for selecting jurisdictions in this project was that the jurisdiction had at least 24 homicides and a homicide clearance rate greater than 80 percent in 2011.¹¹ In addition, the project looked for a combination of municipal police departments and county law enforcement agencies with geographical representation throughout the United States. Using these criteria, a number of agencies were identified and contacted to determine whether they were willing to participate in this project, to include setting time aside for a team to visit the agency, interview investigators and other relevant personnel, and review documents. After this vetting process and discussion among the project team, seven agencies were identified.¹² The selected sites and relevant data are depicted in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

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3. Is the exact location of the offender known so that the subject could be taken into custody now?
 4. Is there some reason outside law enforcement control that precludes arresting, charging, and prosecuting the offender? (FBI 2004:80–81)

For example, in a murder-suicide, the suicide of the offender essentially clears the case.

¹¹The project started in 2012, so the most current full year of available data was 2011.

¹²Financial constraints were also a factor to limit the number of agencies participating.

Table 1: Population and Sworn Officer Data

Agency	Population ¹³	# of Sworn Personnel ¹⁴	# of Homicide Investigators ¹⁵
Baltimore County, MD, Police Department	817,455	1,877	15
Denver, CO, Police Department	619,968	1,420	13
Houston, TX, Police Department	2,145,146	5,294	130
Jacksonville, FL, Sheriff's Office	869,602	1,645	31
Richmond, VA, Police Department	205,533	727	21
Sacramento County, CA, Sheriff's Department	1,450,121	1,193	9
San Diego, CA, Police Department	1,326,179	1,834	27

Table 2: 2008–2010 Three-Year Average Homicide and Clearance Data

Agency	2008–2010 Average Number of Homicides ¹⁶	2008–2010 Average Homicides Per 100,000	2008–2010: 3-Year Average Clearance Rate ¹⁷
Baltimore County, MD, Police Department	27	3.30	91.0%
Denver, CO, Police Department	34	5.48	80.0%
Houston, TX, Police Department	283	13.19	82.0%
Jacksonville, FL, Sheriff's Office	98	11.27	76.0%
Richmond, VA, Police Department	37	18.00	87.0%
Sacramento County, CA, Sheriff's Department	38	2.62	91.0%
San Diego, CA, Police Department	41	3.09	115.0% ¹⁸

Table 3: 2011 Homicide and Clearance Data

Agency	2011 Number of Homicides ¹⁹	Homicides Per 100,000	2011 Clearance Rate
Baltimore County, MD, Police Department	30	3.67	81.0%
Denver, CO, Police Department	34	5.48	95.3%
Houston, TX, Police Department	198	9.23	89.9%
Jacksonville, FL, Sheriff's Office	71	8.16	84.5%
Richmond, VA, Police Department	36	17.52	80.0%
Sacramento County, CA, Sheriff's Department	33	2.27	85.3%
San Diego, CA, Police Department	38	2.87	100.0%

¹³2012 population estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

¹⁴<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/police-employee-data>.

¹⁵This number represents sworn personnel assigned exclusively to homicide investigations and includes all ranks. This number does *not* include cold case squads.

¹⁶2008–2010 average homicide data compiled from analysis of FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) data for corresponding years.

¹⁷Discrepancies may occur between data published by the FBI and individual agencies because of different methods of calculating clearance rates. For consistency across all agencies, officially reported and published FBI UCR data are used in this report.

¹⁸The clearance rate can exceed 100 percent because of the UCR methodology. Homicides may be cleared that were committed in a previous year, hence increasing the clearance rate for that year. For example, a homicide committed on December 31, 2013, will count in the 2013 crime rate. If the person who committed the homicide is arrested the next day—January 1, 2014—the clearance by arrest will be counted in the 2014 crime data.

¹⁹<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/violent-crime/murder>.

To carry out this project, BJA assigned Senior Policy Advisor Michael Medaris, who has more than 21 years of law enforcement experience, to manage the project and to provide direction and guidance on project activities. BJA selected five experienced homicide investigators with recognized expertise, representing different ranks in their agencies. In addition, an experienced law enforcement researcher was selected as team leader, who was responsible for collating and analyzing the collected information as well as writing the project report. At least two investigators²⁰ and the researcher performed each site visit. In addition, the Institute for Intergovernmental Research²¹ (IIR) provided staff and logistical support for the project.

To ensure that key information related to the project goal was collected from each site visit, as well as to ensure reliability across all site visits, a set of core questions was developed. All team members reviewed the questions. After two iterations of review and refinement, an electronic final copy was sent to all team members, who then brought a hard copy to each site visit. Importantly, the questions were for baseline information only.

At each site, the team requested to interview, at a minimum, the homicide investigation commander, a homicide investigation supervisor, and a homicide investigator.²² Because different agencies had different programs or functions that contributed to their success, the team requested interviews with those personnel that the agency identified as being important to the success in achieving homicide clearance rates. The fewest number of people interviewed was 5; the largest number was 14. In each case, the team asked the supervisor and investigator to identify and discuss the importance of programs or personnel as they contributed to the success of the investigation. This was followed by interviews with those personnel. For example, in Sacramento County, the supervisor and investigator described the importance of the Major Crimes Bureau in tracking down homicide suspects. This was followed by an interview of the Major Crimes Bureau Supervisor.

At the end of each site visit interview session, the supervisor and investigator were asked to “walk through” the first 48 hours of a homicide investigation and describe the specific tasks their unit performed, with an estimate of the time frame in which each task was performed. These findings were integrated and served as the foundation for the process map found at the end of this report. It is estimated that there were approximately 120 total interview hours in this project.

Following the site visit, team members would meet to discuss key elements learned in the site visits and to ensure that each team member agreed on the findings. If there were gaps of

²⁰Five investigators were selected as team members who rotated between the site visits, depending on their availability based on their schedules.

²¹<http://www.iir.com/>.

²²In some locations, the term *investigator* was used, while other locations used *detective*. In some cases, *detective* was a rank, while in others, it was simply a job description. Similarly, in some cases a *lieutenant* was the first-line supervisor, while in others, the *lieutenant* was either a shift commander or the homicide unit commander. Other organizational distinctions existed, such as referring to the homicide investigation function as a “unit,” a “bureau,” or a “division.” For consistency and greater ease in comparison for this report, the writing convention is to use the terms *unit*, *commander*, *supervisor*, and *investigator* for describing all agencies.

information or different interpretations, the team leader would recontact the agency to clarify the issue.

After each site visit was completed, participating team members prepared a report of their observations, important points, and best practices used by the agency. These reports were sent to the team leader to be used in the analysis of the information. The team leader integrated all of the material, performed a qualitative analysis, and drafted the report. The draft report was then sent to the team members for their review. The final report reflects a consensus finding from the team.

As the project evolved, team members observed that these successful law enforcement agencies were not simply applying a new technology or implementing a promising practice. Rather, they had reexamined the role of the homicide investigator, the methodology of homicide investigations, and the relationship of homicide investigations to other units within the department as well as with other agencies. Many proven investigation techniques still apply, but through a different paradigm, to make them more effective, with new insight about the application of the technique. In addition, new techniques and an evolved organizational philosophy of homicide investigations can help increase the effectiveness of these inquiries.

Findings

All of the agencies in this project are full-service law enforcement agencies responsible for policing urban areas. All practice community policing, all have some form of Compstat, and all have faced some degree of financial stress as a result of the recent fiscal crisis in the United States. While all of the agencies reported that they are not at full strength, all of the homicide units are fully staffed. While all reported some degree of fiscal “belt tightening,” all of the agencies also said they still have plenty of overtime funds and resources to effectively perform their jobs.

Beyond “apparent” homicides, all the homicide units handle suicides and suspicious deaths. Most also investigate all deaths of children under age 18, kidnapping, and officer-involved shootings. All agencies reported having a cold case squad, although they vary somewhat in structure. While cold case squads are typically part of the homicide unit, those investigators are rarely pulled into an active investigation—there must be very unusual circumstances for this to occur. The reason is that homicide commanders want their cold case squads to “stay on task,” fearing they will lose their cold case investigations if these investigators work active cases too frequently. Only one agency, Houston, has a specialized Homicide Investigation Squad—a Gang Homicide Squad.

Evidence from research suggests that organizational objectives—in this case, increasing homicide clearance rates—are most effectively accomplished when the organization increases its capabilities of two organizational dynamics: *strategies* and *tactics*. Strategies are related to the operational foundation of the agency. They are typically long-term applications of policing philosophy that can be generally applied to the entire organization or specifically applied to a particular function, such as homicide investigation. Strategies dictate the direction of all

organizational initiatives; they represent the predicate for the way a task is approached and decisions are made. Tactics are task-oriented. They prescribe what investigative activities will be performed and how they will be performed in order to accomplish an objective. Tactics are specifically defined activities needed to implement the strategy.

This project identifies both strategies and tactics that have been demonstrated in the site visit agencies to successfully increase homicide clearance rates. In some cases, tactics and strategy overlap; however, these distinctions are discussed in the findings.

The site visit team has worked together on other homicide projects, including two in which the homicide rate was exceptionally high and the clearance rates were exceptionally low. These experiences provided a good contrast of what works and what does not. In many cases, both the successful and unsuccessful agencies were performing the same investigative tasks with significantly different outcomes. One of the team's objectives was to understand the dynamics of these differences.

An illustration provides insight: an important part of the investigative process is to perform a comprehensive neighborhood canvass to seek information from citizens in some detail about the homicides. Both the agencies with high clearance rates and those with low clearance rates employ this investigative tool. In the successful agencies, these canvasses were not simple "knock-and-talk" exercises but discussions with citizens that often included a community-based patrol officer whom citizens knew and trusted. In virtually every case, the neighborhood canvass yielded some type of information—sometimes innocuous—that contributed to the successful investigation and case development. In the unsuccessful agencies, the ersatz neighborhood canvasses were not always performed, and when they were, the process was superficial because investigators said, "It didn't work." In these agencies, investigators made statements that "the canvass was a waste of time," "nobody talks to the police," and "the community does not trust us." The successful agencies had laid a strategic foundation in community relationships that was simply absent from unsuccessful agencies. With this foundation, the neighborhood canvass tactic was effective.

The discussions of strategic and tactical initiatives and practices are not meant to be *prescriptive*. Rather, the intent is to be *descriptive*—to show "what works" in clearing homicides based on the success of seven productive law enforcement agencies. Most of the initiatives and practices will be familiar to readers; the difference between mediocrity and excellence is how those familiar tasks are performed.

Strategic Initiatives and Practices

Selection of Homicide Investigators. It is an often-stated axiom of scientific management that the quality of work is directly a product of the quality of the personnel performing that work—homicide investigation is no exception. The team sought to learn how homicide investigators were selected, as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities²³ (KSAs) sought in new investigators and the process of selection.

²³Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) are a generally recognized characterization of the attributes required to perform a defined job and are generally demonstrated through qualifying service, education, or training.

All of the site visit agencies, except Houston and Baltimore County, select homicide investigators from an applicant pool of investigators who are assigned to other investigative units, with preference to those with investigative experience in crimes against persons. For example, in Denver and Richmond, most homicide investigators have worked on the Aggravated Assault Investigation team, because they have the closest procedures to homicide investigation and often support the homicide investigators. Despite this experience, there is a formal selection process in place that consists of minimum qualifications, such as years of service, a desire to investigate homicides, a review of candidates' case folders, search warrants, and performance evaluations. Candidates then go through a formal process of being interviewed by a panel consisting of homicide investigators and a supervisor. New homicide investigators are assigned to a partner who provides on-the-job training, much like a field training officer. An interesting aspect of Sacramento County is that all road patrol officers first spend five to six years working in the jail. As a result, all officers already have significant experience in dealing with inmates. Homicide investigators find this to be a valuable experience for all investigators.

San Diego has a unique program called "Homicide Relief." Investigators from other units can be placed on an on-call list to assist in a homicide investigation. When the regular homicide shift is short personnel, the next investigator on the relief list is contacted. That investigator then responds to the scene to assist, works with a permanently assigned homicide investigator, and stays with the case until it is cleared or all leads are exhausted. This allows insight from both the investigator candidate and the homicide supervisor as to the competency and compatibility of the relief investigator. It is typically from this pool that a potential candidate is identified and selected to fill a permanent vacancy in the homicide unit.

At the Houston Police Department, those who wish to be considered for a homicide assignment must have a minimum of five years of service and no discipline issues. Candidates must pass a two-part writing test. One is a sample provided from their previous reports. The second is completed during the interview process. Candidates then participate in an oral interview with a panel of lieutenants, sergeants, and investigative officers and are ranked as "most ready," "ready," or "not ready." All command-level interviews indicated that they strive to bring the best person to the unit, not necessarily the most intelligent or best writer, but the person that will "bring something to the team."

In Baltimore County, police officers with at least two years of experience, regardless of assignment, may apply to the Criminal Investigations Division, which includes the homicide unit. Homicide investigators are typically recruited from units within the division, where they have practiced and proved their investigative abilities. Most frequently, they are recruited from the violent crimes unit, which investigates nonfatal shootings and other aggravated assaults. The application includes a résumé and three writing examples that demonstrate their investigative abilities. The submitted materials are then evaluated on the KSAs required for a homicide investigator. Candidates must not have any internal affairs investigations in which they are the subject of disciplinary action. Successful candidates are then interviewed, after which they are ranked as "highly recommended," "recommended," or "not recommended." Another innovative facet of Baltimore County is that the initial responding patrol officer at the crime scene is assigned to the homicide investigation team (plainclothes) for 48 to 72 hours. Besides assisting the investigators with local knowledge, the officer's work gives him or her insight about an

investigation assignment and provides the homicide investigators with insights about potential future investigators. In that role, this practice is also part of the selection process. While Houston and Baltimore County will select patrol officers without any investigative experience, they have a more rigorous selection process for investigators and more training for new investigators than the other agencies participating in the project.

The lesson learned is that successful homicide units know the importance of carefully selecting the right candidates for the position.

Staffing. Adequate staffing requires a sufficient number of investigators to rapidly respond to immediate callouts when a homicide is discovered and to adequately conduct the crime scene and follow-up investigations. While a range of different models exists, an optimum squad size appears to be one supervisor and four investigators, with investigators rotating as the lead investigator. The number of squads is at an optimum when, given the annual number of homicides in a jurisdiction, each investigator is the lead investigator for three homicides per year.²⁴ At first impression, this number may seem low; however, there are several factors that lead to this practice. The lead investigator typically has a number of responsibilities on a case that other investigators do not have. These include managing the information flow and the case file, briefing supervisors and commanders on the status of cases, meeting with the District Attorney's Office on the investigation, meeting with the medical examiner, and meeting with forensic analysts, as well as a wide array of other case management responsibilities. Significant time is spent with witnesses and family management that is sometimes overlooked by police management. In addition, the lead investigator will be responding to homicide scenes and providing investigative support to other cases. Finally, in virtually all homicide units studied, investigators are also assigned to other cases—such as officer-involved shootings, suicides, suspicious deaths, and/or kidnappings. These would be additional cases that often are not as detailed and consuming as homicide investigations. Hence, while the optimum number of cases for which an investigator may serve as lead may be three cases a year, there are many other responsibilities in the investigator's portfolio.

An alternate model, less frequently used but very effective, is the team approach. Under this model, there is no lead investigator in the traditional sense. Rather, the different tasks required in the investigation are divided among the team members, usually based on expertise and at the direction of a homicide supervisor. Thus, in each homicide case, team members perform fundamentally the same tasks. Sacramento County uses this model and finds it very effective because it builds on the strength of each investigator's skills; consequently, investigators work more quickly and effectively. A critical issue, however, is selecting and assigning investigators with the skill sets needed for each team—a sometimes challenging requirement.

Staff Scheduling. The agencies in this project all have full homicide investigation squads assigned both in the day and the evening, with a designated team on call for the overnight

²⁴Obviously, this number is a guidepost and not absolute, because it will depend on the nature of the cases. For example, if the investigator is designated as the lead on a case that turns out to be a murder-suicide, it will be cleared fairly quickly, with much less time spent in meetings, briefings, and report writing. Hence, that investigator should anticipate being the lead on at least four homicides per year.

hours. The schedules are largely based on experience, with investigators readily available at peak times for a faster start to the investigation. (It also costs less in overtime if a squad is already on duty, rather than having to be called in.) All agencies stated that scheduling Homicide Investigators on these two shifts (for example, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight) has worked well. In particular, Richmond examined this scheduling model from a cost-benefit perspective and found that having investigators on call during the overnight hours (midnight to 7:00 a.m.), even with overtime should a homicide occur during the time period, is more cost-effective than staffing the homicide unit on the midnight shift. Consistently, homicide commanders stated that the actual work schedule is less important than having the procedures and resources (including a vehicle, a laptop computer, and a cell phone) to get investigators to a crime scene as quickly as possible.

Training and Professional Development. When the practices of the site visit agencies are viewed together, the optimum training and preparation for the position of homicide investigator is a minimum of three years as a patrol officer, followed by at least two years as an investigator with general investigative experience. Upon selection as a homicide investigator, the new investigator should preferably be assigned to a seasoned investigator for a field training process (or mentorship) of three months. In addition, training for the new investigator on death investigation, homicide crime scene investigation, and interviewing and interrogation is recommended.

Denver and Richmond have a particularly successful professional development model for homicide investigators. In Richmond, any officer who has an interest in eventually being selected to the homicide unit must first work as an aggravated assault investigator. In Denver, homicide investigators typically have worked in an investigative unit responsible for assaults, sex crimes, child abuse, domestic violence, or robbery. The investigative process is very similar to a homicide investigation, so the investigator begins developing the skills needed for a homicide assignment. In addition, homicide investigators mentor investigators in other units to guide them professionally and to get to know them, so the best prospects for a new homicide investigator are known when a vacancy becomes available. In addition, aggravated assault investigators routinely respond to homicide incidents and play an important role in the team-concept approach and are considered to be part of the overall homicide team.

The agencies in the site visits generally select their homicide investigators from a pool of experienced investigators in the department. Hence, the pool of candidates already has experience in the use of databases, report writing, investigative techniques, case development, and other investigative responsibilities that are applicable to all crimes. They are also familiar with specific procedures that are clearly defined in the unit's operating manuals. The result is that new homicide investigators need training only on issues that are uniquely characteristic of homicide investigations. Moreover, because in many cases homicide investigators are also responsible for the investigation of officer-involved shootings, oftentimes new investigators receive training on the unique aspects of these investigations.

For example, new homicide investigators in San Diego receive a one-week basic homicide training course and an advanced two-week investigation school within the first year of their assignment. In addition, homicide investigators receive a one-week Officer Involved

Shooting Investigation class and a one-week In-Custody Death Investigation class. All training is expected to be completed within the first year of assignment to the homicide unit.

In Houston, new investigators are required to attend 12 mandatory investigative classes.²⁵ This amounts to 186 hours of investigative training within the first year. Generally, these classes are taught by current homicide investigators. New investigators also receive mentoring from unit members.

While all agencies seek to provide homicide investigators with additional specialized training that can aid them in their investigation—such as identification and collection of DNA, blood-splatter analysis, or intelligence resources—most of the training provided to new investigators is in the form of mentorship. More than simple “on-the-job training,” new investigators are partnered with experienced investigators who not only provide direction and advice but also review new investigators’ reports and notes to ensure that their work meets quality standards.

An Effective Foundation. It is generally recognized that the critical time interval for identifying suspects, witnesses, and evidence is the first 48 to 72 hours after a homicide is reported. A core question in this project was, “What investigative techniques employed in the first 48 hours after a homicide has been reported are essential to a successful investigation?” As noted previously, the findings suggest that the key issue is not “what” tasks are performed, but “how effectively” they are performed. The key elements of importance for a homicide investigation during the first 48 hours rest on four points:

1. If the suspect has not been apprehended or killed at the scene, collect as much information as possible about the suspect’s identity and behavior because of the likelihood that the suspect is still in a reasonable proximity and is moving away from the scene.
2. Identify and take statements from witnesses before they leave the area and cannot be located. When statements are taken as soon as practicable at the crime scene, memories are more accurate and witnesses are less likely to have the opportunity to compare observations/stories.
3. Identify and collect critical evidence for later analysis before the evidence is contaminated or lost.
4. Understand the motive and manner of death to provide direction for the investigation and interviews of suspects and witnesses. Manner and motive can change throughout the course of the investigation, but investigators have to act on the information available at the present time. It should be noted that

²⁵Because this is unique, it is noteworthy to list the classes: *Basic Investigator* (40 hours), *Interview and Interrogation Techniques* (24 hours), *Kidnapping Investigations* (24 hours), *Officer Involved Shooting Investigations* (16 hours), *Arrest/Search/Seizure (Intermediate)* (16 hours), *Medicolegal Death Investigations* (16 hours), *Basic Crime Scene Class* (8 hours), *Child Abduction/Kidnapping Investigation* (8 hours), *Death Investigation—Homicide* (16 hours), *Amber Alert* (2 hours), and *Child Death Investigations—Team Approach* (16 hours).

investigators can proceed in many directions in relation to motives and manner. Experience has shown that by exhausting all leads, the investigator usually has a clear understanding of the motive and manner of death.

As observed by the homicide commander in Richmond, these factors rely on a community who trust and support the police and are therefore willing to talk with investigators and/or voluntarily provide information to the police. If there is a barrier of distrust that precludes widespread substantive information gathering, the investigation will be limited. This barrier can even extend to anonymous tips. For example, all agencies reported the importance of Crime Stoppers and other anonymous tip methods, such as a dedicated phone line or an anonymous tip form on a Web site. However, evidence suggests that if an effective foundation of trust has not been laid between the police and the community, there will be fewer tips provided by community members.

As an example, San Diego has had significant gang issues for years that have been aggravated by an undocumented immigration population who are both victims and offenders in crime. Yet, the police department has a long history in community policing that has effectively supported community members, including undocumented immigrants who are crime victims. Importantly, patrol officers have been significantly engaged with the community, which, in turn, enhances the police-community foundation that supports all investigations, including homicide. Houston has had similar experiences and also attributes important successes to community outreach by uniformed officers that has translated to community support for homicide investigations. Homicide commanders at all sites stressed the importance of setting and maintaining a solid foundation with the community.

Crime and Intelligence Analysis. The evidence clearly shows that the use of an analyst can significantly support a successful homicide investigation. All of the homicide units in this project have access to both crime and intelligence analysts,²⁶ with most of the agencies having an analyst assigned directly to the homicide unit. The homicide commander in Jacksonville stated that the first person he calls when notified of a homicide is usually the analyst. In Richmond, an intelligence analyst typically responds to homicide scenes. Based on past analysis and knowledge obtained from the community, the analyst prepares a threat assessment on all homicides and the information is disseminated to the field to reduce the likelihood of retaliation homicides, or violence. All of the agencies used analysis for investigative support, ongoing threat definition, and/or pattern analysis of homicide trends.²⁷

Since the terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001, there have been significant strides in the development of law enforcement intelligence. New professional standards have been articulated in the *National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan*.²⁸ The *Law Enforcement Analytic Standards*,²⁹ which provides guidance on quality control of intelligence analysis, and new

²⁶In this context, crime analysis is typically a quantitative assessment of crime patterns and attributes. Intelligence analysis is typically a qualitative analysis of current threats (tactical) and changes in the threat picture (strategic) (Carter, 2009).

²⁷The BJA Law Enforcement Forecasting Group recently produced a paper on the value of analysis in law enforcement; see <https://www.bja.gov/Publications/LEFGIncreasingAnalyticCapacity.pdf>.

²⁸<http://www.it.ojp.gov/docdownloader.aspx?ddid=1153>.

²⁹<http://www.it.ojp.gov/docdownloader.aspx?ddid=1151>.

information sharing systems and resources, most notably the intelligence fusion centers,³⁰ have all been created to assist law enforcement. All of the agencies visited in this project use fusion centers in their investigations and increasingly use the intelligence process, particularly when a homicide is related to a gang or criminal enterprise.

Equipment and Resources. All agencies agreed that successful investigations require access to tools to facilitate the investigation. Some of the basic tools and resources include a cell phone, a camera, a digital recorder, rubber gloves, a departmental take-home car (at least on days when the investigator is on call), a laptop computer, an interview room with audio and video recording, and access to computerized information systems (both governmental and commercial) that can aid in tracking suspects and witnesses. All of the agencies visited have access to this minimal equipment and typically much more. Investigators at Jacksonville, Denver, Richmond, and Sacramento County are assigned take-home cars, while in Houston, San Diego, and Baltimore County, cars are assigned to homicide investigators when they are on call. Investigators consistently reported the value of not only having these basic resources but also having them readily available. For example, if a homicide investigator is on call and does not have a take-home vehicle, the investigator would have to respond from home to the police station, pick up a car, and then respond to the scene. As another example, when an investigator is in the field, it is much faster and more effective if the investigator can use a laptop computer to access critical information systems rather than return to the office.

The failure to provide investigators with the minimal equipment and resources jeopardizes public safety. Beyond depriving investigators of the tools to perform their jobs effectively, this dysfunction sends a message, intended or not, to investigators from administrators that their work and responsibilities are not valued.

Tactical Initiatives and Practices

Understanding the Character of Homicides. An important analytic question is, What is the nature of homicides in the jurisdiction? The answer should indicate whether there is a notable criminogenic trend of homicides within the community that is accounting for a disproportionate number of deaths. The most common examples are gang-related homicides and drug-related homicides. Understanding the unique characteristics of these homicide patterns can contribute to both an increase in homicide clearance rates and the prevention of future homicides. Investigative resources from gang and drug enforcement units can provide invaluable insight for narrowing the focus of suspects as well as gaining additional information from their criminal informants. Working as a team expedites a successful investigation. In all of the project agencies, homicide investigators reported that they work regularly with specialized investigative units when there is an overlap with a homicide investigation. San Diego and Denver reported that whenever there is a drug- or gang-related homicide, an investigator from the appropriate unit is assigned to the homicide investigation team on the case for up to 72 hours, depending on the status of the case and the facts. Similarly, in Houston, because of the large number of gang-related homicides, one squad of homicide investigators works only gang cases. Understanding the character of homicide trends provides the homicide unit with important baseline knowledge as they begin an investigation.

³⁰For more information about fusion centers as well as their locations, see <http://www.nfcausa.org/>.

Overtime. Because of the importance of the investigative tasks in the first 48 hours of a homicide investigation, the need for overtime is as important to an investigation as the equipment. All investigators interviewed stressed the importance of overtime to effectively “work the case.” Supervisors and commanders agreed. The homicide commander from Baltimore County stated that sometimes the overtime funds are not in the budget but that they find the money because of the importance of overtime to solve cases.

To be clear, every agency has specific rules on when overtime is allowed and an authorization process. In general, overtime is allowed during the first 48 to 72 hours of a new case, depending on how the facts evolve. Generally, overtime is not authorized for follow-up on active cases or for cold cases. From an accountability perspective, overtime is not “automatic”; rather, in all agencies, the process requires a request for overtime that must be approved by a supervisor. In the seven agencies in this project, it was clear that there is a commitment from the departments’ administrators that clearing homicides is a priority for the department. That commitment is key to securing overtime funds for investigators.

Committed Case Time. An important aspect of successful clearances is giving homicide investigators the time to work leads, develop new leads, analyze the evidence, and integrate all of the information derived from evidentiary analysis, intelligence analysis, and the medical examiner’s findings. All of the agencies in this project recognize the importance of these duties and ensure that all investigators have time to perform these tasks without handling new cases or other non-case management duties. Some investigators referred to this as “down time,” meaning it is time uncommitted to other homicide unit tasks. In reality, rather than being “down,” it is time when investigators can focus all of their efforts and thoughts on an open case.

An investigator in Sacramento County observed that “sometimes you just need time to think—even though that doesn’t look like you’re accomplishing a lot.” Because most homicide units handle all suspicious deaths, missing persons, and kidnappings, there are often a large number of phone and e-mail inquiries to investigators about all the cases the unit is handling. There is often a tendency for managers to have any homicide investigator who happens to be in the office respond to these inquiries. While intuitively this appears to be a good use of staff time, in practice it has a different effect. Responding to inquiries, while certainly important, not only is time-consuming but also interrupts the train of thought on an investigation. Investigation managers at successful agencies recognize the importance of committed case time and arrange for each investigator working on open cases to have the time free from inquiries and other duties to commit to their work on cases. There must always be staff available to provide good customer service in response to inquiries; however, that must be balanced with the need to provide time for homicide investigators to effectively “work their cases.”

Patrol/Uniformed Officers. In successful agencies, the first responding uniformed officers are trained to identify, detain, and conduct a preliminary interview of suspects and witnesses; they identify and protect forensic evidence and often perform a neighborhood canvass. Consistently, agencies stressed the importance of first responders being proactive—their actions essentially create a platform of information from which the investigators launch their inquiry.

All of the agencies in this project reported a good, productive relationship with patrol officers as well as a mutual respect. The project team members interviewed investigators and patrol officers alike, finding consistent results. Interestingly, in the agencies for this project, the more traditional view of homicide investigators being “the first among equals” is largely gone. Rather, patrol officers and investigators recognize that they have different roles to perform, and both execute their responsibilities professionally. In Houston, the challenge is to convince officers to leave patrol for a transfer to investigations. The project team does not argue that this type of change has occurred in all law enforcement agencies, but it is clearly present in the seven agencies visited in this project.

As one example of an expanded role of first responding uniformed officers, a patrol sergeant in Sacramento County stated, “The crime scene is mine until the homicide investigators arrive.” Recognizing the importance of witnesses, this agency’s patrol officers immediately interview witnesses on their patrol car video cameras to ensure more accurate statements and to have a video record in case witnesses later change their stories. Also in Sacramento County, homicide investigators have prepared a “Homicide Callout Worksheet” (see Appendix B) that patrol officers use to guide their preliminary investigation and record all essential information. Each responding patrol officer completes the checklist and is debriefed by the sergeant to clarify any issues. The patrol sergeant then meets with the homicide investigation team on their arrival to brief the investigators and give them the checklists. All agreed that this is an effective approach to enhance investigations.

In San Diego, upon arrival at the scene of a homicide, a field supervisor designates a patrol officer to be the crime scene scribe. Using a standardized Homicide Investigation Briefing Script (see Appendix C), the officer is able to document all critical people, conditions, and circumstances at the crime scene. The completed form is turned over to homicide investigators when they are about to release the scene. They have found this to be an invaluable process because, too often, small but critical details have been lost during the initial chaos at the crime scene. This process gives order to the preliminary part of the investigation.

In a unique practice in Baltimore County, the initial responding patrol officer is assigned to the homicide investigation team (in plainclothes) for the first 48 to 72 hours of the investigation. The rationale is that the patrol officer knows the people and geography of the area, which will expedite the investigation. Beyond assisting the investigation, this is also seen as a professional development opportunity for patrol officers.

Crime Scene Investigators.³¹ The need for both an effective and responsive forensic evidence capability has been shown to be critical for successful homicide investigations and prosecutions. The first portion of this capability is to have trained and equipped crime scene investigators (CSI) who can recognize and collect crime scene evidence.³² The most successful

³¹All agencies have crime scene investigators (CSIs); however, they use a wide range of different titles for the function (e.g., field forensic technicians, road techs, and forensic investigators). As a writing convention in this report, all are referred to as CSIs, whose function is to search for, identify, collect, preserve, document, package, and transport physical and forensic evidence from a crime scene.

³²All agencies reported that their CSIs are available to work all cases; however, homicides always receive top priority because of the serious nature of the crime.

homicide investigations have CSI personnel who are staffed on peak call shifts and have homicide calls as their top response priority. Moreover, the relationship (and confidence in competence) between crime scene investigators and homicide investigators is also an important ingredient for success. All agencies in this project minimally staffed the CSIs during the day and evening shifts and have CSIs on call during off-hours. However, some of the site visit agencies have CSIs staffed 24/7. The CSIs are a mixture of sworn and nonsworn personnel.

All of the agencies in this project reported a strong mutual respect for and a great deal of confidence in the competence of their crime scene investigators. In all of the agencies, upon their arrival at the crime scene, the CSIs and homicide investigators communicate during the initial response and usually do a “walk-through” of the crime scene, looking for evidence. Following this, the CSIs tend to process the scene independently of homicide investigators. A Denver homicide investigator stated that the CSIs have a better perspective than the investigators on where to look for valuable forensic evidence. Thus, CSIs may be allowed to use their own initiative to process the crime scene, unless there is a question or the lead investigator has a special priority. As information is developed by homicide investigators from witness statements and other resources, the information is communicated to the crime scene investigator at the scene in real time for better collection of evidence.

Agencies reported that after a scene is processed, there is usually a conference between the CSIs and homicide investigators at the scene to describe what has been found, what they are seeking in the analysis of the evidence, whether further processing is needed, and the types of evidence to be sought with further processing. In Richmond, the same teams of CSIs and homicide investigators are scheduled for the same days and shifts to ensure that they work together on every case. The investigators stated that this significantly enhances the coordination and efficiency of the investigations.

Forensics Laboratory. The second element of successful forensic support for homicide investigations is an effective and responsive crime laboratory. All the law enforcement agencies in this project have access to an accredited crime laboratory.³³ There is a mixture in the structure of the crime laboratories, but all crime laboratories in this project are part of the law enforcement agency, except Richmond and Jacksonville, which use the state laboratory, and Sacramento County, whose laboratory is part of the District Attorney’s Office and also serves the city of Sacramento and other jurisdictions in the county. Operating agreements are in place, with no problems in service delivery by the laboratory to all agencies.

All agencies visited stated that the crime labs are responsive to homicide investigators. Several agencies reported that in homicide cases, preliminary DNA analysis is returned within 48 hours, because the laboratory staff members know the importance of the results to support the investigation. The lesson learned is that a competent, well-equipped, and well-staffed crime laboratory that is responsive to investigators will have a significant effect on homicide clearances. All of the laboratories in this project have a “customer-driven” perspective and attempt to be flexible to assist investigators.

³³Crime laboratories are accredited to rigorous standards by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) Laboratory Accreditation Board. See <http://www.asclcd-lab.org/index.htm>.

While it is obvious that a competent forensics laboratory is essential for effective investigations, these site visits found that the most effective laboratories are not only competent but are part of the investigation team.

Team Approach. During the Reform Era of Policing (Kelling and Moore, 1988), there was growing professionalism in all aspects of policing responsibilities and a growing emphasis on specialization. Homicide investigations were reflected in this trend in several ways—in particular, through the growing vision that homicide investigators were the “top tier specialists,” reflecting the best and brightest officers in the department. As such, homicide investigators tended to have a superior perspective of their role and viewed other police units as having simply a support role to aid homicide investigators in solving their crimes. Given the nature of complex criminality, the growth of professional expertise of all police officers, and the vast expertise that has been developed by law enforcement personnel in all assignments, this “first among equals” perspective of homicide investigators is more of a legacy than current practice in the agencies visited in this project.

All the agencies in this project tend to use a scientific approach to investigations requiring diverse sources of information and expertise. Investigators realize that homicides linked to other types of criminal activity—most notably drug trafficking and gangs—can be more effectively investigated by using the knowledge and informants of other units. Thus, these agencies tend to use a team approach to investigations. As an example, a homicide unit supervisor from Denver stated that if they have a gang-related homicide, a gang unit investigator is assigned to the homicide investigation team until the case is cleared or leads are exhausted. Not only does this approach provide ad hoc expertise to the investigation team, it is a more efficient use of human resources, particularly as agencies downsize during financial exigency. The most successful homicide investigators realize the value provided in a team approach to investigations and practice it regularly. Among the agencies, the most common units to work with homicide investigators are auto theft, drugs, gangs, vice, domestic violence, gun crime, and fugitive/major crimes units. Jacksonville specifically defined its homicide investigation team, which includes the homicide unit, the State’s Attorney (District Attorney), crime analysis, patrol, crime scene investigation, Operation Safe Streets, Gun Buy Back Program, and Crime Stoppers.

In San Diego, when a homicide call goes out, both drug and gang suppression units are on alert and ready to respond should the need arise. If information is gleaned that indicates the motive for the homicide is drug- or gang-related, they respond to the scene and, under the guidance of the homicide investigator, will assist. This includes intelligence as well as logistic support and investigative support.

As evidenced by the diverse array of people from different assignments that the project team interviewed at all seven agencies, they are truly practicing teamwork, not just talking about it.

Working With External Agencies. Much like the traditional reluctance to work with other units within the law enforcement agency, historically, homicide investigators have resisted working with outside agencies—the investigators seem to view it as a matter of professional pride that they are able to solve the crimes by themselves. While there is a role for pride in one’s

work, the greater good is served for both justice and public safety by utilizing all resources necessary to clear a homicide.

All agencies in the study showed evidence of working with outside agencies in order to clear homicides. For example, Richmond works with the U.S. Marshals Service on the Federal Fugitive Task Force. Jacksonville works closely with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) on Operation Safe Streets and the Gun Bounty Program. Houston works consistently with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on gang homicides and the Safe Streets Initiative. All agencies reported ongoing cooperation with an array of federal agencies—the FBI, ATF, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and the U.S. Marshals Service were the most common—to investigate and suppress homicides.

Beyond these federal agencies, all agencies reported that they regularly use a fusion center as a resource in investigations and work with neighboring law enforcement jurisdictions and probation and parole. The critical factor learned was that working with specialized law enforcement agencies, corrections organizations, and contiguous law enforcement agencies notably increases the probability of clearing a homicide. Importantly, as pointed out by a Sacramento County investigator, this type of work is a two-way street. For example, Sacramento County investigators regularly work with the Sacramento Police Department on homicides that occur within the city. The investigator stated, “Even though we have different badges, it’s all one community. We are all responsible to protect our citizens, regardless of their address.”

Fugitive Squads. Denver, Sacramento County, Richmond, and Baltimore County all have specialized units that are designed to track and locate people. Using different names, these units conduct extensive surveillance, work criminal informants, monitor social media, search a wide array of commercial and law enforcement databases, and network with other agencies to locate people.³⁴ These units, which search for both suspects and reluctant witnesses, are surprisingly successful and are relied on heavily by homicide investigators. This allows investigators more time for case development and case management.

Interestingly, the historical depiction of an investigator as a “gumshoe” referred to the time and effort used by successful investigators to tread the streets to track down a criminal. As seemingly everything else in law enforcement, this depiction is dated. Homicide investigators in some cities are increasingly “outsourcing” that work to fugitive units that have specialized training, skills, and time to hunt suspects. According to the agencies in this project, this practice is a more effective way to search for suspects, and it provides more time for the investigator to manage and build the case.

District/Prosecuting Attorney. Although an arrest will clear the homicide for purposes of the Uniform Crime Report, the ultimate goal is to successfully prosecute a homicide suspect. Prosecuting attorneys view the investigation process somewhat differently than investigators. While investigators seek information to identify and apprehend the offender, prosecutors seek information that can identify, apprehend, and convict the offender. Given the requirements to

³⁴One homicide supervisor informally referred to them as the “hunter squad” to describe their persistence and effectiveness.

meet their burden of proof in court, prosecutors seek a greater amount of evidence that can also withstand constitutional scrutiny. These distinctions sometimes place homicide investigators and prosecutors on different paths.

There is often a circumspect relationship between homicide investigators and prosecutors, largely based on their somewhat different roles; yet, there is a need for a reciprocal relationship (Keel, Jarvis, and Muirhead, 2009). All agencies in this project reported a good working relationship with their respective prosecutor's office, although a number of different procedural models exist for the investigator/prosecutor relationship.

An Assistant District Attorney (ADA) responds to every crime scene in Denver for purposes of observing the interviews of suspect(s) and some witnesses. The ADA also participates in briefings and provides consultation but clearly recognizes that the crime scene and the investigation are the responsibility of the homicide investigator. Jacksonville has a State's Attorney who is responsible for only homicide cases and also responds to all homicide scenes. In Richmond and Baltimore County, an ADA will respond to the crime scene on request and provide consultation as requested. Houston (Harris County, Texas) has a Major Offender Division with several Assistant District Attorneys who work closely with the homicide unit, responding to crime scenes on request.

In San Diego, the District Attorney does not respond to crime scenes but is on call for assistance. There is a capital crimes prosecutor housed at the San Diego Homicide Unit offices who is available for consultation, search warrants, and other needs. The Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office provides strong support to the homicide unit and is considered a member of the team. There is one overall Deputy Prosecutor who leads the homicide prosecution team, which consists of six assistant prosecutors who are assigned on a rotating basis. A Commonwealth Attorney will occasionally respond to homicide scenes.

Although different models were used, all agencies in this project agreed that their relationship with the District/Prosecuting Attorney strengthened the investigation. As noted by a Denver ADA, "We have different goals, but we have mutual respect and are one team."

Medical Examiner. Understanding the causes and circumstances of death is a key component in the investigation process. The greatest successes show that this is enhanced when there is close, direct communication between homicide investigators and the medical examiner's office. At the agencies in this project, a medical examiner investigator responds to all homicide crime scenes, with a medical examiner available to respond if needed. The lead homicide investigator from all agencies in this project is always present during the victim's autopsy and is able to not only discuss the autopsy results but ask specific questions during the autopsy that could help direct certain aspects of the examination. Investigators agreed that this is a critical component in the investigation. Without a close and cooperative information sharing relationship with the medical examiner's office, the investigators can miss important clues to direct the investigation.

Victim-Witness Advocate. The use of victim-witness advocates emerged on a large scale in the 1970s, with seven core responsibilities to protect the rights of victims (and their families) and witnesses of criminal acts:

1. The right to protection from intimidation and harm.
2. The right to be informed concerning the criminal justice process.
3. The right to reparations or restitution.
4. The right to preservation of property and employment.
5. The right to due process in criminal court proceedings.
6. The right to be treated with dignity and compassion.
7. The right to counsel.³⁵

Historically, homicide investigators have had little interaction with victim-witness advocates, often limited to a referral, because victim assistance was viewed as a different role than investigation. Oftentimes, the victim-witness advocate is located in the District Attorney's Office, although some police departments also have an advocate. In Richmond, however, the homicide unit embraces the victim-witness advocate as a resource to support the investigation. Investigators work closely with members of the victim's family to not only collect information for the investigation but to also help the family recover from the trauma of victimization. This increases the amount of information that is obtained from the family, often leading to a faster arrest—families often have more information about the offender than they originally tell police and may not know that the information could be of value to the investigation. As a result of this program, there are fewer complaints from the victim's family about investigative and prosecutorial actions. One of the challenges to overcome was the resocializing of investigators to have a community orientation—this was a different role for investigators and did not evolve easily.

In Denver, the Victim-Witness Advocate's Office is one of the most robust in the country. The office has 38 staff members, funded by a fee assessment on every criminal conviction within the jurisdiction. Beyond being proactive in establishing relationships with victims' families and witnesses, which increases the information flow to investigators, the office also provides witness relocation when necessary. The investigators have access to the protected witness, which further supports the investigation. Although this is an atypical Victim-Witness Advocate's Office, it nonetheless illustrates the value of this function.

While all agencies visited have a victim assistance resource of some kind, Denver and Richmond demonstrated the most substantive relationship between investigators and advocates. Investigators from both agencies stressed the importance of this function not only to support the investigation but also as the "right thing to do" to aid crime victims and their families.

³⁵http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/rural_victim_assistance/pfv.html.

Technology Investigations and Analysis. Technology is part of the daily life of most Americans. Cell phones, e-mail, use of social media, online shopping, and search engine queries are a few of the common elements of a person’s daily routine. The pervasiveness of this technology can provide great insight about what a person has been doing, whom they have been interacting with, and where they have been. Consequently, an analysis of the memory in technology devices can provide valuable information in a homicide investigation about both the victim and the suspect. All agencies reported that cell phones of victims and suspects are always analyzed and that a forensic analysis of digital evidence is performed in virtually every investigation in which a victim’s or suspect’s computer is found. Investigators from all agencies consistently pointed to the value of digital evidence as an important part of many investigations.

All agencies stated that when a homicide is reported, one source of information always considered is data dumps from the cell phone towers that overlap the crime scene.³⁶ Active cell phones search for and make contact with the closest cell tower or sets of towers as the user moves. Records of these movements, including phone numbers, date, and time, are kept in limited memory at the cell tower. (Some cell providers, such as Sprint, also record the “pinging” of the phone at a tower even if it is not in use but just “on.”) With these towers retaining every cell phone number that uses that tower, a record of those numbers has the potential to be a source of great investigative value. It is possible to download this information onto a spreadsheet in what is commonly called a “tower dump.” The ability to have evidence that a particular cell phone was, in fact, used in the vicinity of the crime can possibly verify or contradict an alibi or statement. It can also supply information that a relevant cell phone, which investigators may have had no previous knowledge about, was in the area at the time of the incident.

Since cell towers maintain a record of these numbers for only a limited amount of time, it is imperative that an investigator who wants this information request the cell “tower dump” from each cellular provider³⁷ that uses the tower as soon as possible, usually within the first day or two. At the least, investigators can request a “Preservation Letter” in order for the service provider to capture and retain the data at the tower before it is deleted. Investigators can then have a subpoena served to obtain the information at a later date.

Defining a narrow time frame for which cell data is needed in a geographic area that has a limited amount of cell usage will allow for a quick analysis of cell numbers. Conversely, a wider time frame in a densely populated area may create too many numbers to efficiently manage. There is also a cost involved for each service provider and for each cell tower. As a result, investigators considering a cell “tower dump” must weigh the pros (obtaining all cell number information from a crime scene area) and cons (request must be made within the first few days, the cost involved, the inability to limit the time frame involved, and the amount of cell phones hitting the tower) in making the decision as to whether their case would benefit from this information.

³⁶In most cases, data in cell phone towers is kept in memory for only a limited amount of time, which varies depending on the service provider and the type of equipment at a particular tower.

³⁷There may be as many as seven different service providers on one tower. A separate request must be made to each provider and each tower in order to obtain a “tower dump.”

The process for obtaining a data dump from a cell tower varies both by jurisdiction and service provider. While all agencies in this project had used tower dumps in the past, some agencies, such as Sacramento County, use it more frequently than others, such as Houston, because of the difference in population density (the more dense the population, the more cell towers and more numbers to analyze).

Agencies that are successful in clearing homicides in their jurisdiction are open to diverse investigative options. Information collected from technologies is a resource that provides great value to an investigation. In all site visit agencies, the forensic analysis of technologies is part of almost every homicide investigation.

Public Information. The public information function is both a strategy and a tactic. As a strategy, the law enforcement agency needs to establish a long-term, trusting, two-way relationship with the news media, as well as a philosophy of the types of information that will be shared with the public and how it will be shared. As a tactic, the Public Information Officer (PIO) “gathers, verifies, coordinates, and disseminates accurate, accessible, and timely information on the incident’s cause, size, and current situation; resources committed; and other matters of general interest for both internal and external use.” (National Incident Management System, undated, p.10)

With respect to homicide investigations, public information is provided not only because of the public’s right to know about crime but also for public safety and to enlist the assistance of the public in identifying the suspect. An illustration of the value of enlisting public assistance is the identification of the suspects in the Boston Marathon terrorist attack of April 2013.

A decade ago, the PIO focused efforts toward the local print and broadcast media. Today, however, the use of blogging and social media—such as establishing a YouTube channel, a Facebook page, or a Twitter feed—is perhaps an even more important responsibility. Baltimore County posts information on Patch.com—a national Web site that tailors news and information to a community. Baltimore County³⁸ and Houston³⁹ also use iWatch to post and push information to community members.

All of the agencies in the project expressed the importance of having an effective PIO and particularly find social media valuable for eliciting tips from the public. Ideally, the PIO would have Internet access at the crime scene to update the public, solicit public assistance, or correct inaccurate information. In another illustration from the Boston attack, the Boston Police Department used Twitter at one point to correct information that was being inaccurately reported by the national media⁴⁰—once the Tweet was sent, news organizations corrected their reporting.

³⁸<http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/police/media/iWatch/>.

³⁹<http://www.readyhouston.tx.gov/iwatchhouston/>.

⁴⁰In this case, both the print and national broadcast media were reporting that a suspect had been arrested, when, in fact, that had not occurred.

Among the PIO responsibilities at the crime scene are:

- Determine from the lead investigator the limits on information release.
- Develop information releases for distribution to all media briefings.
- Obtain approval of media releases from the lead investigator.
- Conduct media briefings.
- Arrange for media interviews of investigators.
- Maintain current information summaries on the incident.
- Provide information to the police command about media coverage, issues, and interests.
- Manage media and public inquiries.
- Coordinate emergency public information and warnings.
- Monitor media reporting for accuracy.
- Maintain an activity log of releases and inquiries.

Crime Stoppers and Citizen Tips. All homicide investigators interviewed from all agencies agreed on the importance of tips from citizens to aid the investigation. Agencies reported regularly receiving tips (many of which had limited value) from citizens after a homicide. Somewhat surprising is the importance given to Crime Stoppers⁴¹ by every agency in the project. While the enthusiasm for Crime Stoppers varies somewhat among the agencies, all agree that it is a positive resource for homicide investigations. Once again, these agencies also tend to have generally strong community support, which is an important factor in the value of Crime Stoppers.

Richmond: A Comprehensive Integrated Approach

A number of unique programs and practices have been discussed in the preceding pages—Sacramento County’s use of patrol car cameras to video record witnesses, the Denver Victim-Witness Advocate’s Office, Baltimore County’s practice of temporarily assigning the first responding officer to the homicide investigation team, Houston’s Gang Homicide Squad, and San Diego’s gang and drug investigators responding to homicides. These were discussed above in the context of a broader conversation about the issue. However, Richmond employs a particularly unique approach that not only uses new tools but also reengineers the role of the homicide investigator into what is essentially a systems model for managing violent crime.

⁴¹<http://www.crimestoppersusa.com/>.

Richmond had a significant gang homicide problem that was not only driving up the homicide rate, it was also reducing the quality of life in the community. To address the problem, the police department examined the conditions contributing to the homicides and developed creative ways to address them. They include:

- *The Focus Mission Team (FMT)*—This is a proactive crime focus initiative driven by analysts. The analysts work closely with sworn officers and provide high-quality, substantive analysis using diverse analytic tools and mapping in order to better understand crime trends, circumstances of criminal incidents, and forecasts of probable future violence. Stepping beyond the traditional analyst’s role, the Richmond analysts will often go to crime scenes with investigating officers, as well as meet with community members. These activities provide new information and context to aid the analysts in providing more robust analytic products.
- *Directed Patrol*—The police department also began an aggressive directed patrol initiative that is based on the analytic products. The more robust analysis of crime data permits the development of more focused directed patrol initiatives, which aids in the prevention of crime and intervention in potential gang and drug activities.
- *Retaliation Assessment Tool (RAT)*—When a homicide occurs, there is relentless follow-up to examine all aspects of the crime. A particularly unique aspect of follow-up is the RAT, notably for gangs. The assessment is performed for all violent crimes wherein a retaliation analysis defines the probability and nature of possible retaliation for the victim’s injury or death. Gang members will often attempt to injure or kill a member of the offending gang as “payback.” Police work closely with potential victims in order to prevent crime retaliation from occurring. Since there is a potential for retaliation in some neighborhoods based on historical information and information obtained from the community, retaliation is a significant issue that must be addressed for preventing future violence.
- *Cooperative Violence Reduction Partnership (CVRP)*—Perhaps one of the most critical initiatives is the CVRP, which is a partnership among local and federal law enforcement, prosecutors, and corrections. Prosecutors are part of community policing and are assigned to each precinct. There is a clear and open line of communications between prosecutors and both law enforcement and community members to enhance prosecution of cases. Similarly, the Richmond Police Department works closely with federal agencies, particularly ATF, as a team in a collaborative effort to reduce violent crime.
- *Community Buy-In*—Communication with the community is important to gain community trust, which increases cooperation in identifying suspects and in prosecutions. From a community-policing perspective, there is a philosophy of recommitment and communication. The Richmond police host or

participate in numerous community meetings with citizens, reaching an average of 600 to 700 meetings annually.

- *Homicide Family Management Initiative*—Involving various social services, homicide investigators work closely with members of the victim’s family to not only collect information for the investigation but to also help the family recover from the trauma of victimization. This increases the amount of information that is obtained from the family, often leading to a faster arrest.
- *Gang Reduction Interdiction Program (GRIP)*—A combined effort of federal, state, and local agencies, GRIP targets criminally active gang members. By using relentless pressure on the gangs by all sectors of the cooperating agencies, gang member activities are severely limited.
- *Community R.E.S.E.T. (Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of Trauma)*—The premise behind Community R.E.S.E.T. is to restore a community to its level of normalcy after a homicide or any traumatic event that disrupts the daily life of that neighborhood. This program has social workers respond to the area of a homicide about three days after the crime. They are clearly social workers, not the police. They are a small group and go door-to-door handing out brochures on services available to citizens affected by the recent violence. It is not their goal to seek information; however, many times they are aware of what information might assist the investigation and are willing to relay that information to investigators, if appropriate.

The Richmond approach illustrates a creative application of many factors discussed above: an analytically driven approach that is based on a solid foundation laid and reinforced with both the community and media and that draws on diverse resources both within and external to the police department in a victim-centered approach to investigation.

Implications

In light of these factors, what are the implications for investigations to increase homicide clearances? Fundamentally, for the homicide clearance rate to increase, the homicide unit needs to be adequately staffed with competent, qualifications-based investigators who are equipped with the tools to conduct an effective investigation. Moreover, it is important to have strong support and an open relationship with the community, throughout the law enforcement agency, and with other law enforcement agencies in the region. While these are easy principles to state, they are difficult to achieve because they require organizational and individual change for which there will always be some resistance to overcome. Depending on the priority given to homicide clearances in the agency as well as the fiscal condition of the department, some resource reallocation may also be required—this is always a difficult process that creates new conflict if not handled adroitly.

Further findings indicate that the role of the homicide investigator has also changed. The investigator is no longer simply “digging for information,” as was largely the vision of

investigations in the professional era of policing. Rather, the homicide investigator is increasingly becoming an information manager. In the successful agencies studied in this project, the investigator reaches out to a wide range of people in the department, in the community, and in the region, as well as a wide range of databases, in order to link them together to identify and apprehend the suspect. This requires a broader range of skills, which was evident in interviews at these agencies. As observed by one Houston homicide investigator, “We can’t solve homicides only by ‘beating the pavement’—now we need to network. It’s a different world.”

A Summary of Best Practices

This project identified a number of best practices for successful homicide investigations that are used by multiple, but not all, homicide units examined in this project. At the end of each interview session, homicide investigators and supervisors were asked to summarize the points that have significantly contributed to their successes. The following list is an amalgamation of those best practices that were used or observed by two or more agencies. While a law enforcement agency may not be able to implement all of these practices, adopting as many as possible will most likely increase homicide clearances.

1. A homicide unit will be most effective when there is demonstrated support from management. This includes reasonable staffing levels, resource allocation, and organizational flexibility to meet the unique demands of homicide investigation. While every unit in the law enforcement agency can make a legitimate argument for resources, the homicide unit is responsible for investigating the most serious criminal act to humankind.
2. The role of the contemporary homicide investigator has changed. Increasingly, the investigator must be an information manager who can coordinate and integrate information from a wide range of sources to drive the investigation forward. At the same time, the investigator needs to be more community-based to aid victims' families and to more effectively reach out to community members for information.
3. Every law enforcement officer goes through a rigorous selection process to ensure that people selected are honest, responsible, brave, and selfless and have strong character and an above-average intellect. Homicide investigators must be selected from a group of people with these characteristics, to ensure that they have the personality and aptitude for homicide investigations. Some of the characteristics mentioned most often in this project were passion, tenacity, tolerance, creativity, commitment, strong work ethic, integrity, taking pride, being able to bond with people, and being able to work effectively on a team.
4. The staffing level must meet the workload. If there is an inadequate number of investigators to fully handle each case, then the number of clearances and successful prosecutions will fall. With inadequate staffing, not only is there greater difficulty in conducting a comprehensive investigation, but personnel morale will decrease, resulting in less commitment and productivity.
5. It is assumed that the person selected as a homicide investigator has solid basic investigative skills and is a good report writer. Additional training most commonly recommended for new homicide investigators is death investigation, interviewing and interrogation, information resources, and DNA identification and collection. If the homicide unit is also responsible for officer-involved shootings, then the new investigator also needs training in

this area. Finally, all new homicide investigators should be mentored by an experienced investigator for at least six months.

6. Effective interviewing and interrogation skills are important for successful investigations.
7. The overtime budget must be adequate for the investigative team to work straight through a case in the critical first 48 hours. Bluntly stated, inadequate overtime will reduce clearances. Moreover, all homicide investigators must be provided periods of time to work exclusively on the follow-up of their cases, free from commitments to respond to other homicide unit inquiries and duties.
8. Crime and intelligence analysis plays an important role in the success and direction of an investigation. In the most successful cases, analysts respond to the crime scene, as well as observe witness interviews, which helps them direct the type of analysis that is needed and provide investigative support. Each homicide investigation team should include an analyst.
9. Homicide investigators should establish a relationship with the nearest state or major urban area fusion center—in particular, informing the fusion center of homicide investigation information needs, requesting trend analysis in homicide cases in the region, and sharing information among jurisdictions in the region where homicides may have a nexus with a criminal enterprise.
10. Using a team approach to investigations, including not only the homicide investigators but also any other unit or agency that can contribute to the investigation of cases, will significantly contribute to success. The expertise and depth of knowledge of specialized investigators should not be undervalued.
11. Comprehensively video-record all interactions and interviews with witnesses and suspects, including statements by witnesses at the crime scene. This significantly helps develop and prosecute a case even if the video shows the frustrations and flaws of homicide investigators.
12. Well-trained and effectively scheduled crime scene investigators are an important resource for every homicide investigation. Ideally, CSIs will be deployed 24/7, with homicide as their top-priority call. When on-scene, the CSIs should work at the direction of the lead homicide investigator, who, in turn, should also respect the CSIs' expertise.
13. There needs to be a strong relationship with the forensics laboratory for timely analysis of evidence and trust, wherein the lab will respond with urgency on those cases for which the analysis of evidence is truly time-critical.

14. A medical examiner investigator should respond to every homicide crime scene. The medical examiner's office should also provide regular training to the homicide unit.
15. A readily accessible computer forensics unit is an important resource for nearly every homicide investigation. While such a unit should be capable of performing a wide range of forensic analysis, one of the most important immediate applications is to extract information from victims' and suspects' cell phones. The computer forensics unit must understand the need for fast analysis and feedback in homicide cases.
16. There should be a strong relationship of reciprocity and respect between the homicide unit and the District Attorney's Office. A District Attorney's Office that is willing to provide advice and training to homicide investigators is a valuable resource. There must be mutual respect and open communications between the District Attorney and homicide investigators. The District Attorney's Office should also provide periodic training on relevant legal updates.
17. The most successful homicide units have a comprehensive digital case management system that contains all reports, photographs, videos, medical examiner reports, and images or documents that constitute the entire investigation. The system should have a comprehensive integrated search capability and the ability to easily transfer files.
18. There must be a strong relationship between the law enforcement agency and the community, with a high degree of support from community members that is fostered by all law enforcement personnel. Accomplishing this requires a long-term consistent effort with support from management. This relationship pays important dividends in homicide investigations because it increases the willingness of community members to report information on cases.
19. Homicide investigators need to have good relationships with patrol officers, to include communications, information sharing, and respect. The investigator needs to recognize that his or her case will largely be built on the foundation established by the first responding patrol officers.
20. First-responding patrol officers must be effectively trained to not only protect the crime scene but to also identify, stop, detain, and interview potential witnesses. Investigators emphasized that without this type of response from patrol officers, many important witnesses and leads would be difficult and time-consuming to locate, if not lost altogether. First-responding officers should be viewed as part of the team.
21. A neighborhood canvass at each homicide scene should be performed in at least two phases. The first phase is immediately after the arrival of the

- homicide investigators and is typically performed by patrol officers. The officers should inform citizens, seek information, leave business cards, and tell citizens they will be contacted by an investigator within 48 to 72 hours. The second canvass, made by homicide investigators, provides the opportunity for community members to report information to the police that they may not have reported previously. Successful investigators have learned that citizens may want to give information to the police but not to a visible uniformed officer right after the homicide has occurred. The first contact by the patrol officer may yield important information, but it also “gets the citizens thinking” about what they may have observed and lets them know they will have the opportunity to tell a plainclothes investigator in the coming days.
22. All homicide investigators should have cell phones and access to laptop computers with data cards at least for the first 48-plus-or-minus hours of the investigation. This is important for updates and records checks while in the field as well as permitting investigators to update digital case files on a timely basis.
 23. All homicide investigators should have department-supplied take-home cars when they are on call. This permits investigators to respond to crime scenes more rapidly and have their investigation kit and supplies with them.
 24. On a daily basis, homicide unit personnel should have a “coffee break” during which they can informally discuss cases and issues. This can provide new ideas and directions for investigators whose investigation has reached an impasse, as well as uncover linkages between cases.
 25. The homicide unit should have an open and strong working relationship with other units within the agency. When there is a nexus between a homicide and the other unit’s investigations, the mutually supported relationship produces an effective investigation.
 26. Consider the use of a specialized unit—often called a fugitive squad—whose expertise is to track down people through the integrated use of social media, database searches, surveillance, and informants. This has proved to be an effective use of personnel.
 27. A proactive victim-witness advocacy unit is an important resource. It will not only provide support and assistance to victims’ families during a time of trauma but can aid in collecting information to support the investigation as well as assist in witness relocation.
 28. A valuable source of information for homicide units has been intelligence from jails—this is particularly true for gang members. Information learned from inmate phone calls and mail has been important to link gang members

and identify previously unknown gang members, which frequently leads to additional people to interview and, in some cases, charge for other crimes.

29. From a prevention perspective, homicide investigators should work with other investigators to build cases against gang members for participating in a criminal enterprise so they may be prosecuted under Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statutes. This not only eliminates gang members from the street—some of whom are likely involved in homicides, at least as an accomplice—it also likely prevents additional homicides.
30. The department needs a strong relationship with the media and an effective media strategy. This would include having a Public Information Officer respond to all homicide crime scenes to make statements, handle press conferences, and respond to media inquiries. The media strategy also needs to include the use of social media, including not only Twitter, Facebook, reddit, and similar media but also community-based blogs and sites such as Patch.com or a blog on the agency's Web site.
31. Crime Stoppers can be an important and effective tool for tips and should be advertised and used broadly. In addition, an anonymous dedicated telephone tip line should be established, as well as an anonymous tip submission tool on the department's Web site. While many tips lead to a dead end, there are nonetheless many tips that will provide important leads for investigations.
32. Effective investigators are professional, proactive, enthusiastic individuals who operate with strong administrative support to investigate all homicides thoroughly with a community-based approach and respect for civil rights.

The First 48 Hours of a Homicide Investigation

When patrol units initially arrive at the scene of a reported homicide, the first two critical responsibilities are:

- Determine whether aid must be rendered to any injured person.\
- Apprehend the suspect(s) if still at the crime scene.

Assuming that neither of these conditions exists, the clock starts on the next critical series of steps for a thorough and productive investigation. The following map of activities assumes the most common circumstance: one crime scene with one homicide victim in a building or its curtilage wherein the suspect is not present or is not definitively known.

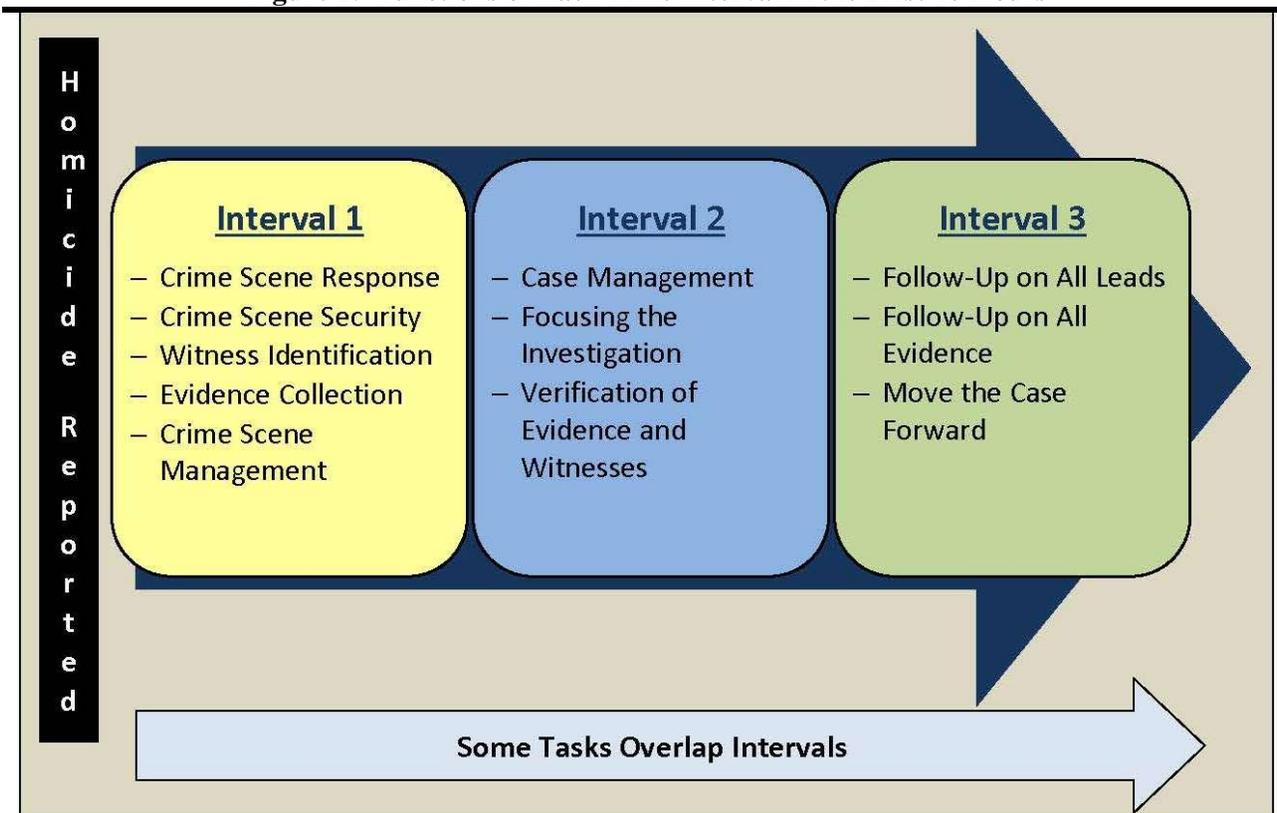
The types of tasks that will be performed in the first 48 hours after a homicide has been reported and the time it takes to perform each task will vary depending on the facts of the case, the number of victims, the number of crime scenes, and a variety of environmental factors. Despite these qualities, a generalized depiction of best practices during these critical hours can be made.

The map of activities identifies 80 separate tasks to be performed by patrol officers, investigators, CSIs, intelligence analysts, supervisors, the medical examiner investigator, the PIO, and others, depending on the facts of the case. The lead homicide investigator is typically the conductor of this investigative symphony. The lead has to ensure that each function performs its tasks, documents evidence and leads, and integrates all the information, like an arrow that provides direction to the next steps of the investigation.

The individual tasks listed in this chart should not be viewed as *sequential steps*, per se, in the homicide investigation. Rather, *the group of tasks within each time interval should be performed sometime within that noted interval*. The key issue for a successful homicide investigation is not “what” tasks are performed but “how effectively” they are performed.

There are three time intervals in the first 48 hours of an investigation following the report of a homicide: Figure 1 depicts the general themes of activities in each interval. The process map on the following pages specifies individual tasks to be performed in each time interval as defined by best practices found in this project.

Obviously, some of these tasks will be stipulated to be performed in a certain manner dictated by departmental policy, local Mutual Aid Agreements, law, and even custom. Nonetheless, from the perspective of the project team, the steps in the chart provide solid direction for managing the first 48 hours of the investigation. Some of the tasks have end notes that refer to best practices identified in this project and are summarized on the last two pages of this section.

Figure 1: Functions of Each Time Interval in the First 48 Hours

Each interval has a specific purpose for managing a homicide investigation, and the tasks within each interval are guided toward that end. Of course, the transition between intervals is a continuous process, rather than discrete. Nonetheless, the tasks of each interval are essential for a successful investigation.

The key to Interval 1 is managing the crime scene in a coherent, responsible manner. Generally, the crime scene is the most chaotic portion of the investigation, because there are many important tasks that seem to have to be done simultaneously. In reality, the facts and environment of the crime scene will help officers in prioritizing tasks, which may differ somewhat between cases. Rendering aid, apprehending suspects, identifying witnesses, protecting evidence, and ensuring security and accountability at the crime scene are all components of crime scene management. As the chaos of the scene is managed, the investigation moves into Interval 2, when the investigation begins to focus on the suspect. By this time, fundamental facts are known; in some cases, hypotheses have been developed and information gaps have been identified. Investigators, officers, CSIs, and others on the investigation team have directed responsibilities to help identify the suspect and collect evidence that will later be used in prosecution. Thus, during this time frame, tasks shift from looking inward at the crime scene to looking outward for the suspect.

As Interval 3 arrives, there is typically a clear understanding of the evidence and facts of the case, a perspective on the suspect (e.g., identified, solid evidence but no identity, or simply

unknown), and a series of leads that need to be followed. Personnel have often been working straight through the last 24-plus hours, and their productivity begins to fade. During this interval, particularly without an identified suspect, the tasks seek to tie all the evidence together, develop new leads, and establish a foundation for an ongoing investigation throughout this interval. The investigation will move forward, but first there must be time for all of the evidence to be analyzed, evidence and leads to be reassessed, and investigators to rest. The “first 48” are over.

Tasks During the First 48 Hours of a Homicide Investigation

INTERVAL 1		
Hours 0–1	Hours 1–4	Hours 4–8
<p>Patrol Supervisor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves as crime scene manager until investigators arrive¹ Assigns patrol officer as crime scene scribe² Assigns officer(s) for traffic control at scene Contacts child protection services if child is a witness or abandoned at scene Establishes a media assembly point staffed by a patrol officer that is safe and does not interfere with the investigation but is convenient (send all media representatives to that point) Conducts initial assessment at scene to determine whether there is gang or narcotic involvement—if so, notifies those units 	<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead investigator assigns investigative tasks⁶ Check with communications for related calls around time of homicide call Establish command post if warranted by facts Notify and brief command Establish and confirm identity of victim Crime scene measurements and sketch Photograph and video-record crime scene⁷ Temporary witness relocation if warranted⁸ Investigator and family advocate contact victim's family Make "all cars" broadcast of suspect as applicable 	<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain cell tower data dump if needed¹² Database checks of witnesses, addresses, and suspects Determine whether crime scene can be released Designate officer or investigator to accompany victim to hospital to recover clothing and evidence Contact lab if priority analysis is needed Follow-up interviews of witnesses—video-recorded Case review briefing for all team members Lead investigator attends autopsy
<p>Patrol Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Render aid if needed Apprehend suspect if at scene Assess safety at scene Confirm death of victim Determine whether to request homicide to respond Secure crime scene—officer assigned for security³ Evaluate to determine whether possible second scene—if so, locate and secure Create crime scene access log Identify suspects and witnesses at scene Record weather and environmental conditions Ensure that chain of custody is maintained Document vehicles in area and check licenses/vehicle identification numbers 	<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigator and family advocate contact victim's family Locate security cameras at businesses in area—seize recordings Debrief with all personnel after scene is processed⁹ Conduct extended crime scene search if warranted Document victim's predeath circumstances and facts Contact personnel from other units within the department who may assist (e.g., gangs) Contact other federal, state, and local agencies that may assist 	
	<p>Crime Scene Investigators and District Attorney</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSIs continue to process scene¹⁰ CSIs confer with investigator after scene has been processed District Attorney arrives on scene (if appropriate)¹¹ 	
<p>Patrol Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct neighborhood canvass Conduct preliminary interviews of witnesses⁴ Brief investigators on actions and circumstances 	<p>Public Information Officer (PIO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrives at the scene Briefed by investigators to determine information to be released Prepares statement for media release Plans press conference as determined by circumstances Tweets available suspect information and community safety information 	
<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrive at scene Apply for search warrant if required Contact intelligence analyst for information needs⁵ Receive briefing from patrol supervisor Receive briefing from first-responding officer 	<p>Crime Scene Investigators and Medical Examiner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical examiner investigator (MEI) arrives at scene Briefs CSIs and crime scene "walk-through" CSIs process scene with advice from investigators MEI coordinates/communicates with investigators 	<p>Crime Scene Investigators and Medical Examiner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSIs secure evidence and transport for analysis Medical examiner's office removes body from scene Medical examiner performs autopsy

INTERVAL 2		INTERVAL 3	
Hours 8–16	Hours 16–24	Hours 24–36	Hours 36–48
<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop profile/description of suspect—all cars be on the lookout (BOLO) Notify other agencies, fusion center, and PIO of suspect information Document decedent's medical, social, and mental health histories Consult District Attorney on case status and evidentiary needs Prepare case report Notify community stakeholder organizations Conduct second neighborhood canvass Confer with analyst on leads Have strategy meeting with team members to decide next steps 		<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case review team meeting—identify next steps in investigation and responsibilities Command briefing update Temporarily assigned personnel return to unit Reinterview family for additional information Meet with lab analysts to discuss evidence Verify case file is current Meet with District Attorney and advise of case status If no clear suspect emerges and/or if the modus operandi is distinctive, compare facts and characteristics to other cases to determine whether this is a possible repeat offender (particularly in gang-related homicides) 	
<p>Public Information Officer (PIO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> News release, information push, press conference¹³ 		<p>Public Information Officer (PIO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow-up press conference(s) and announcements/bulletins in social media as dictated by facts, suspect status, and public safety 	
<p>Digital Forensics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital forensic analyses of phones, computers, and digital storage media 			
<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage fugitive/major case squad to search for suspect¹⁴ Follow up on tips from Crime Stoppers and tip lines/Web site Continued contact with victim's family by investigators and victim advocate¹⁵ Determine whether surveillance/undercover is needed—follow department procedures, including notification of supervisor since these may require coordination with different units and/or overtime Work suspect leads, including checking diverse information sources (e.g., phone records, credit histories, civil courts, FBI ViCAP) 			

Crime Scene Investigators, District Attorney, and Medical Examiner
Digital Forensics
Homicide Investigators
Patrol Officers
Patrol Supervisor
Public Information Officer (PIO)

- ¹ Best practices indicate that the uniformed first responders take a proactive role in the investigation. They should not only secure the crime scene but also actively seek witnesses, interview them, and locate and protect evidence outside of the immediate crime scene. This should be done in a systematic, documented manner under the supervision of a uniformed supervisor. For example, the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office has a specific "callout checklist" that deputies complete and give to the patrol supervisor. The uniformed supervisor should be responsible for collecting all information from patrol officers and briefing homicide investigators upon their arrival at the scene. This will maximize the investigative effort, adding value to the potential success of the critical first 48 hours of a homicide investigation.
- ² For example, in San Diego, the patrol sergeant designates a patrol officer to act as the scribe, who documents information using a standardized form, with a full running log of who enters and leaves the crime scene and when, as well as everything that is done at the crime scene.
- ³ The Denver Police Department sets up two tape barriers at a homicide crime scene: a large outer perimeter using yellow tape and the inner perimeter, which is the actual crime scene, with red tape. This adds a layer of control for crime scene access and more working room for investigators and CSIs.
- ⁴ The Sacramento County Sheriff's Office has first-responding uniformed deputies perform the initial witness interviews at the scene on the patrol unit's dash-mounted camera in order to get a more accurate initial statement and to avoid later changes in the witness statements.
- ⁵ All of the successful agencies with high clearance rates have an intelligence analyst or crime analyst directly assigned to the homicide unit or have immediate access to an analyst. All emphasized the importance and added value the analyst brings to the investigation. As such, investigators stressed that the analyst be brought on the investigation team at the very beginning. In Richmond, the analyst also responds to the crime scene.
- ⁶ The Baltimore County Police Department assigns the uniformed patrol officer who initially responded to the homicide to the homicide investigation team. The patrol officer works in plainclothes with the homicide investigators and typically works the case for the first 48 to 72 hours. The reason is that the patrol officer knows the people in the community as well as the geographic area better than the homicide investigators; hence, the officer is a good resource. The assignment is also for professional development of patrol officers.
- ⁷ The Baltimore County Police Department has a policy of "wall-to-wall video-recording." It has found that video-recording the entire early investigation process, including full recording of the entire interview of witnesses, has significantly enhanced its investigation and prosecution of cases. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office has a policy of "wall-to-wall video-recording" of suspect interviews.
- ⁸ The Denver Police Department has a large Victim Assistance Unit that includes funds for witness relocation. The homicide unit will contact the advocacy office as soon as it appears a witness may be in jeopardy and have them relocated within hours.
- ⁹ At the San Diego Police Department, it is standard procedure to have all units involved in the investigation, including CSIs, reconvene before they leave the crime scene to discuss the case and make sure all information is vetted and to plan for the next steps in the investigation.
- ¹⁰ For smaller agencies that do not have a CSI, a resource is the National Forensic Science Technology Center, which offers a 16-hour online Crime Scene Investigation training program. For more detail, see <http://www.nfstc.org/service/forensics-training/online-course-intro-to-csi/>.
- ¹¹ At most of the successful agencies, the District Attorney's Office does not respond to a homicide scene unless requested or a high-profile case. In Denver, a District Attorney responds to every homicide scene to provide legal advice and assistance when asked, to observe all suspect interviews, and to participate in briefings. Denver Police Department investigators find this to be good practice for building the case and emphasized that the police lead the investigation, not the District Attorney.
- ¹² Data dumps from cell towers can be very useful; however, procedures for cell tower data dumps should be developed because the process can be confusing, time-consuming, and costly. Multiple wireless phone carriers will use a single tower; therefore, a subpoena/warrant/court order (depending on the jurisdiction) must be obtained for each carrier (and a fee paid to each carrier). A policy needs to be established for when cell tower dumps will be requested, designation of an approving authority in the department, and step-by-step procedures for going through the process.
- ¹³ This requires ongoing communication with the Public Information Officer. The Baltimore County Police Department also posts crime and suspect information to Patch.com and to iWatch in order to push information to the community quickly. For more information, see <http://www.patch.com> and <http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Subscribe/iWatch.html>.

- ¹⁴ Each successful agency has a similar unit with different names; e.g., Fugitive Unit in Denver, Major Crimes Bureau in Sacramento County, Criminal Apprehension Unit in Baltimore County, and Street Crime Unit in Richmond. These units conduct surveillances, monitor social media, work informants, seek information from other agencies, and use any other lawful tactic to locate suspects. These units have developed an expertise in finding people, and homicide investigators find them to be of great value.
- ¹⁵ The Richmond Police Department homicide investigators take a community-based approach to all victims' families. They assist the victim's family with final arrangements and grief counseling and keep the family constantly apprised of the status of the investigation and prosecution. This holistic approach aids in the investigation and prosecution of the offender but is also viewed as "the right thing to do" for citizens and victims.

Appendix A Project Team

Project Team

BJA Project Management

Michael Medaris, Law Enforcement Senior Policy Advisor
Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice

Project Team

David L. Carter, Ph.D., Team Leader
Michigan State University

William Blackburn
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Police Department

Jorge Duran
San Diego, California, Police Department

John Jackson
Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department

Timothy Keel
Federal Bureau of Investigation, Behavioral Analysis Unit

Brian Russell
Richmond, Virginia, Police Department (Retired)

Project Coordination and Support

Gina Hartsfield, Senior Vice President
Institute for Intergovernmental Research

Regina Schimpf
Institute for Intergovernmental Research

Appendix B

Homicide Callout Worksheet

Homicide Callout Worksheet⁴²

(To be completed by first-responding patrol officer)

DATE _____ TOC _____ TOA _____

REPORT NUMBER _____

EVENT # _____

OF SCENE(S) _____

LOCATION(S):

PRIMARY OFFICER(S):

NAME	BADGE #	UNIT #	CELL
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

ADDITIONAL OFFICER(S):

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

VICTIM(S):

NAME	DOB	ADDRESS	NOTES
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

MEDICAL PERSONNEL:

NAME/MEDIC # _____

Time Pronounced (V-1) _____ (V-2) _____

⁴²The model for this document is from the Sacramento County, California, Sheriff's Department.

WEAPON(S) USED _____

VEHICLE(S):

LICENSE PLATE #	YR	MAKE	MODEL	COLOR	NOTES
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

VEHICLE(S) IMPOUNDED FOR EVIDENCE? Yes No

_____ TOW COMPANY: Yes No PROPERTY WAREHOUSE: Yes No

STATUS INTO RESIDENCE/VEHICLES? RESIDENCE: Yes No VEHICLE: Yes No

HOW? (PROBATION, PAROLE, CONSENT, ETC.) _____

CONSENT TO SEARCH OBTAINED? Yes No IF SO, BY WHOM? _____

FORM SIGNED? Yes No

SEARCH WARRANT? Yes No ASSIGNED TO: _____

KEYS/PASSCARD OBTAINED? Yes No _____

CANVASS COMPLETE? Yes No _____

CORONER NOTIFICATION (PHONE NUMBER): TIME _____ DATE _____

DEPUTY CORONER (PHONE NUMBER-AFTER HRS)

DEPUTY CORONER NAME _____ BADGE # _____

PATHOLOGIST NAME _____

BODY REMOVAL TEAM _____

CORONER ARRIVAL TIME _____ CORONER CLEAR OF SCENE _____

CORONER REPORT # _____

CRIME LAB _____

COUNTY OPERATOR _____

CRIME SCENE CLEANUP _____

ID BUREAU/PROP WAREHOUSE REQUESTS _____

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE (PHONE NUMBER) _____

(AGENCY) _____

REPORT # _____

CANVASS OF _____

DETECTIVE NAMES:

RESIDENCES SPOKEN TO:

RESIDENCES—NO ANSWER—FLYER LEFT:

DEPUTY/BADGE #

Briefing

- CAD event #/report #/call time/97 time
- ID all officers, primary officer
- Car cameras
- Medical personnel, pronouncement time
- Key witnesses
- Evidence
- Canvass

Resources/Follow-Up

- Media/tip lines
- Pawnshops
- Outside agencies (teletypes, trax flyer)
- 9-1-1 calls ([agencies], fire)
- Patrol car video
- Coroner/pathologist
- Notifications
- Cell phones
- Major crimes bureau
- Canvass (scene/suspects' residence)
- Computer analysis
- CLETS check
- Informants
- Pretext calls
- Financial records
- Tower dump
- Wiretap

Scene

- Lighting/windows/doors
- Thermostat
- Fridge/garbage
- TV, videos/mail
- Phones—cell/landline
- Phone books/calendars
- Computers, cameras
- Purses/wallets/indicia
- Trace evidence/swabs
- Blood/biological evidence
- Weapons
- Money/financial records
- CSI—fingerprint, photograph, Bluestar, measurements, swab stains
- Crime lab—shoeprint lifts, impressions, collect blood, alternate light source
- Clean scene/Hygentek
- Police dogs (people/property/guns)
- Witnesses/suspects—DNA swabs/GSR, fingerprint, photograph
- Victim at hospital/take clothes and photos
- Vehicles—photo, GSR, seal door, follow to tow location
- Surveillance cameras

Appendix C

Homicide Investigation Briefing Script

Homicide Investigation Briefing Script⁴³

I am (rank/ID#/unit) _____.

At _____ hours, (agency) Police Communications received a call from (name/address/phone #)

_____.

The call was entered in Communications at _____ hours.

The call was dispatched at _____ hours. The incident number is _____.

The call originally came in as a (type) _____ on Beat # _____
at (address) _____.

Weather conditions at the time of the incident were (clear/rain/foggy, etc.) _____.

The approximate temperature at the time of the incident was _____.

Officer(s) was/were the first officer(s) on the scene, arriving at _____ hours.

Name(s)

The victim has been identified as (name/address/dob/race/sex/height/weight, etc.)

_____.

Infant death—Primary caregiver during incident was (name/address/phone #/DOB/race/sex, etc.)

_____.

Paramedic Unit # _____ Engine Co # _____ transported the victim to _____.

Paramedic #1 _____ ID # _____

Paramedic #2 _____ ID # _____

⁴³The model for this document is from the San Diego, California, Police Department.

Officer _____ ID # _____ rode/went to the hospital with the victim and did/did not obtain a statement from the victim. The victim's statement, if any, is:

The victim was pronounced dead by: Dr. _____ at _____ hours.

The victim is/was located: (describe scene, position of body, wounds if known, and possible weapon)

Initial information/interviews have revealed the following scenario/scene conditions:

Priority witnesses are: (name/address/phone/current location)

The suspect(s) is/are described as follows: (name/address/dob/race/sex/height/weight, etc.)

The suspect vehicle is described as:

Checklist

1. _____ Scene containment, protection of evidence, time perimeter established at _____ hours. (LIMIT ACCESS INTO AND OUT OF THE SCENE. LEAVE SCENE INTACT UNTIL ARRIVAL OF INVESTIGATORS; do not drain water from tubs, sinks, etc. Protect locations where latent prints may possibly be found, etc.)
2. _____ Ensure scene perimeter is large enough, taking into account the type of case (consider escape route of suspect).
3. _____ Neighborhood witness check completed.
4. _____ Identify, isolate, and interview all witnesses.
5. _____ Document the witness search.
6. _____ Attempt to identify the suspect.
7. _____ Broadcast all units if necessary.
8. _____ Conduct a follow-up investigation.
9. _____ Record all license plates in the area of the scene.

Follow-Up Investigation: (Describe what steps were taken to identify and arrest suspects.)

Are there any questions?

Maintain control of the scene until the scene is released to the investigator. Do not release the scene prior to the arrival of an investigator without the approval of an investigator.

Control of the scene was relinquished to _____ at _____ hours.

How may we be of further assistance?

Resources

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About BJA

The [Bureau of Justice Assistance](#) (BJA) is a component of the [Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice](#). BJA's mission is to provide leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal justice strategies to achieve safer communities. BJA supports programs and initiatives in the areas of law enforcement, justice information sharing, countering terrorism, managing offenders, combating drug crime and abuse, adjudication, advancing tribal justice, crime prevention, protecting vulnerable populations, and capacity building.

The *Homicide Process Mapping: Best Practices for Increasing Homicide Clearances* document furthers BJA's efforts to provide national leadership in criminal justice policy, training, and technical assistance and to help disseminate information on best and promising practices to further the administration of justice.

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