

USING RESEARCH TO MOVE POLICING FORWARD

BY CAPTAIN JAMES NOLETTE

A 2014 LEADS scholar explains how his agency uses evidence-based research to reduce crime and better help the public.



Today I drove a Dodge Charger to the Fayetteville (North Carolina) Police Department, where I worked an eight-hour day shift. I wore a white uniform top with navy blue uniform pants and had my 9mm Glock handgun, with which I train four times a year during state-mandated trainings. I used my department-issued smartphone to speak with a member of the public in a quick and transparent manner. The command staff and I discussed crime trends and upcoming events, analyzed past responses and outcomes, and reviewed officer schedules.

I tell you this because every decision that I make as a law enforcement officer is — and should be — based on research. It could be as simple as how effective it is for police officers to carry a tourniquet on their duty belts or as high profile as storing data from body-worn cameras. Research dictates everything that officers do, whether we realize it or not.

For example, the way patrol officers respond to calls, the amount of patrol coverage allocated to a given geographical area, and how detectives evaluate and investigate cases are all based on research from the 1970s. Most supervisors and command staff are familiar with the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment,¹ arguably one of the best-known research projects to date in the field of law enforcement. Yet most of today's junior officers do not know why their agency deploys patrol officers and detectives in a given fashion; often, to these officers, it simply *makes sense*.

As we manage limited budgets to maximize resources and efficiency, research will play an ever-growing role in law enforcement. Today, research results can reach a large audience because of technology and the ease of



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disseminating information. I know that agencies in Saskatchewan, Canada, are looking at a collaborative approach to reducing crime by addressing both criminal and social aspects and how to keep offenders from re-offending.² Data from the Saskatchewan Hub Model — and other projects around the globe — might prove invaluable to agencies like the Fayetteville Police Department as we look for innovative ways to address crime trends.

Using CompStat to Reduce Crime

In the 1990s, the New York City Police Department developed CompStat, a creative approach to looking at crime and accountability. CompStat places an image of crime on a map, so that it can be tracked and evaluated, and assesses the resources and techniques used.

Agencies across the country have adopted the CompStat model of policing. Why? Because the research shows that if used properly, along with other policing techniques, there is a great likelihood that crime can be reduced.³ Some argue that it is not CompStat that reduces crime but rather the techniques used in conjunction with CompStat. Either way, crime is reduced, and the research proves it.

In the Fayetteville Police Department, we have a robust CompStat program that, together with the sector model of policing and intelligence-led policing, has seen great reduction in crime. Every Wednesday morning, we meet with members from neighboring agencies and military representatives from Fort Bragg's Provost Marshal to discuss crime trends and responses. We have also developed a Crime

Intelligence Unit, which focuses on crime analytics and how crime affects every aspect of life within our jurisdiction.

Incorporating Research Into Practice

In recent years, the Fayetteville Police Department has implemented numerous programs and made many decisions based on research, and we continually evaluate these programs and decisions for their effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Here are some examples:

- We have developed an electronic monitoring unit that places grant-funded GPS monitors on offenders for specific felony crimes, such as robbery and burglary, while the offenders await the conclusions of their court cases. The offenders enter this program, which is based on past practices and success from other agencies in North Carolina, as a condition of their release. By using GPS technology and crime-scene correlation, the Fayetteville Police Department can compare the known location of crimes to the known locations of offenders wearing GPS locators. We do not constantly monitor the offenders; instead, we run a daily report correlating the offenders' locations with crime locations. This program has limited the recidivism rate among these offenders and has freed up space within our local county jail. We have also seen significant reductions in robberies and property crimes.⁴
- Fayetteville patrol officers currently work a 10-hour shift, rotating between weekdays and weekends on a quarterly basis. Each of our three districts has one overlap day a week when the majority of their officers work. This schedule is based on NIJ-funded research⁵ and agency best practices. Meanwhile, schedules for our detective division are unit specific, because detectives must be present when the crime they investigate typically occurs. In our investigative division, we have three separate schedules for different sections of the district. These schedules have reduced overtime within the units and have helped us better manage manpower allocation.

For the past two years, the Fayetteville Police Department has also collaborated with a research team from Rutgers University as a pilot organization

for a project called Risk Terrain Modeling, which states that criminal activity is attracted to a given location because of specific risk factors in that area. In theory, by removing those risk factors, we will alter the environment so much that it will no longer appeal to criminals.

The research team, led by Joel Caplan, an associate professor at Rutgers, reviewed five years of crime data and identified five areas that account for a large percentage of Fayetteville's violent crime. Using risk-factor targeting and smart policing concepts, the researchers identified factors that contributed to bringing crime into the five areas and, subsequently, suggested tactics that we could implement in

response to our unique circumstances. Using new operations based on the results of this data analysis, the Fayetteville Police Department was able to reduce violent crime citywide by 11 percent. Not only did we reduce crime, but we did so with minimal disruption to normal patrol functions and no additional resources.⁶ The bottom line: Research-backed operations can be effective, inexpensive and sustainable.

The LEADS Program

In October 2014, based on the partnership between the Fayetteville Police Department and the Rutgers University team, I was recognized for bringing research into the law enforcement workplace.

Developing the Next Generation of Law Enforcement Leaders

by **Theodore D. Robinson**

To support the professional development of research-minded law enforcement officers, NIJ and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) launched the Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science (LEADS) program in 2014. Under LEADS, NIJ awards merit-based scholarships to sworn, midrank officers who have either partnered on a research project or infused research into policy development at their agency.

Through LEADS, NIJ and IACP are helping to develop the next generation of law enforcement leaders. LEADS scholars attend the IACP Annual Conference and Exposition, where they network with law enforcement leaders, learn about the latest research, and see how other agencies and jurisdictions operate. The LEADS scholars can then take back the information they've gleaned from the conference to their own agencies to strengthen policy and practice. Scholarship recipients also attend NIJ's IACP Conference research track, titled "What Works and What Matters in Policing"; participate in private roundtable events with NIJ, Office of Justice Programs and IACP leadership; and participate in the IACP Research Advisory Committee.

NIJ used the insight gained from the first year of the LEADS program to guide development for 2015 and to ensure that we continue to identify rising leaders in law enforcement and nurture their professional growth. Furthermore, the Institute is arranging activities that allow for collaboration between the 2014 LEADS recipients and 2015's incoming class. NIJ hopes that through LEADS, we can ensure that future law enforcement executives use evidence-based research to advance criminal justice.

About the Author

Theodore D. Robinson is an editorial assistant for the National Criminal Justice Reference Service.

As law enforcement officers and administrators, we must be willing to try something, celebrate both successes and failures, share our experiences with other agencies, and develop better methods of policing.

I was one of nine midrank officers chosen to participate in the first year of the Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science (LEADS) program. The LEADS program — a partnership between NIJ and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) — brings together the researchers who study policing, the policymakers who make policing decisions and the officers who implement those decisions with the goal of supporting law enforcement in learning how to use and integrate research into policing. (See sidebar, “Developing the Next Generation of Law Enforcement Leaders.”)

As part of the program, I attended the 2014 IACP annual meeting in Orlando, Florida, met leaders at the U.S. Department of Justice and attended Research Advisory Committee sessions. This year, the LEADS program gave me the opportunity to once again attend IACP’s annual meeting and spend time in Washington, D.C., meeting policymakers and researchers to learn more about how departments and universities across the United States are collaborating to address policing issues through research.

A glimpse at the enormous scope and impact of the work happening around the country has been

eye opening. After attending the IACP Research Advisory Committee (RAC) last year as part of the LEADS program, I submitted a résumé and a letter of interest to join the committee. Today, I am one of the RAC’s newest members.⁷ I am honored to be able to participate in research and research-based projects to find better ways for law enforcement to help the public.

Propelling Policing Forward

For research to be successful, it does not always have to prove that a theory is correct or an operation is effective. We often learn as much — or even more — from failures as we do from successes. As law enforcement officers and administrators, we must be willing to try something, celebrate both successes and failures, share our experiences with other agencies and develop better methods of policing.

I do not rest on past successes. Every day, I look at my job, my profession and myself, and I think about what we can improve and what evidence is available to show that we can improve in those areas. I try not to reinvent the wheel — too many people have done this job for too long to have not tried what I am thinking about. Before making a major decision, I look for the research and whether its results can be recreated or the process tweaked so that it can be successful within my department. As an agency, we are always looking to use new, innovative and evidence-based ways to propel our officers forward.

About the Author

Captain James Nolette has been with the Fayetteville Police Department for 15 years working in areas of patrol and investigation. He is currently assigned as the Executive Officer to Chief Harold Medlock. Captain Nolette was a 2014 LEADS scholar.

For More Information

For more information on the LEADS program, go to NIJ.gov, keyword: scholarship.

See NIJ Director Nancy Rodriguez, IACP's Director of Research and Programs Hassan Aden, and former LEADS scholars talk about the program at NIJ.gov, keyword: leadsvideo.

Read about NIJ's current risk terrain modeling grants, "Risk Terrain Modeling Experiment: A Multi-Jurisdictional Place-Based Test of an Environmental Risk-Based Patrol Deployment Strategy" and "Linking Theory to Practice: Testing Geospatial Predictive Policing in a Medium-Sized Police Agency," at NIJ.gov, keywords: 2012-IJ-CX-0038 and 2013-IJ-CX-0054.

6. To date, the Fayetteville Police Department, in partnership with Rutgers University, has not published its final findings, but we have seen promising results based on the work being implemented.
7. *Editor's note:* Captain James Nolette serves alongside police chiefs, sheriffs, executive directors and heads of university research programs on the IACP RAC.

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NCJ 249223

Cite this article as: Nolette, James, "Using Research to Move Policing Forward," *NIJ Journal* 276 (2015): 46-51, available at <http://www.nij.gov/journals/276/Pages/iacp.aspx>.

Notes

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