

The Law Enforcement KNOWLEDGE LAB

CONVENING SUMMARY

June 5–6, 2023 • Denver, Colorado

To mark the first anniversary of the Law Enforcement Knowledge Lab, a two-day convening was held in Denver, Colorado, with over 100 participants including Department of Justice leadership, law enforcement leaders, and representatives from Law Enforcement-Mental Health (LE-MH) Learning Sites Program, among others. Over the two days, attendees heard about the recent progress and future direction of the Knowledge Lab, learned about the work of LE-MH sites from across the country, and heard panel discussions on constitutional policing.

Convening Opening and Welcoming Remarks

The meeting came to order with the presentation of the colors followed by a welcome message from Denver Police Chief Ron Thomas. Karhlton Moore, the Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), welcomed the attendees, noting that one of BJA's primary missions is to "be in the field" and to support transformational, field-driven practices. Director

"The Lab helps to close the gaps between the knowledge haves and have-nots. The Knowledge Lab represents one of our best tools, most promising tools to accomplish that lofty goal."

—Karhlton Moore, BJA Director

Moore highlighted the opportunity the Knowledge Lab presents to transform law enforcement by guiding agencies toward evidence-based, constitutional policing practices. Director Moore also highlighted the Knowledge Lab's newly released [Federal Interventions Dashboard](#), a first of its-kind resource to provide user-friendly, easily digestible information on federal civil consent decrees and settlement agreements.

"There is a growing national consensus that we must embrace the lessons learned from our past, learn how to effectively communicate with each other and identify and implement best practices that create safer communities, protect officers and residents alike, and build trust between law enforcement and communities. The purpose and vision behind the Knowledge Lab is to help advance all of those goals by providing law enforcement, along with community leaders, civil rights groups, and other stakeholders, critical tools, resources, and support to help build safer and stronger communities."

—Vanita Gupta, DOJ

Vanita Gupta, Associate Attorney General (AAG) of the United States, also offered welcoming remarks via a pre-recorded video. AAG Gupta discussed the progress

that has been made since the Knowledge Lab’s launch event in 2022 highlighting comprehensive resources under development in four core issue areas: mental health and crisis intervention, investigatory stops and detentions, searches and seizures, and arrests. In the coming months, these resources will include model policies, training curricula, webinars with leaders in the field, and much more.

Law Enforcement Knowledge Lab Update

Jim Burch, President, National Policing Institute (NPI) and Dr. Laura Wyckoff, Senior Director of Knowledge, Learning, and Translation at NPI provided an overview of the current focus and recent progress with the Knowledge Lab. Dr. Wyckoff noted that, while there is a plethora of information available to law enforcement agencies about best practices, it can be challenging to find and identify the best ideas to suit agencies’ needs. The Knowledge Lab strives to help mitigate this type of information overload by providing a virtual roadmap of evidence-based and innovative practices and approaches to constitutional policing.

The Knowledge Lab’s recent focus has been on law enforcement and mental health and crisis response. Law enforcement needs vetted tools and resources to help develop policies and procedures related to mental health and crisis response. A comprehensive playbook that allows agencies to adopt practices that

best fit their needs within their available resources is important. The Knowledge Lab has leveraged its relationships with mental health practitioners and specially trained law enforcement personnel to gather leading approaches to mental health and crisis response. The resulting [website pages](#) contain resources, strategies, and approaches that law enforcement agencies can utilize to fit their specific needs.



LE-MH Program Learning Sites

Cornelia Sigworth, Associate Deputy Director at BJA, and Megan Quattlebaum Justice Center, Director at the Council for State Governments, gave an overview of the [LE-MH Learning Site Program](#). LE-MH learning sites are a resource for agencies looking to tailor strategies and response models to address their own distinct circumstances. Ms. Sigworth and Ms. Quattlebaum presented each LE-MH learning site with an award for their contributions to the program.





Representatives of the LE-MH learning sites pose for a photo after receiving their awards.

Constitutional Policing in Practice: Examples, Thoughts, and Experiences

Panel participants: Sean Smoot, 21CP Solutions; Gerard Bartlett, Albuquerque Police Department; Rebecca Boatright, Seattle Police Department; Andy Harvey, formerly of Pharr (Texas) Police Department; and Maris Herold, Boulder Police Department

The session began with an introduction to constitutional policing—what it is and why it is important in the day-to-day interactions of the police with the community. The panel discussed the idea that equitable and effective responses to mental health crises require collaboration between police and mental health service providers to ensure individuals in crisis have access to the response, treatment, and services they need.

Constitutional policing encompasses fair and unbiased policing practices to ensure that all citizens are treated equally under the law. Constitutional policing goes beyond the traditional crime-fighting approach and places the community at the center of policing decisions. Constitutional policing includes three primary principles: transparency, accountability, and community-oriented policing. Training is a critical component of constitutional policing and

even in the best law enforcement agencies, it should be continuously improved. Training related to constitutional policing should include appropriate use of force, de-escalation tactics, cultural diversity and awareness, communication skills, and implicit bias training.

Law enforcement agencies should follow a three-step process for implementing constitutional policing policies:

- Develop a comprehensive policy that incorporates constitutional policing principles and guidelines.
- Communicate and educate law enforcement agencies, officers, and the public on the policy.
- Monitor implementation, identify and address barriers to compliance, and encourage officers to adhere to the policy.

Primary challenges and limitations of constitutional policing include cultural resistance, resource limitations, and lack of community trust. Forward-thinking leadership and the use of innovative technology (e.g., body cameras, data-gathering and analytics) can help promote constitutional policing practices, as well as diversity and inclusion programs, and maintaining strong partnerships with community stakeholders.

Fireside Chat: Shared Destiny—How Community Safety and Wellness is Tied to Officer Safety and Wellness

Panel participants: Linda Seabrook, Office of Justice Programs; Art Acevedo, Aurora (Colorado) Police Department; and Aqeela Sherrills, Community-Based Public Safety Collective

In light of recent, adverse interactions between the police and the public, the panel discussed police accountability and community engagement. Chief Acevedo reflected on his decision to offer a Houston Police Department escort for the funeral services for George Floyd saying, “It was the right and honorable thing to do.” The only way to begin to make amends was to show contrition, empathy, and compassionate leadership from the outset.

Mr. Sherrills talked about his organization’s role in the notable changes in Newark (New Jersey) Police Department between 2014, before the consent decree, and 2020. Community-Based Public Safety Collective worked with the police and city administration toward the same goal: make sure that our community is safe and that people can go home at night. In 2020, after the death of George Floyd, 12,000 people were in the streets and not one arrest, police shooting, or act of violence occurred. These milestones were attributed to hard work, understanding, constant communication, and a commitment by the community, the city administration, and the police department to doing things better than before.

Creating the Culture of Equitable Enforcement in Practice: Examples, Thoughts, and Experiences

Panel participants: Nola Joyce, 21CP Solutions; Ernest Cato III, Chicago Police Department (retired); Paul Noel, Knoxville Police Department; Regan Rush, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice; Tiffany M. Russell, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

People living with mental illness are more likely to be arrested, injured, and killed in their interactions with police officers, which may be a byproduct of the stigma toward people living with mental illness and perceptions that they are more likely to be violent. Because of inequities in health care access and rates of police contact, people of color, as well as LGBTQ+ people, young people, and people living in poverty, are at higher risk of the outcomes mentioned above when living with mental illness.

Creating a culture that supports equitable responses requires educating officers about the law, mental illness, racial disparities, and resources available in the community. It also requires active collaboration with behavioral health service providers to ensure people living with mental illness are given access to the treatment and services they need. Creating this culture may also reduce the stigma of mental health disorders among officers in the agency, which could result in officers being more likely to seek treatment, open up to others when they need help, and encourage their colleagues to seek help.



Reliance on Validated Information and Innovative Approaches: De-Escalation Policies and Training. What We Know and What We Still Need to Learn.

Panel participants: Dr. Gabrielle T. Isaza, National Policing Institute; Kevin Lutz, Rutgers University Police Department; Tom Wilson, Police Executive Research Forum (PERF); and Justin Witt, Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD)

The panel discussed what we know about use of force and de-escalation training. Panelists agreed that most police training curricula are rooted in tradition and are based on anecdote – not evidence.

De-escalation training is often viewed as a “common sense” approach and a best practice. It is widely endorsed by law enforcement and the public because it is believed to

reduce the frequency and/or severity of use of force by law enforcement.

“We can’t train what works until we know what works!”
—Gabrielle T. Isaza, NP

De-escalation training can reduce use-of-force incidents and officer and citizen injuries. Content and delivery impact the effectiveness of de-escalation training. A holistic approach to de-escalation (e.g., policy, field supervision, managerial reinforcement) in addition to training will likely produce even stronger impact and further increase officer and public safety.

PERF’s Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) Training Guide is designed to fill a critical gap in training police officers how to respond to volatile situations in which subjects are behaving erratically and often dangerously but do not possess a firearm. The panelists agreed that the ICAT training was

an effective, measurable training resource for all types of departments. In the case of Louisville, ICAT training led to remarkable reductions in use of force incidents, citizen injuries, and officer injuries.

Fireside Chat: Lessons Learned While Working to Reform an Agency

Panel participants: Jim Burch, National Policing Institute; and Paul Humphrey, LMPD

In April 2021, the DOJ Civil Rights Division and the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Kentucky opened an investigation into the Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky Metro Government (Louisville Metro) and the LMPD. The investigation is examining whether Louisville Metro and LMPD engaged in excessive force; discriminatory policing; violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and unreasonable stops, searches, seizures, and arrests. The investigation is currently ongoing and case specifics were not discussed.

Lieutenant Colonel Humphrey discussed the importance of law enforcement leadership during and after a “pattern and practice” investigation. While each investigation is unique and each law enforcement agency will respond to the investigative process differently, the LMPD

took many proactive steps, including creating an entirely new bureau, the Accountability Review Bureau, to serve as the compliance arm. The LMPD also restructured its training division to

“... For effective leadership and effective oversight and accountability, [...] you need to have quality, well-written policy that officers can understand and comply with ...”
—Lieutenant Colonel Paul Humphrey, LMPD

include a unit performance review board and audited the department's policies.

LMPD leadership is taking a hard look at its existing policies and practices, looking for promising and/or best practices to implement in Louisville. The Knowledge Lab is becoming such a resource for all law enforcement agencies looking for examples, policies, practices, and templates that help create change. Continuous improvement is LMPD's ultimate goal.

Promoting Continuous Organizational and Professional Improvement: How Do You Know What You Are Doing in Your Jurisdiction Works?

Panel participants: Assistant Chief David Lazar, San Francisco Police Department (SFPD); Blake Christenson, Denver Department of Public Safety; Megan Hitchman, Bexar County, Texas; Chris Richardson, Denver Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) Program

Assistant Chief Lazar and other panelists provided an overview of the impact of data collection and analysis, described how various models, when correctly applied, can serve communities, and noted some failures and areas where improvement is necessary.

"... I love when we talk about data, transparency, and using data to inform public safety strategies ... 31 years ago when I started my career, no one was talking about data and transparency."

—David Lazar, SFPD

The benefits of "big" data in policing and public safety vary from community to community, but some are universal. Data informs enforcement strategies (i.e., how, when, and where officers are deployed for maximum effectiveness) and allows agencies to challenge their thinking and can help see other options to improve public safety. Data can also be used to help demonstrate success, which can be important for budgetary reasons and counter negative narratives. It can be compelling to defend police actions and demonstrate to the public programmatic success with data.

"... Data is important because it helps promote the idea of why programs exist ... and how they can actually impact different areas that historically have been the one size fits all."

—Chris Richardson, Denver STAR Program

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For more Information, email
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