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# Knowledge and Innovation Site Profile

## Use of Force Review at the Fairfax County (VA) Police Department



### KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION SITE PROFILES

This is one in a series of profiles being published as part of the Knowledge and Innovation (KI) Site Network. The agencies highlighted in these profiles are part of the KI Site Network and have demonstrated exemplary practice in a core area of policing. The KI Site Network provides resources and peer engagement opportunities at no cost to law enforcement agencies. Visit [www.leknowledge.org](http://www.leknowledge.org) to learn more.



## THE APPROACH

Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) is part of the Knowledge and Innovation Site Network because it exemplifies best and evidence-based practices in its use of force (UOF) review processes and accountability mechanisms. FCPD's UOF policy was developed through a comprehensive process involving stakeholders and the community. The UOF review process involves multiple layers of review, which inform revisions to policy, training, and supervision. FCPD effectively uses communication strategies regarding UOF compliance and utilizes data analysis to inform strategy and enhance transparency.

## KEY ELEMENTS

### Use of Force Policy

- Explicitly states several key concepts:
  - The value of and preservation for all human life
  - Deadly force should only be used in response to an immediate threat of serious physical harm or death to officers or others on scene
  - Requires that officers use only the level of force necessary whenever possible and appropriate by employing techniques such as de-escalation
  - Requires clear instructions and warnings when feasible before using force
  - Requires officers to provide appropriate medical care as soon as they are practically able
  - Prohibits warning shots

### Knowledge Lab Core Practice Areas

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community Trust &amp; Partnerships</li><li>• Crime Investigations</li><li>• Crime and Violence Response</li><li>• Crime Victim Support</li><li>• Mass Critical Incident Response</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mass Demonstration Response</li><li>• Mental Health &amp; Crisis Response</li><li>• Office Safety &amp; Wellness</li><li>• Public Transparency</li><li>• Recruitment and Retention</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stops, Searches &amp; Arrests</li><li>• Technology</li><li>• Training &amp; Education</li><li>• <b>Use of Force</b></li></ul> |
|--|--|---|

# KEY ELEMENTS

## Use of Force Review Process

- Written directives and checklists to guide review
- Creation of a dedicated Compliance Division (within the Internal Affairs Bureau) focused on the appropriate use and documentation of force
- Review processes result directly in revisions to training, policy, and supervision
- Random audits of body-worn camera footage by first-line supervisors
- Independent police auditor provides additional expertise, oversight, and legitimacy to the review process



## Use of Force Supervision

- Supervisors are notified and report on the scene for all force incidents
- Supervisors complete initial documentation and review in BlueTeam, which is then reviewed by all layers of supervisors
- Watch Commander position enhances the review process and emphasizes adherence to use of force policies agency-wide
- Formal and informal feedback loops in the agency keep all levels of the agency informed and allow supervisors to directly address patterns or trends in use of force

## Use of Force Communication

- Strong organizational messaging about use of force compliance
- Multiple layers to aid real-time communication for use of force updates to command staff
- Promotion of exemplary incidents involving use of force and de-escalation

## Actionable Use of Force Analysis

- Systematic data collection and analysis displayed in a use of force dashboard
- Quarterly review meetings between the Compliance Division and Commanders
- Public-facing annual use of force review report
- Use of force data and patterns are used to improve policy, training, and supervision
- Strategic goals of the department are linked to reducing force and enhancing safety

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## THE BENEFITS

A robust use of force review process results in many benefits to a police agency, both internally and externally. A strong UOF review process ensures accountability following a use of force incident and can help identify problematic practices. Consistent, organizational messaging and transparency surrounding a use of force incident can enhance officers' trust. Having a strong UOF review process can result in increased legitimacy with the community, especially with timely and transparent communication.

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## AGENCY AT A GLANCE

Fairfax County Police Department, with roughly 1,500 sworn officers, serves approximately 1.2 million people in a large urban/suburban area west of Washington, D.C. FCPD's vision statement is "We are committed to reducing the fear and occurrence of crime while safeguarding our community through innovative and effective data-informed policing and engagement to improve the quality of life for all."

*"With [the UOF review process improvements],  
information flow is faster and more proactive, enabling  
quicker response and greater public transparency."  
– FCPD Commander*

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## PHOTO CREDITS

- Images courtesy of the Fairfax County Police Department.