

# 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT OPEN DATA IN POLICING

The police profession has always been entrusted with keeping data close in order to protect privacy interests of citizens and to ensure that those who would use data for criminal purposes do not have access. Police agencies can participate in open data innovation and initiatives without jeopardizing this trust or their responsibilities.

As the open government movement has emerged since early 2009, the creation and use of open data has steadily grown. Today, many cities, counties, states and federal government agencies are releasing data to the public and making it available for use and reuse. Within the mix of government agencies experimenting with open data are a growing number of law enforcement agencies. Several major city and county law enforcement agencies are making available historical and current calls for service data, location data for public safety facilities, and even incident data, after being stripped of personal identifiers that would violate the privacy of individuals. Even small agencies are beginning to take part in this practice. Federal agencies are releasing summary case and statistical data in the law enforcement and criminal justice domains. As a result, citizens, web and mobile app developers, researchers, and advocacy organizations can perform analysis of individual and combined data sets using various visualization tools and can map the data as well, if the data is geocoded. Law enforcement leaders should understand the benefits of open data to the communities they serve and to their agencies, as well. A good primer on open data can be found on the Code for America website at <https://www.codeforamerica.org/governments/principles/open-data/>



## 1 COMMUNITY ANALYSIS OF OPEN DATA COULD YIELD IMPORTANT INSIGHTS INTO POLICING

Open data allows the community to use data in ways that may not have been previously attempted, potentially yielding new insights into crime, safety and community well-being. Potential users include citizens, businesses, academic institutions and advocacy organizations. For example, citizens or researchers combining police data with public health data may identify emerging trends or risks that help the agency take action. Similarly, police data could be analyzed in new ways or combined with sensor data to develop tools or techniques to improve officer safety. By allowing this, citizens can more effectively interact and offer insights and ideas not previously possible.



## 2 OPEN DATA HELPS THE COMMUNITY UNDERSTAND WHAT POLICE DO AND PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR TWO-WAY ENGAGEMENT

As open data is explored, it is common for neighborhood leaders, media and others to share their efforts, which can offer a new perspective into the need and demand for police services. This also provides an opportunity for agencies to extend their community engagement activities, by introducing the data to the community and encouraging its exploration in ways that help the community gain new perspectives and identify issues and areas of concern that can be addressed in partnership.



## 3 OPEN DATA DEMONSTRATES TRANSPARENCY & CAN PROMOTE LEGITIMACY

Providing open data makes a statement about the acceptance of accountability on the part of the agency and its willingness to be transparent. Transparency, acceptance of accountability, and participatory decisionmaking are important concepts for legitimacy, which can enhance law enforcement's ability to be effective in community engagement and crime reduction. In addition, leveraging data in the police-community dialogue may improve the nature and outcome of those conversations.



## 4 PUBLIC SAFETY DATA IS IMPORTANT IN ADDRESSING BROADER COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Police often realize how related their work is to other areas or systems, including public health concerns, economic concerns such as the attraction and sustainability of businesses in the community which provides revenues and jobs, and the ability of the community to thrive in other ways. Open data allows those addressing these important issues to leverage police data, analyze it with other non-police data sets, and to better understand the relationships between the issues to improve interventions.



## 5 OPENING LAW ENFORCEMENT DATA CAN HELP IDENTIFY NEW TOOLS & BETTER PROCESSES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY

Many in the science and technology communities have aspirations of developing the next generation of crime fighting tools, technologies and approaches. Open data levels the playing field and provides all of these entities access to the data they need to be more effective. Companies can use the data to better understand the issues police confront, to develop more precise models, and to test their hypothesis using real data. Providing open data stimulates economic development and promotes the discovery of new technologies. Internal agency users can also benefit from open data.

The Police Foundation is the oldest nationally-known, non-profit, non-partisan, and non-membership-driven organization dedicated to improving America's most noble profession – policing. The Police Foundation has been on the cutting edge of police innovation for 45 years since it was established by the Ford Foundation as a result of the President's Commission on the Challenge of Crime in a Free Society.