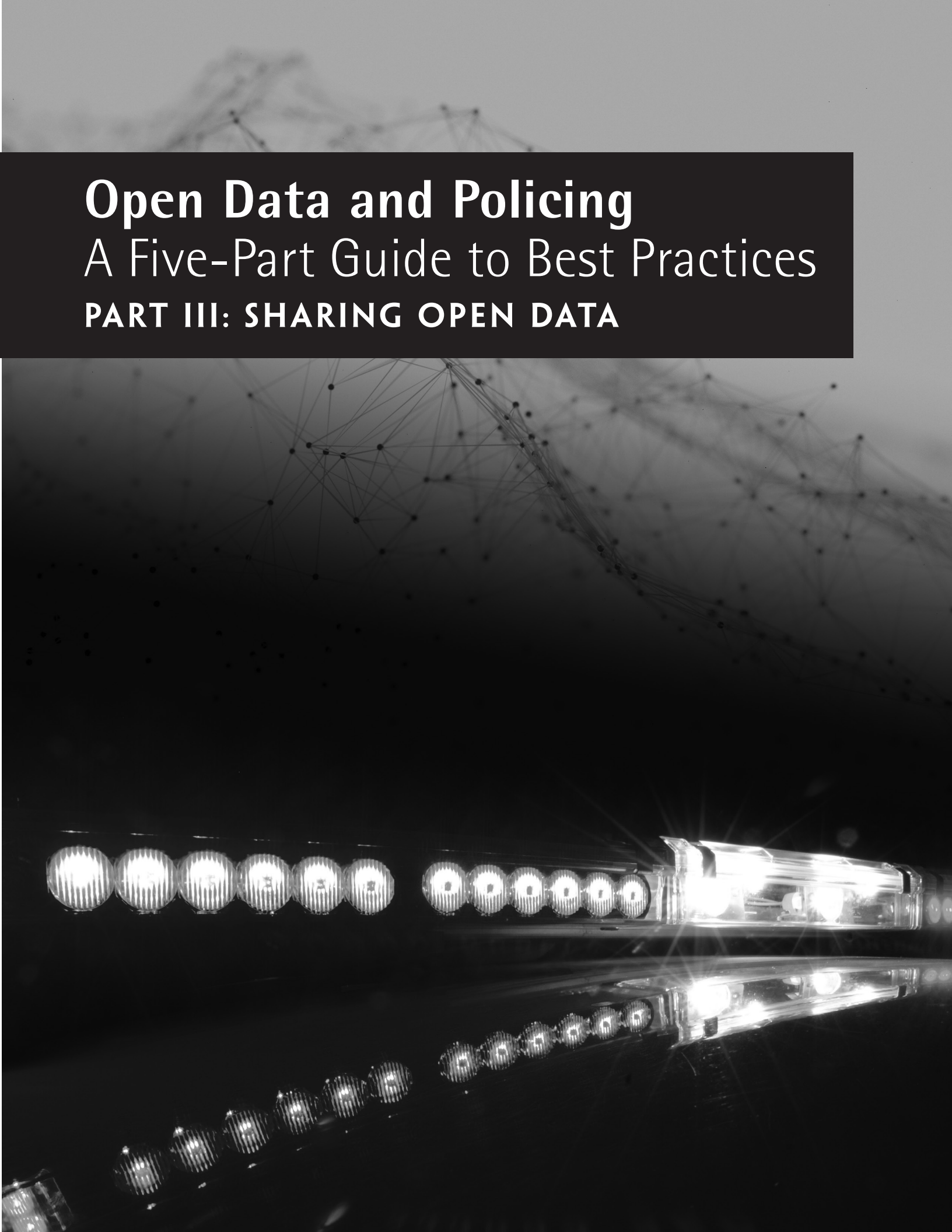


Open Data and Policing

A Five-Part Guide to Best Practices


PART III: SHARING OPEN DATA



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This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 2016CRWXX001, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

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Recommended citation:

Police Foundation. 2018. *Part III: Sharing Open Data*. Open Data and Policing: A Five-Part Guide to Best Practices. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Published 2018



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I. Introduction

Law enforcement agencies nationwide, large and small, have already released open datasets representing citizen calls for service, arrests and citations, police response to resistance, assaults on officers, citizen complaints, bicycle and pedestrian collisions, traffic stops, drug overdoses, hate crimes, agency training and workforce data, and more. By providing open data, members of the public, community groups, and law enforcement agencies can independently and collaboratively analyze the data to identify potential problems, improve understanding of the challenges faced by law enforcement and their responses, craft solutions, and improve their communities. To date, more than 140 law enforcement agencies have joined the Police Data Initiative (PDI), a community of practice consisting of members that have committed to releasing open data.¹

Drawing from promising practices used by these law enforcement agencies, this five-part best practice series aims to guide executives and members of local law enforcement agencies as they release open data. This guide, *Part III: Sharing Open Data*, outlines key points for agencies to consider in developing their datasets for public release.

1. For more information on the Police Data Initiative, visit <https://www.policedatainitiative.org/>.

II. How Can Agencies Share Their Open Data?

Beyond releasing a new dataset, agencies can publicly share data in multiple ways. By strategically publicizing their open data, agencies can further engage their communities and ensure that the release is messaged appropriately. Prior to dataset releases, it is helpful to develop a departmental strategy outlining roles and responsibilities for each step in the data release process. Following this strategy and other existing departmental public relations policies can help the agency use platforms effectively.

Agencies can enhance the data-sharing process in the following ways:

- **Connect Locally:** Agencies should contact their local government and community groups for opportunities for collaboration and data dissemination. Where police data is part of a larger citywide transparency effort, local governments may be able to access additional dissemination support. Collaboration with local stakeholders can also help agencies identify local open data policies they may need to follow.
- **Use Social Media and Traditional Media Connections:** Agencies should collaborate with their Public Information Officer (PIO), or other employee that handles media relations, to develop an open data release strategy.
- **Develop an Open Data Portal:** An open data portal is a website, or an area on a website, that presents the open data to the public. Data portals can be hosted by the jurisdiction, such as on the agency or city's existing website, or can be created by a technology vendor on a new jurisdiction-sponsored website. Data portals allow agencies to provide not only their data, but also its context. By providing contextual information for the dataset and associated data fields, viewers can better understand and use the data for informed analyses. The contextual information can also allow the agency to begin a dialogue with the community on the issues being presented by the data from a place of common understanding.

Promising Practices in Data Portal Features

Although there is no standard for features to include in an open data portal, promising practices that agencies have included are listed here. Generally, an open data portal should provide the following:

- An easily accessible link or button to download the open data
- An explanation of how to use the website or download the data if it is not intuitive
- Supporting materials for understanding the data (e.g. description of the dataset, data dictionary or “codebook,” frequency of updates)
- Contact information or a comment area for users to send feedback, suggestions, or questions about the dataset(s)

To offer context for the data, some agencies have additionally chosen to provide the following:

- A letter from the agency executive or other note from the agency about the dataset(s) and value of open data
- Summary statistics of the incident-level data
- Visualizations of the data
- A mobile-friendly version of their data portal to attempt to increase or sustain web traffic

III. How Can Agencies Create a Data Portal?

Agencies can create a data portal independently with local information technology (IT) resources, or through a technology vendor. Each approach has its own advantages:

- **Independently:** Most agencies already have their own website or page on their local government website. Agencies can create an open data portal on this website by creating a page dedicated to providing the open data. By including the open data portal as part of the agency's existing website, agencies can have direct control over the content and display of their data portal. They can make updates to the data portal directly on their website and include text, images, and links in the same way they would add to other areas of their website. For example, the **Harlingen (Texas) Police Department** created a data portal on their existing agency website, which includes a message from Chief Jeffry Adickes welcoming viewers to use the information presented on the website.² Given the variance in IT resources among agencies, agencies should consult their IT staff to determine best courses of action for data portal development. Some agencies, by beginning the open data process and reaching out to their local IT resources, have developed more collaborative relationships with their local governments.
- **With a Technology Vendor:** It may make sense to use a technology vendor to release, maintain, and update open data and create a data portal. Many technology vendors can assist agencies with releasing open data, particularly if they have existing relationships with local government. For example, since the City of Tacoma selected Socrata to create their open data portal, the **Tacoma (Washington) Police Department** could use this existing portal to host their police data.³ The Tacoma Police Department also points to its data portal from its agency website; for example, Chief Don Ramsdell mentions the portal in an embedded [YouTube video](#) of a discussion of department efforts to build trust, relationships, and understanding between community members and officers.⁴

2. "Harlingen Police Department," City of Harlingen Texas, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.myharlingen.us/page/police.home>.

3. "Results 253," City of Tacoma, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://data.cityoftacoma.org/stories/s/Tacoma-Performance-Landing-Page-Demo/q7y9-pq69>.

4. "Talks with TPD," City of Tacoma Washington, accessed March 8, 2018, https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/police/talks_with_tpd.

IV. Case Studies

Rochester (New York) Police Department

“I think we should be looking at open data as the opportunity to inform a more productive discussion, rather than being fearful of getting scooped, exposing inefficiencies, or having our data misrepresented.”

– Nicholas Petitti, Director of Office of Business Intelligence, Rochester Police Department⁵



Rochester (New York)
Police Department
badge

The Rochester Police Department (RPD) is the law enforcement agency serving the City of Rochester, New York. The RPD employs approximately 750 sworn officers that serve a community of over 200,000. Having joined the Police Data Initiative in December 2016, the RPD opened its data portal to the public with a “soft launch” in January 2017, following a six-month planning and development process.

The RPD Office of Business Intelligence (OBI), comprising a database manager, statistician, crime analyst, and director, spearheaded the department’s open data planning process. The police department was the “guinea pig” for the open data plan of the greater City of Rochester, and the OBI was tasked with shaping the RPD planning process to fit the city’s goals.

The six-month process involved discussions with RPD command staff and various stakeholders throughout the department about what data portal platform to use, which datasets to make public, and which objectives could achieve quick and easy wins in the project’s infancy. According to OBI Director Nicholas Petitti, the RPD’s first priority was to get the data portal running, with a “mindset of incremental improvement over delayed perfection.”

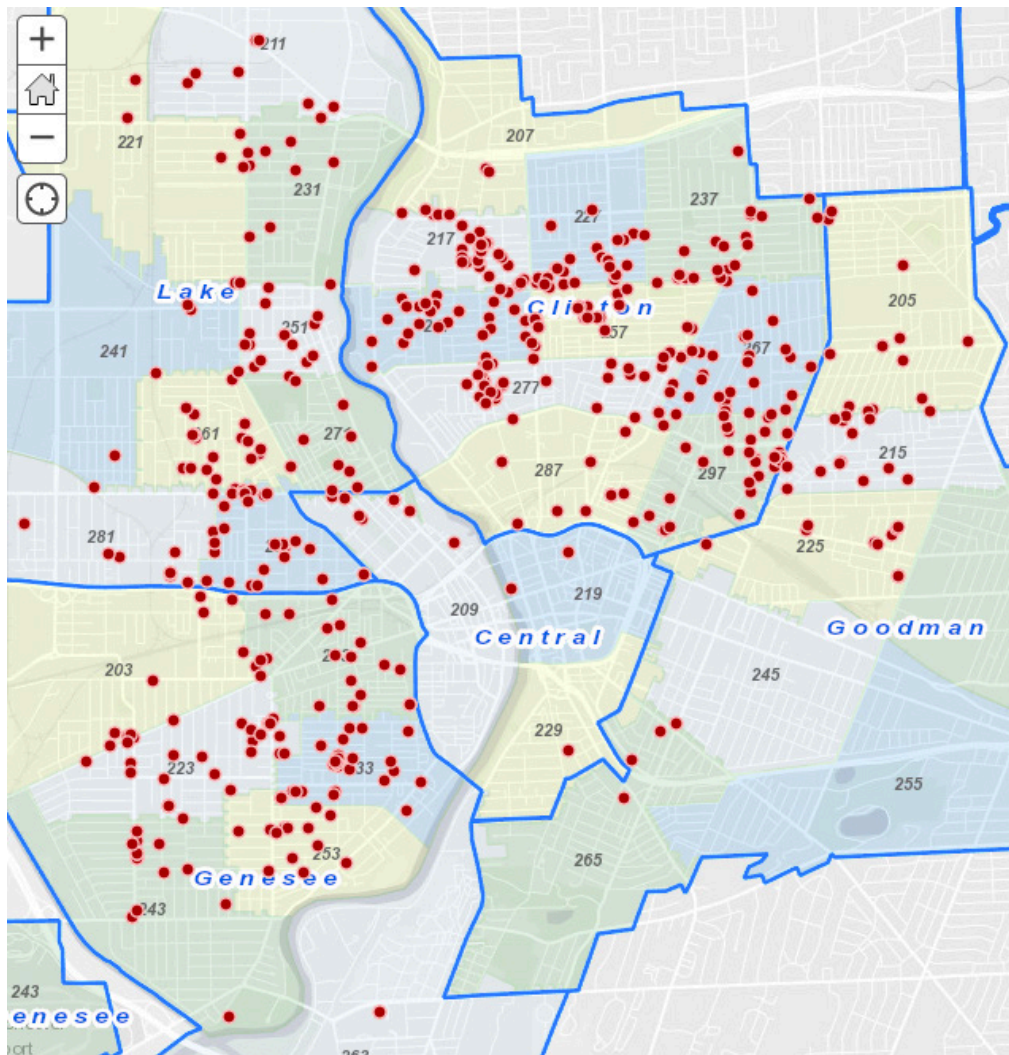
The RPD designed many of its datasets to be standardized and automated so that they do not require significant long-term maintenance. Once the data portal⁶ was launched and set to update nightly, the team could shift its workload to integrating datasets and keeping the data portal content fresh. Although most of the department’s data is stored on the city’s enterprise data warehouse system, the city gave the OBI increased access to the police data to maximize the office’s ability to

5. Nicholas Petitti, Rochester Police Department, interview with Police Foundation staff, February 9, 2018.

6. The RPD Open Data Portal can be found at <http://data-rpdny.opendata.arcgis.com/>.

work with the data in unique ways. This relationship with the city has allowed the Rochester Police Department to create innovatively-designed datasets and present them in multiple formats, both externally via the open data portal and internally to improve collaboration and decision making.

Data visualizations on Rochester's open data portal



The open data team valued the buy-in from other department stakeholders and sought to address their concerns—chief among them the fear that releasing open data would increase scrutiny of the department. Petitti strongly believes in the open data benefits of informing the public and fostering trust and transparency. He also believes, however, that the benefits are only fully realized when datasets are presented in a way that engages viewers.

To increase public use and understanding, the RPD has prioritized making its data portal mobile-friendly, keeping webpage content fresh, providing codebooks for all datasets to guide users through police-specific terminology, and integrating open data into a greater community

engagement and social media plan. The RPD plans to build on its open data goals by continuing to publish new reports and articles alongside new datasets, increasing its social media presence, and collect more user feedback.

Rochester Police Department Codebook

Variable	Position	Label	Format
OBJECTID 1	1	Object ID	Numeric
Residency	2	Residency	Text
Full_Name	3	Full Name	Text
Sex	4	Sex	Text
Race	5	Race	Text
Ethnicity	6	Ethnicity	Text
Age	7	Age	Numeric
Hire_Date	8	Hire Date	Date
Age_At_Hire	9	Age at Hire	Numeric
Years_On_Job	10	Years Employed	Numeric
Employee_Status	11	Employee Status	Text
Employee_Type	12	Employee Type	Text
Rank	13	Rank	Text
Rank_Start_Date	14	Rank Start Date	Date
Shape_Area	15	Shape Area	Numeric
Shape_Length	16	Shape Length	Numeric

South Bend (Indiana) Police Department



South Bend (Indiana)
Police Department
badge

The South Bend Police Department (SBPD) is the law enforcement agency that serves the city of South Bend, Indiana; it employs over 240 sworn officers and serves over 101,000 residents.⁷ The SBPD joined the Police Data Initiative in September 2016. When the City of South Bend proposed creating standalone open data portals for city government agencies through its existing Esri license, the SBPD volunteered to be the pilot agency. This led to the launch of the SBPD Transparency Hub⁸ in April 2017 following a four-month development process.

7. "2016 Crime in the United States," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/tables/table-26/table-26-state-cuts/table-26-indiana.xls>.

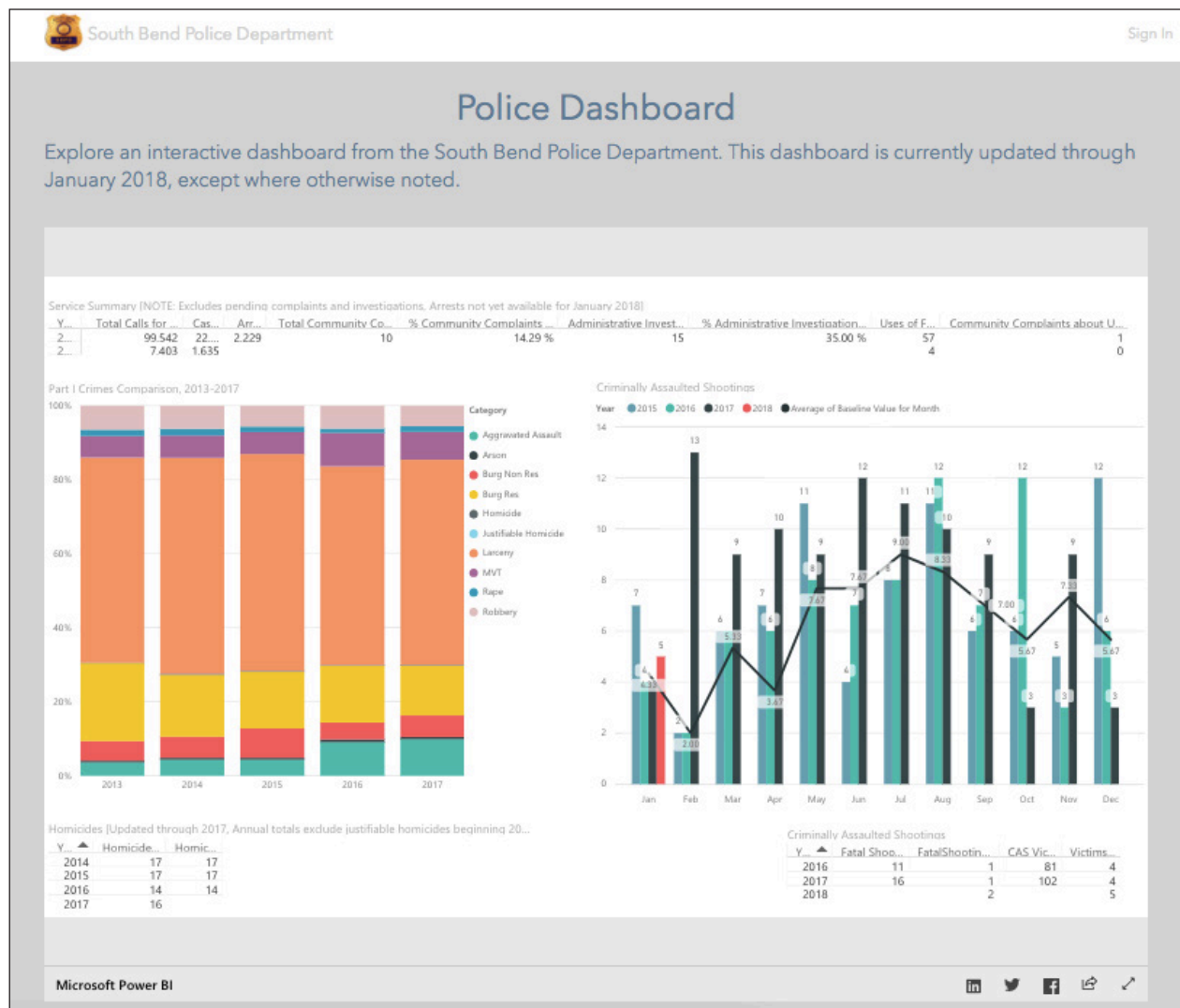
8. The South Bend Police Department Transparency Hub can be found at <http://police-southbend.opendata.arcgis.com/>.

After deciding to launch the SBPD Transparency Hub, the SBPD created a plan with the City of South Bend. A significant priority of the SBPD and the city's Business Analytics Team and Civic Innovations Team was that the platform be user-friendly for the community and the media.

“After hearing about PDI, we wanted to make sure to know how to tackle two questions: how do we make sure to provide enough context to help people interpret and understand what the data means, and how do we release information [that is] related to the need for transparency, but [is] not necessarily raw data?”

— Danielle Fulmer, Director of Business Analytics, City of South Bend.⁹

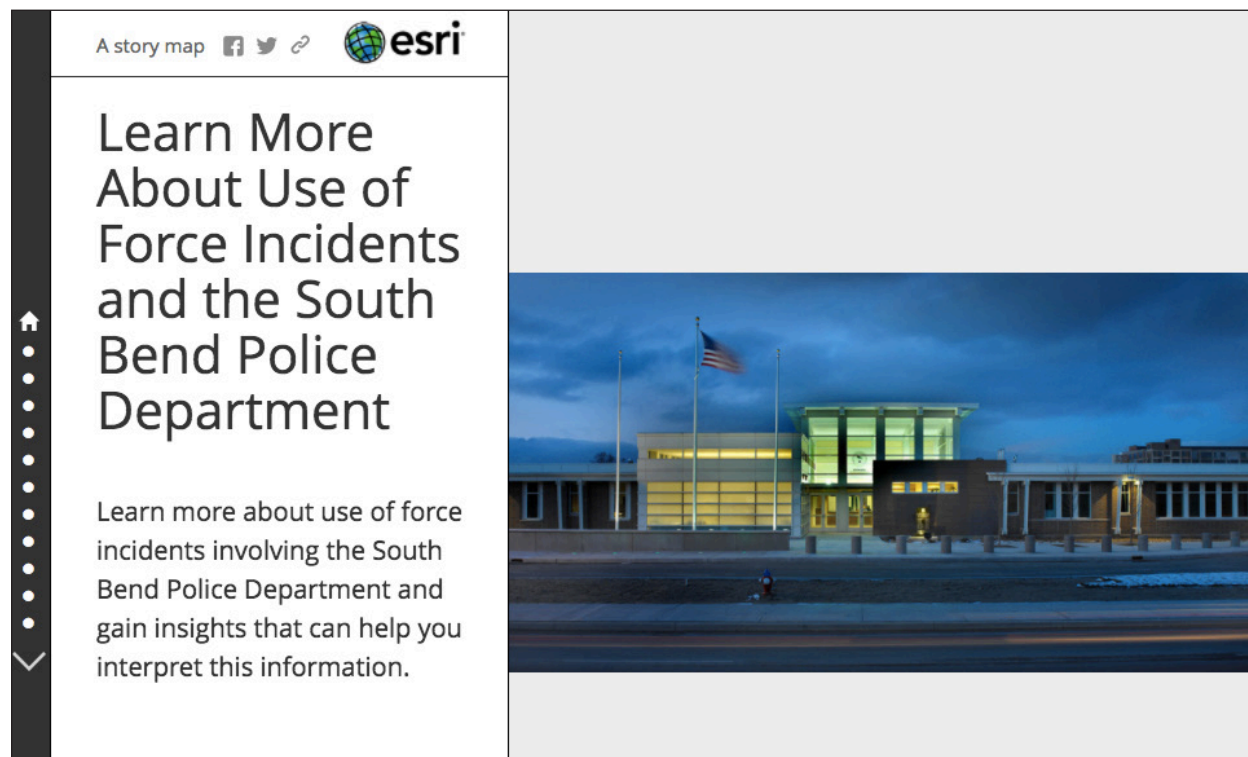
South Bend Police Dashboard



9. Danielle Fulmer, City of South Bend, interview with Police Foundation staff, February 27, 2018.

With these considerations in mind, the city's open data team, in collaboration with the SBPD, decided to organize the data through a Transparency Hub that includes interactive visuals and other information to enable viewers to process and better understand information about the police department and its activities. "The dashboard is good for people who don't want to sit down like a researcher and go through an Excel spreadsheet, but then if you are one of those people who needs to understand underlying causes. . . [i]t will help them to kind of define certain terms," Fulmer explained.¹⁰ The hub also provides variables and fields to help users understand the datasets, as well as documents and reports that transparently provide information about department operations and characteristics to the public.

South Bend use of force storymap



On the Transparency Hub, the SBPD also includes an interactive storymap of use of force incidents. Since many members of the South Bend community and media already engage with the police department regularly, the SBPD wanted to ensure that their requests and concerns were being considered when deciding which datasets to release. Use of force data was one of the most frequently requested datasets, and its release has since been received positively. As SBPD Chief Scott Ruszkowski explains, "There is nothing to hide here. It is what it is—if we have to use force, we use force. . . . The police department has many things to fix, no doubt, but there are a lot of

10. Fulmer, interview with Police Foundation (see note 9).

things we are doing right and people need to know about it.”¹¹ With the data open to the public, South Bend can be transparent and provide context for officer uses of force, easily point to its data portal when questioned about police operations, and allow the media to quickly access records for more accurate information. Additionally, in Chief Ruszkowski’s evaluation, releasing data about Police Officer Commendations has noticeably improved officers’ performance.¹²

The SBPD’s use of the Transparency Hub has allowed the department to improve its relationships with its community. As Chief Ruszkowski said, “We have always maintained a relationship with the community. For the past three years, we have been attending neighborhood meetings, study and diversity councils, board of public safety, and school and neighborhood walks. We have an emphasis on relationship policing.”¹³ To effectively showcase work of the SBPD officers, Chief Ruszkowski agrees that there is need to listen to the people who live in their community. “We cannot do our job, which is to help, without the people we are sworn to protect telling us what they want.”¹⁴ The SBPD is continuing to develop additional datasets for publication, using open data resources to build trust through transparency.

11. Scott Ruszkowski, South Bend Police Department, interview with Police Foundation staff, February 27, 2018.

12. “Police Officer Commendations,” South Bend Open Data Portal, accessed April 17, 2018, <https://data-southbend.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/police-officer-commendations>.

13. Ruszakowski, interview with Police Foundation (see note 11).

14. Ruszakowski, interview with Police Foundation (see note 11).



V. Conclusion

As agencies develop plans for open data releases, they should also think through how they will share the open data. Using available tools to share open data can help agencies to better meet their open data goals and objectives. Key lessons learned from Rochester, South Bend, and other Police Data Initiative agencies that have successfully developed practices for sharing their open data include the following:

- Develop the agency's open data objectives and priorities.
- Consider local connections that may support the department's open data-sharing objectives.
- Collaborate with appropriate department personnel on a communications strategy and open data release plan.
- Create an open data portal.
- Select data portal features, such as a codebook, that support the department's open data objectives.
- Continue to release or update content, as appropriate, to sustain and promote community engagement around open data.



About the Police Foundation

The **Police Foundation** is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing innovation and science in policing. As the country's oldest police research organization, the Police Foundation has learned that police practices should be based on scientific evidence about what works best, the paradigm of evidence-based policing.

Established in 1970, the foundation has conducted seminal research in police behavior, policy, and procedure and works to transfer to local agencies the best new information about practices for dealing effectively with a range of important police operational and administrative concerns. Motivating all of the foundation's efforts is the goal of efficient, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

To learn more, visit the Police Foundation online at www.policefoundation.org.



Law enforcement agencies nationwide have released open datasets representing calls for service, arrests, and more. Members of the public, community groups, and law enforcement agencies can analyze this data to identify problems and craft solutions. To date, more than 130 law enforcement agencies have joined the Police Data Initiative (PDI). Drawing from their promising practices, this five-part series aims to guide executives and members of local law enforcement agencies as they release open data.

This guide, *Part III: Sharing Open Data*, discusses the features, use, and development of data portals. It includes case studies of programs in Rochester, New York, and South Bend, Indiana.



1201 Connecticut Ave NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036

www.policefoundation.org

031801865
Published 2018