

DGA Companion: Data Collection Recommendations

Why Data Matters

Following the nationwide protests sparked by the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other unarmed Black Americans, there has been a surge in public demand for changes to policing and public safety more generally. To help inform these desired and needed changes, complete and accurate data on police-community interactions are essential.

With comprehensive and complete data, law enforcement agencies and communities can better evaluate whether policing strategies are achieving their shared public safety goals efficiently, effectively, and equitably. Comprehensive data collection on police-community interactions further enables agencies to better assess officers' conduct and build community trust through transparent, data-informed dialogue about local policing practices.

By providing the recommendations below, informed by lessons learned through our work with communities and law enforcement across the country, we hope to help your agency move toward the comprehensive data collection practices necessary to achieve your public safety equity goals without creating an undue data entry burden for your officers.

General Recommendations

- 1. For each data set collected, include a control ID that enables you to link incidents in the different data sets together appropriately.**
- 2. Consider collecting data on Stops, Use of Force, Crime, and Arrests all within the same system, with a shared control ID.**

When data sets can be linked together, it is easier to pull missing information from one data set for another. For example, if location information is tracked reliably for each CAD event, and each CAD event can be linked to each Use of Force incident, respectively, that can be used to determine the geographic distribution of Use of Force incidents if location information isn't collected within the Use of Force data.

Additionally, when different types of data are collected within a single system and can be reliably linked to one another, this *can* partially alleviate duplicative data entry by officers. For example, rather than having to enter a community member's information into both a use of force form and an incident form, some systems allow users to add a use of force report to an incident report, enabling officers to simply copy the community member information from the incident report to the use of force report.

Finally, having a shared control ID across data types enables law enforcement agencies to see, for example, which CAD record is tied to which specific Stop, Use of Force incident, Crime, Arrest, etc. This enables you to follow the course of events from Stop to finish and identify trends. This may allow you to determine how many interactions with officers result in a Use of Force incident or an Arrest.

3. Collect data primarily in a digital format.

Consider providing a combination of both paper and electronic methods of collecting this data to provide officers the needed flexibility to collect the data under whatever conditions they are working in. For instance, using a Mobile Data Computer may not be possible for officers patrolling on a bicycle or on foot. However, the use of a handheld device or paper forms may work for officers in these circumstances. Providing a range of data collection options enables individual officers to collect data in the way that best fits their needs.

Regardless of how the data is collected, the data must be captured promptly—*i.e.*, as immediately after the interaction as possible—to ensure accurate recall of information for data input. If paper forms are utilized at all, that data then must be inserted into the digital Use of Force data system regularly and often. This will ensure that all of the data is digitally recorded, enabling the analysis of all incidents.

4. Ensure officers input Street Address Details, including zip code.

5. If possible, use geocoding technology for the recording of addresses or latitude and longitude coordinates (e.g., technology that automatically suggests a geocoded location as officers are entering address information).

Use of Force Recommendations

6. Ensure the following variables are tracked for all Use of Force events:

- Nature of Contact (Suspicious Person, Witnessed Crime, Traffic Stop, Call for Service, Warrant, etc.)
- Was the incident officer-initiated?
- Person's Resistance (Verbal Aggression, Physical Force, Fleeing, etc.)
- Whether the person who experienced force possessed a weapon.
- Whether the person who experienced force used a weapon.

With the above-listed variables, your Department can better understand the nature of incidents that are leading to the use of force. For instance, you may find that the majority of Use of Force incidents occur when responding to domestic violence calls. With that finding, you may then want to look at how your officers are responding to those calls and think about what training and policy changes can occur to make those calls safer for all parties.

With comprehensive disposition information across the Use of Force Data, you can, for example, better determine if these incidents result in disparate outcomes across different racial groups.

Information on resistance, as well as weapon use and possession, can shed light on, for example, how often officers use force on individuals perceived to be armed versus unarmed. With that information, you can then further evaluate whether there are differences in the rate of use of force for armed versus unarmed individuals by demographics such as race, gender, age, etc.

Finally, information on whether a person who experienced force was hospitalized or killed can shed light on whether more lethal means of force are being used against some groups over others. Additionally, it may help shed light on, for example, whether any less lethal tool or method is resulting in unexpected numbers of injuries, hospitalizations, or deaths.

7. Refine Police Weapon/Force Type listed as “HAND” to specify type (Hold, Strike, Takedown, Etc.)

In order to enable future bespoke analyses and correlative introspection on behalf of your team and personnel, and without having to rely explicitly on mining the narrative, we recommend that you specify the type of force within the larger category currently listed as “HAND”.

8. Delineate Police Weapon/Force Type listed as “TAS” or “ECD” to differentiate between point versus discharge.

Similar to the above example, we recommend adding a layer of granularity to your force type so you can identify correlations and draw potential patterns based on the most specific circumstances within the force incident. It is typically more efficient to build standalone variables rather than grouping and then decoupling through leveraging of the narrative.

Vehicle and Pedestrian Stop Recommendations

9. Collect demographics (race, ethnicity, gender, age) for every stop based on the officer’s perception.

We recommend that all data points, including demographics, be collected for every stop, including during roadblocks or checkpoints (which should be clearly identified as such to enable delineation).

For Vehicle Stops, we recommend collecting data every time an officer pulls a car over, for any reason. This is to ensure that Vehicle Stops data is comprehensive and allows for a systematic and thorough evaluation of whether disparities exist.

For Pedestrian Stops, under most state laws, as well as federal law, a pedestrian is considered “stopped” when an officer takes actions that, based on the totality of the circumstances, would make a reasonable person feel that they are not free to leave. We acknowledge that this standard is not perfect; however, it is a standard likely already familiar to your officers and one that best ensures the collection of Pedestrian Stop data is also comprehensive.

10. Ensure the following variables are tracked for all Stops:

- Reason for Stop (i.e., Moving Violation, Equipment Violation, Warrant...)
- Whether a search was conducted (on occupant(s) and/or the vehicle)
- Nature of each search (i.e., incident to arrest, plain view, consent, etc.)
- Whether the search found contraband
- Type of contraband found, if any
- Whether a K9 was used to search

With the above-listed variables, you can better identify trends in why people are being stopped and identify whether that aligns with your public safety goals. For instance, you may find that the agency is issuing too many citations for equipment violations, resulting in a disparate financial impact on low-income residents. With that finding, you can then start having discussions, both internally and with your community, about how to address this disparate impact.

Quantitative data on whether searches were conducted, the nature of those searches, whether contraband was found in those searches, and the nature of any contraband found are all key components in looking at the efficiency, effectiveness, and any apparent disparities in those interactions. For instance, with that information, you can start to ask questions like:

- What percentage of each officer's searches result in contraband discovery?
- How does the rate of searches during stops differ by race, age, and/or gender?
- Does the rate of searches and contraband discovery vary by officer units?

Collecting the above-listed variables for stops will better enable you to identify trends across all stop interactions and allow you to ensure that the tactics used are meeting your shared public safety goals with your community.

Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Recommendations

11. Enable the system to capture both Initial Call Type AND Final Call Type

Call circumstances can change drastically, and officers oftentimes arrive on scene to something completely different than what it was called in to be. Providing a variable for Final Call Type can give you a clearer picture of what calls you are responding to.

12. Consider the implementation of a Mental Health Indicator

As agencies shift towards co-responder and alternate response models, it is important to try to understand the frequency and volume of calls you are responding to that might involve a mental health component. While it can be difficult to ascertain if this condition or circumstance exists within the details of a call, it is important to understand your landscape to better understand if alternate response endeavors are worthwhile or practical for your agency.

Conclusion

We want to thank you for partnering with us to do a Data Gap Analysis and provide you with written recommendations on how you can improve your data to better monitor and achieve your policing equity goals. We appreciate your courage and willingness to dig into your systems and ask for candid feedback on how you can improve your data. If you would like our assistance in implementing any of these recommendations, we are happy to do so.

For more information on using data to assess and improve policing equity, please read our Guidebook on data collection: [Collecting, Analyzing, and Responding to Stop Data: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies, Government, and Communities](#).

Additionally, we invite you to reach out to your CPE Implementation Strategists if you're interested in other ways you can partner with the Center for Policing Equity in this space.