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Gang Enforcement Audits Update: Police Bureau has improved patrol activities, but still needs a policy for using gang information

News Article



Since our 2018 audits on the Police Bureau's Gang Enforcement Team, the Police Bureau has formed new units. This follow-up on our 2018 recommendations found the Bureau has improved patrol activities, but still needs a policy for using gang information.

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The Auditor's Office published two reports in 2018 with findings and recommendations for the patrol and investigations functions of the Police Bureau's Gang Enforcement Team. Since then, the Bureau has changed its approach to gang and gun violence and made progress by collecting, analyzing, and reporting more data about its patrols and investigations. However, to implement our remaining recommendations, the Bureau should monitor data about mere conversations, record the investigative reason for stops, and adopt a policy about using gang information.

The City disbanded the Gang Enforcement Team and formed new units

When we released the 2018 audits, the Gang Enforcement Team was made up of a patrol unit and an investigative unit. At the time, we found that the team labeled people by their alleged gang affiliations or associations without effective policies or safeguards to protect community members' civil liberties and ensure the information was accurate. Community members expressed

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concerns with these practices and felt they contributed to mistrust of police. Our audits made recommendations for both the gang patrol and investigative units.

City Council and the Bureau made a number of changes since we published the audits. In 2019, the Bureau restructured the Gang Enforcement Team into the Gun Violence Reduction Team. That team, which focused on gun crime generally, rather than gangs, was short-lived; City Council eliminated it. In 2021, the Bureau formed the Enhanced Community Safety Team. It was created to investigate gun violence.

In 2022, the Focused Intervention Team began patrolling in parallel to the Community Safety Team. This new team is overseen by its own Community Oversight Group that meets regularly and gives guidance to the Bureau leadership and officers; the Gang Enforcement Team did not have community oversight like this. The Community Safety Team and Intervention Team carry out some functions similar to those of the former Gang Enforcement Team. For this reason, we urge the Bureau to adapt and implement remaining recommendations from our 2018 audit reports.

Gang Enforcement Patrol: Bureau partially implemented recommendations to improve patrol activities

Our [2018 audit](#) about patrol found that the Police Bureau could not demonstrate that the Gang Enforcement Team's traffic stops were effective because the Bureau (1) did not require officers to collect relevant information and (2) did not analyze other available data. The traffic stops disproportionately affected Black Portlanders. Community members said the stops were too broad and that they were not limited to criminal gang suspects. We made five recommendations to make patrols by the Gang Enforcement Team more effective, transparent, and accountable. One recommendation for patrols was implemented, one was no longer relevant, two were partially implemented, and one was not implemented. We encourage the Bureau to adapt and implement our remaining recommendation for Intervention Team patrols.

The Bureau implemented our recommendation to regularly analyze and publish demographic data regarding Gang Enforcement Team traffic stops.



The Bureau published stops data for the Gun Violence Reduction Team for 2019, the last full year that it operated. The Bureau produced a report on patrol stops in 2020 overall, but without detail for the six months the Gun Violence Reduction Team was still working. The Bureau plans to separately analyze 2022 stops data for the Intervention Team.

Our recommendation that the Bureau evaluate the effectiveness of suppression operations by the Gang Enforcement Team by reviewing crime trends and arrest outcomes was no longer relevant.

According to the Bureau, there have been no suppression missions since 2018.

Our recommendations that the Gang Enforcement Team regularly monitor stops data, including the percentage of encounters recorded as “mere conversations,” provide training to officers when encounters should be classified as such, and require its officers to document the investigative reason for their traffic stops were partially implemented.



The Intervention Team began patrols in early 2022 to target specific areas and people suspected of involvement in violent crime. According to the Bureau, the team mostly makes traffic stops to investigate a specific person for a crime. Unlike the Gang Enforcement Team, we were told that Intervention Team officers were not making broad and frequent traffic stops for minor violations.

The Intervention Team has improved their data analysis resources by using a dashboard since March 2022 to monitor and assess its traffic stops and searches. The dashboard displays data of stops for traffic violations versus crimes, including demographic and location information and data about searches.

The Bureau publicly reported some stops data since our audit, and officers continue to receive training about the laws governing traffic stops.

Our recommendation, however, addressed one more area of data collection where the Bureau has not implemented changes: The Bureau has not implemented a monitoring system for “mere conversations,” which are interactions in which a person is engaged by an officer but has not been detained. Data on mere conversations are incomplete because some interactions are recorded as such and some are not. Without this, the Intervention Team may not be able to show a complete picture of its patrol practices and its effectiveness. Police managers and the public also cannot understand how often proactive-patrol units such as the Intervention Team

use mere conversations. If the Intervention Team does not use mere conversations, then this risk may be less relevant.

The Bureau and Mayor's Office raised policy questions, feasibility concerns, and legal concerns about collecting data on mere conversations. Police managers maintained the Bureau should not be keeping records of officers having mere conversations with people who are not suspected of crimes. Our concerns raised in the initial audit stemmed from stops that were then recategorized as mere conversations.

The Bureau has made progress in documenting investigative reasons for traffic stops. Since late 2020, all officers have had to record in the stops data system what kind of traffic violation or other crime was the reason for each stop. This allows the Bureau to analyze if officers are making stops primarily for traffic or for other crime reasons. Additionally, Intervention Team officers can document the investigative reason for their stops on another optional reporting form, but this was not required. Occasionally, the Bureau publicly discussed some reasons for Intervention Team stops: media releases indicated that some Intervention Team traffic stops were for excessive speed, reckless driving, a stolen vehicle, vehicles matching the description of a shooting suspect, intoxicated driving, and license plate issues. To fully implement our recommendation, the Bureau should include in the Intervention Team's stops data whether a stop's investigative reason was related to a shooting investigation.

Our recommendation that the Gang Enforcement Team set goals to measure the effectiveness of patrol stops and record whether they resulted in contacting a criminal gang suspect was not implemented.



While the Bureau has a high-level mission statement for the Intervention Team, it has not set goals to measure the effectiveness of patrol stops made by the Intervention Team. This makes it difficult for the Bureau to articulate whether the new unit's traffic stops are successful at meeting its mission to reduce violent crime and ease tension in the community. We recognize the Bureau's new teams have a different focus than the Gang Enforcement Team, but the Bureau should still articulate its goals for traffic stops by the Intervention Team to understand the effectiveness of patrol stops.

Gang Crime Investigations: Bureau has not implemented policies to protect civil liberties when working with information about gang relationships

Our [2018 audit](#) about investigations found that some community members distrusted the Bureau's collection and sharing of information about people it labeled either as gang members or associating with gang members. The Bureau acknowledged the mistrust when in 2017 it announced the discontinuation of designating people as gang members. At the time of our 2018 audit, the Bureau still tracked Active Gang Members and Associates without policies and few safeguards to protect civil liberties of those on the list. Among our four recommendations, we recommended the Bureau adopt policies and safeguards. Our audit report did not take a position on whether the Bureau should or should not use gang information, but we emphasized the importance of a policy with safeguards. Two recommendations for investigations were not implemented, one was no longer relevant, and one was in process of being implemented.

Our recommendation to adopt policies and procedures for collecting and disseminating information about people with gang relationships, along with a recommendation describing specific safeguards for the policy, was not implemented.



The Bureau does not have policies or procedures for collecting or disseminating information about people's gang relationships because it discontinued the practices of the Gang Enforcement Team.

However, evidence suggests that the Bureau still maintains and uses information about gang relationships. We found that:

- The Bureau uses intelligence information, investigators' knowledge, and victim statements about gang involvement to investigate crimes.
- The Intervention Team in early 2022 and other officers received training on Portland's known gangs from former Gang Enforcement Team officers. The Bureau said such training was important for officer safety and a large portion of Portland's gun violence involved people associated with criminal street gangs or criminal social groups.
- The City obtained a study by the California Partnership for Safe Communities, which based its findings on interviews with Bureau personnel and case evidence. It concluded about half of Portland's gun homicides and shootings from 2019 to mid-2021 involved group or gang members either as victims, or suspects, or both. The study said the Bureau had identified 30 gangs and groups active and at significant risk

of violence. The study estimated gang and group membership at 1,000 to 1,495 members, based on interviews with Bureau personnel and case evidence. The study recommended the City focus on the largest known driver of gun violence, which includes gang involvement and group member involvement. The Police Bureau emphasized that it had not designated anyone as a gang member for this study. The Mayor's Office noted that redactions and confidentiality agreements served as safeguards.

These examples show that the Bureau continues to use information about people's gang relationships in less formal ways than keeping lists. For that reason, our recommendation for the Bureau to put policies in place to ensure people's due process rights and to safeguard any gang-relationship information remains relevant. The Bureau receives information about gang relationships in a variety of ways, including from crime victims and witnesses. It needs a policy guiding officers on whether and how they can use and share the information. Developing a policy is the right mechanism for weighing different needs and providing transparency to the community about police use of information. A policy may also be needed if the Bureau proceeds with a recommendation by the Community Oversight Group for the Intervention Team to create a Violent Impact Player list, a point system rating people's likelihood to engage in violence to target them for interventions.

Our recommendation that the Police Bureau review current practices for creating the most-active gang member list against legal requirements was no longer relevant.

According to the Bureau, the Most Active Gang Member list was discontinued in March 2018. If the bureau uses gang information, it should again review its practices against legal requirements. A review may also be needed if the Bureau proceeds with a recommendation by the Community Oversight Group for the Intervention Team to create a Violent Impact Player list, a point system rating people's likelihood to engage in violence to target them for interventions.

The Bureau was in process of implementing our case tracking recommendations to improve the management of Gang Enforcement Team investigations:

- 1. Track the clearance rate for the Gang Enforcement Team's investigations; set a goal for the clearance rate; and publicly report the outcome;**
- 2. Track caseload by detective and rebalance workload as needed;**
- 3. Maintain accurate case status in the records management system and other case management systems and use this information to track the timeliness of cases.**

The Bureau reported clearance rates for its gun crime investigations in some of its annual reports to the public. Regular reporting on this metric is important for managers and the public to determine how effective investigations are at solving crimes.



The Bureau told us that Community Safety Team detectives and officers had cleared 20 percent of shooting investigations started in 2021, but this had not been publicly reported. The Bureau publicly reported clearance rates for the Gun Violence Reduction Team of 33 percent in 2020 and 26 percent in 2019. A new clearance goal of 45 percent for non-fatal shootings was established in 2022.

The Bureau could not easily provide information to analyze whether workload was balanced among detectives or that case status and clearance rates were accurate. Lack of readily available data means that managers could not evaluate and ensure they were effective.

Mayor's response

The Mayor responded to this report with concerns and disagreement on three recommendations.

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