

# Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative Research & Evaluation Report: 2019-2022

## Executive Summary

In 2019, the Chicago Police Department,<sup>1</sup> in partnership with the [Policing Project](#) at New York University (NYU), implemented the Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative (CNPI). This initiative is composed of two interrelated goals:

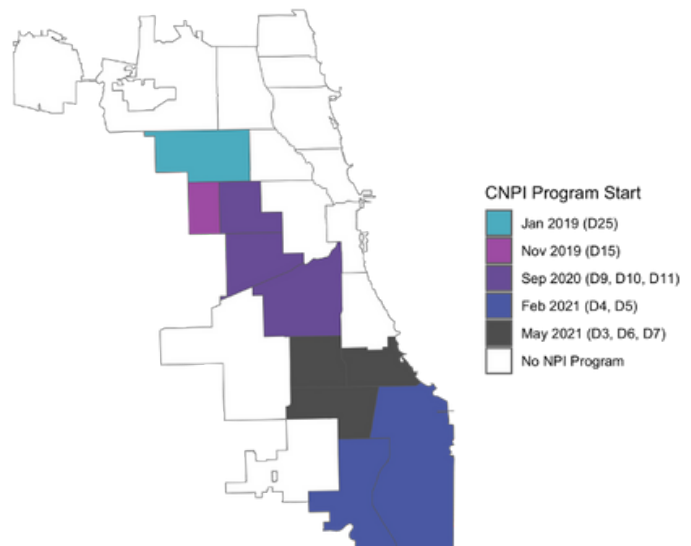
Restructuring district-level police operations by establishing new standards of community policing (i.e., relationship building and proactive problem solving), incorporating specialized officers' work into community policing, and developing new geographic boundaries within which these officers work.

Establishing trust and working relationships between officers and community members by centering the role of Community Ambassadors and other residents in CNPI activities and larger district wide public safety planning.

To achieve these goals, CNPI includes specialized officers, called District Coordinating Officers (DCOs), and community volunteers (Community Ambassadors). Through CNPI, Ambassadors and DCOs engage and collaborate frequently to identify and respond to public safety priorities.

The Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research & Science (CORNERS)<sup>2</sup> at Northwestern University is CNPI's evaluation partner. Since launching in District 25, CNPI has expanded to nine additional Chicago Police Districts; data collection focused on four of these – Districts 25, 15, 10, and 4 – and detailed evaluation findings for these districts have been published in Corners' final CNPI report.

CNPI Rollout Date by CPD District



To measure CNPI's impact, CORNERS built a multi-method research design capturing perspectives of residents and police in CNPI districts through in-depth interviews, systematic observations at police and community meetings and events, quasi-experimental statistical analyses, and analysis of key documents detailing CNPI activities.

<sup>1</sup> Referred to as CPD or "the department" throughout.  
<sup>2</sup> CORNERS originated as the Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3), which was established in 2018 by Faculty Director Dr. Andrew Papachristos. The research center, while maintaining its core ethos and activities, rebranded in 2022 to reflect its distinctive "neighborhood science" approach.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

**In the four years since CNPI was first introduced, CPD has not yet fully implemented the initiative to fidelity, which has hindered CNPI’s impact at both a district- and department-level. Despite the best efforts of individuals close to the project – within CPD, the Policing Project, CNPI communities, and the City of Chicago – the work of this relatively small group has understandably not overcome the barriers presented by CPD as it has struggled to fully implement CNPI as its community policing strategy.**

The findings below provide continued evidence of these challenges and contextualize ongoing implementation barriers:

1. CNPI has not yet distinguished itself meaningfully from CPD’s key community policing strategy, CAPS,<sup>3</sup> and this has resulted in inconsistent implementation in CNPI districts. This has so far limited CNPI’s ability to emerge as part of CPD’s “core philosophy.”
2. Beat officers struggle to understand the role of DCOs in their districts and are generally disconnected from the work of CNPI. In trainings, beat officers have openly expressed disdain for community policing work, and DCOs note that beat officers conceive of the DCO role as being "soft policing" primarily intended to free up time for other officers to respond to calls.
3. As CPD continues to experience staff shortages, DCOs are being pulled from their work to fill beat officer roles. Some CNPI district Commanders expect officers to fill both DCO and beat officer roles at the same time, which DCOs note is challenging and at times impossible.
4. Officer and Commander turnover continues to present a barrier to consistent CNPI implementation and relationship building. Community members express their dissatisfaction with frequent personnel changes in the department, noting that staff turnover often means building relationships from the ground up every few years.
5. Internally, the department has yet to establish and implement a clear plan for CNPI’s measurement and reporting, which often leaves officers feeling as though their work is not being adequately understood or recognized within CPD.

6. DCOs do extensive community engagement work and respond to various problems with non-enforcement solutions, which often includes working with diverse community stakeholders. Analysis of DCO activity logs and meeting notes from regular check-ins with officers suggests that much of the DCO role is, in fact, focused on community engagement and problem solving, the two primary responsibilities of these specialized officers.
7. Community engagement, while a critical component of CNPI, remains both a key success and a key challenge for the initiative. Community residents feel that officers are at times inconsistent in this work. Meanwhile, DCOs point to department constraints on their time as key barriers to effective engagement.
8. Analysis of metrics related to violent crime, 911 calls for service, and arrests all provide no evidence of CNPI impact at a statistically significant level. At the same time, analyses of sentiment metrics provide an inconclusive picture of CNPI, painting the program as having potentially weak but conflicting impacts on trust in police and perceptions of safety.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As CNPI enters its fourth year, the City of Chicago has expressed interest in expanding CNPI citywide by the end of 2023. Based on the above findings and with recognition of the leadership transitions in both the Mayor's office and CPD, CORNERS recommends:

### COMMUNITY POLICING PHILOSOPHIES

CPD should more clearly differentiate between CAPS and CNPI strategies and the roles of CAPS officers and DCOs through official codification and communication.

### BEAT OFFICER BUY-IN

The department should continue to clearly inform and educate beat officers and leadership about the DCO role and the role of the entire department in CNPI implementation.

### DCO REASSIGNMENT

CPD should end – or at least minimize – the practice of deploying DCOs to beat officer duties and other non-DCO roles and make efforts to prioritize the work of DCOs in their communities.

## **DISTRICT STAFF TURNOVER**

CPD should prioritize selecting DCOs who are more likely to stay in the position longer and should establish clear plans for officer and leadership transitions, with consideration for the impact of officer turnover on relationships with community members.

## **MEASUREMENT OF DCO ACTIVITIES**

Departmental tracking and measurement of DCO activities and impact should include qualitative data that includes information about DCOs' intensive problem-solving work and community members.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

CNPI stakeholders – including CPD leadership, DCOs, and Community Ambassadors – should establish clear norms and communicate expectations around community engagement and the role of DCOs within their geographic boundaries. These expectations should be responsive to the needs and expectations of community members within their District Coordination Areas.

**At the individual district level, DCOs and community stakeholders remain invested in the interpersonal impacts of the initiative and continually stress the importance of relationship-building and problem-solving as key components of public safety strategies in their communities. However, departmental and institutional challenges continue to impede implementation of the model consistently throughout the evaluation districts and remain a barrier to effectively implementing CNPI as a citywide strategy.**

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The full CNPI evaluation report can be accessed through [CORNERS' website](#).

CORNERS thanks Community Ambassadors and residents in Chicago Police Districts 25, 15, 10, and 4; CPD staff; and NYU Policing Project for their insights.

This research was made possible with support from the Joyce Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Polk Bros. Foundation, the Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation, and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.