

Building and Measuring Community Trust in Policing

How the Montgomery County
Police Department conducts
outreach and measures its
impact on the community.

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates how the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) builds and measures community trust, a cornerstone of effective community policing. It explores two primary avenues of trust building: relational trust building, such as town halls and community engagement events, and informational trust building, such as public data sharing through platforms like DataMontgomery and annual reports. The report highlights innovative police programs within the county that have used outreach very successfully, including the Drone as First Responder (DFR) program and the Autism/Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Outreach Program, both of which leveraged face-to-face engagement to build trust with residents. The report also analyzes the existing measures of community trust. Although past legislation requires an annual, demographically disaggregated survey on community-police relations, this has not been implemented due to resource constraints. The remaining measures leave gaps in the County's ability to evaluate the impact of its outreach and policing efforts. Current metrics—such as the National Community Survey—offer limited insight and often fail to measure trust directly or track demographic variation.

To support community trust in policing and assess its growth over time, the report recommends the following: (1) improve the accessibility of DataMontgomery by adding charts, tutorials, and splash pages to aid public understanding and reduce misinterpretation of raw data; (2) develop a public-facing crime dashboard modeled on other jurisdictions, leveraging in-house technical expertise and inter-county collaboration; (3) require new police programs to include data recording and publishing plans in operational procedures; and (4) invest in new or expanded measures of community trust, including funding the annual survey required by Bill 45-20 which, due to technology recently acquired by MCPD, will likely require reduced funding, or, if cost-prohibitive, adding trust-focused questions to existing surveys like the National Community Survey and conducting targeted pre/post surveys for specific programs or demographics. These recommendations are designed to increase transparency, improve public access to information, and ensure that efforts to build trust are measurable and inclusive—ultimately enhancing both community-police relations and public safety.

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Definitions

Community Policing

A philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.

Community Trust

The respect and cooperation between police agencies and the communities they serve.

Relational Trust Building

Activities by a police department (or similar organization) focused on establishing personal, face-to-face relationships with community members to foster trust. Examples include community meetings, neighborhood patrols, and informal conversations with residents.

Informational Trust Building

Efforts aimed at building trust by sharing timely, accurate, and transparent data with the public. This includes publishing datasets, dashboards, or reports that allow the community to see and verify agency activities or outcomes.

Public Data Reporting

The practice of publishing transparent, timely, and accessible data about an organization's activities, outcomes, and processes, to inform the public and strengthen public trust.

Qualitative Trust Measurement

The assessment of community trust through descriptive, subjective, or narrative methods. This includes tools like focus groups, interviews, or informal community feedback to understand perceptions and sentiments.

Quantitative Trust Measurement

The assessment of community trust using numeric, statistical, or survey-based measures. This typically includes community-wide trust surveys, standardized scales, or other data that can be aggregated and tracked over time.

About the Fellow

Jackson Dillard is a graduate student at George Washington University, where he is pursuing a master's in public policy with a concentration in program evaluation and policy analysis. This summer, he is serving as a fellow with the Montgomery County Police Department's Crime Analytics Division through the County Council Summer Fellow Program. Before moving to Washington, D.C., Jackson earned a bachelor's degree in economics from Clemson University, with minors in Political and Legal Theory and Public Policy.



Introduction

The [United States Department of Justice](#) defines community policing as “A philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.”¹ Community policing has been a driving force behind changes in policing for almost 30 years, with changes prioritizing crime prevention and partnerships with communities. Police departments across the country have implemented tenets of community policing into their organization. MCPD has done so through numerous efforts.

Community trust is a fundamental element of the community policing philosophy. The [International Association of Chiefs of Police](#) (IACP) defines community trust as “the respect and cooperation between police agencies and the communities they serve.”² Building and maintaining trust requires engaging with the community transparently and accountably. It is an ongoing process that occurs as part of all aspects of policing to ensure that the public safety goals of the community and the police are aligned. Community trust helps foster a cooperative environment within a community, where police officers can carry out their duties and the members they serve feel respected and protected.

While this report evaluates community trust in the context of the Montgomery County Police Department, community trust is also shaped by the actions of all policing entities at

¹ [U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services, Community Policing Defined](#)

² [Overview, Community Trust Hub | International Association of Chiefs of Police](#)

the county, state, and even national levels. Two critical elements of measuring the success of community policing are understanding what actions the police are undertaking and understanding how the community feels about those actions.

To begin, this report presents background information on community trust in police across America and discusses the existing research on the impact of police outreach. Then, relational trust building, or face-to-face outreach conducted by MCPD, is analyzed to assess the potential impact of this form of outreach on the community. To illustrate, in addition to assessing the outreach activities led by the police department, largely by the Community Engagement Division (CED), two exemplar programs are discussed: the outreach conducted by the Drone as First Responder Program (DFR) and the Autism/Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Alzheimer's and Dementia Outreach Program. Analyzing how these innovative programs collaborated with the community to address concerns and generate community trust provides excellent case studies of how community trust can be developed and the facilitatory impact that doing so can have on a program.

Second, informational trust building, or public data sharing, outreach initiatives will be assessed. The most significant portion of publicly available data within Montgomery County is DataMontgomery, which provides access to large swaths of information in an unprocessed format. Other elements of available public safety data are the annual reports released by MCPD. These various reports provide information on the performance of several specific departments as well as the entire department. Additionally, reports on crime trends within the county contain narrative details that help put changes in the context of police initiatives. Several comparable jurisdictions are considered for their methods of public data sharing, and gaps existing in Montgomery County's delivery of public data are considered.

Third, the measures of community trust within the county are discussed. A limited number of snapshot surveys and repeated measures assessing the levels of community trust in policing have taken place within the county in the last two decades. This has hindered a quantitative understanding of the relationship between the community and the police. The department has recently implemented new measures and will pilot another in August of 2025, demonstrating a desire to further develop an understanding of their relationship with the community. Still, some remain limited by methodology or scope. Additional metrics proposed by the department that may proxy for the level of community trust are considered.

The final portions of the report provide recommendations on improving informational trust-building measures within the county and recommendations for improving methods to measure the level of community trust. Existing challenges and limitations that may hinder

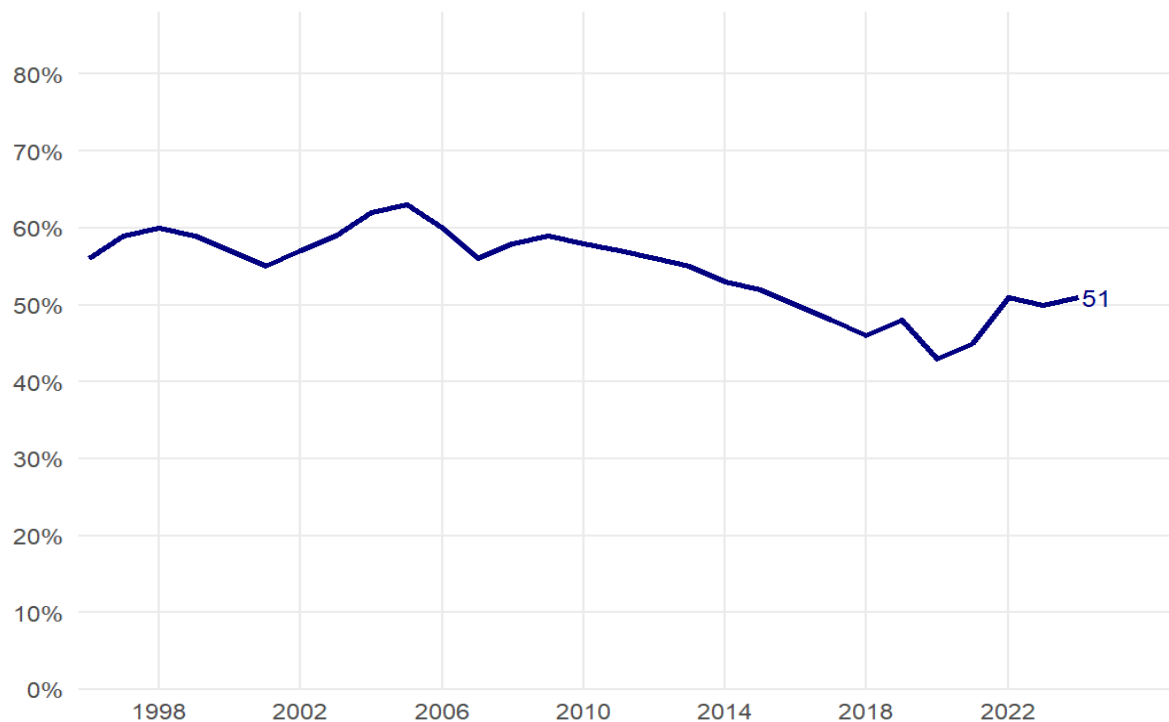
the implementation of the recommendations are discussed. Finally, the potential racial equity and social justice impacts of implementing the proposed recommendations are considered.

Background

Over the last three decades in America, confidence in the police has hovered above 50%. However, in the last decade, only a minority of Americans express confidence. [Gallup](#) has evaluated American confidence in the police since 1993. A majority of Americans reported confidence in the police each year until 2020, when a large year-over-year reduction brought the share to 48%. It is possible this reduction is related to George Floyd’s murder while in police custody, the protests in response, and a heightened level of scrutiny of law enforcement officers. In the following years, national confidence hovered below 50%, with the lowest share during the period tracked by Gallup, 43% in 2023, and an increase to 51% in 2024.

FIGURE 1: AMERICANS' CONFIDENCE IN THE POLICE, 1996-2024. SOURCE: GALLUP

SHARE OF AMERICANS EXPRESSING “A GREAT DEAL” OR “QUITE A LOT” OF CONFIDENCE IN THE POLICE EACH YEAR.



CAPTION: THE LINE GRAPH DISPLAYS A FALL IN THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE IN POLICE, DROPPING BELOW AND HOVERING AROUND 50% FOR THE PAST DECADE.

Montgomery County not only implemented community policing, but significant legislative efforts in recent years have expanded ways of quantifying how community policing is taking place. In 2020, the Council passed [Bill 33-19](#), Police – Community Policing. In addition to setting several standards focused on community policing, the bill requires MCPD to provide annual data reports on officer and employee demographics, policing, use of force, and community complaints. The standards set in Bill 33-19 were further expanded upon in November of 2021, with the passage of [Bill 45-20](#), which greatly expanded reporting requirements and increased the disaggregated data collected on demographics affected by policing. The [MCPD Annual Statistical Reports for County Officials](#), a response to the legislative requirements, details the requirements in these two legislative initiatives.

Even with significant attention to community policing taking place, measures of the level of community trust in the MCPD have remained limited. An annual survey of community and police measures was included in Bill 45-20, with an estimated funding requirement of \$100,000. The County Executive’s recommended FY24 Operating Budget included a request for funds to purchase a survey platform; however, Council did not approve the funding. The Executive did not include a funding request in the recommended FY25 or FY26 Operating budgets. As a result, other measures estimated to proxy trust in the police, other county surveys that mention community opinions of police, or qualitative reviews of police interactions have filled the gaps in measuring community trust within the county.

Developing positive perceptions of law enforcement officials has been considered a necessary component of policing since its modern inception in 1829. Sir Robert Peel, who established the London Metropolitan Police Force, listed as the second of his nine principles of policing: “recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behavior, and on their ability to secure and maintain respect.” Following a similar line of thought, the fourth principle is: “the extent to which the cooperation of the public can be secured diminishes proportionately the necessity of the use of physical force and compulsion for achieving police objectives.”³

Peel’s principles remain as crucial today as they did nearly two centuries ago. Both principles highlight Peel’s core ideals: that the power the police possess is drawn from the community’s approval, and that when the community trusts in the police, all the elements of policework become easier to accomplish. These same principles are echoed in a recent quote from then-Director of the CED at MCPD, Cpt. Jordan Satinsky: “An actively engaged community is a low-crime community.”⁴ Illustrating that MCPD understands the

³ [Law Enforcement Action Partnership, Sir Robert Peel’s Policing Principles](#)

⁴ [MCPD CY 2023 Annual Community Policing Report, final sentence](#)

importance of outreach and developing community trust. The following section describes the types of community trust-building activities taking place within Montgomery County.

Types of Community Trust-Building Activities

This report will broadly separate community trust-building initiatives into two general categories: relational and informational trust building. Informational trust building largely takes the form of public data sharing. While data are likely to be presented at relational trust-building initiatives, for the purposes of this report, the two are conceptually divided.

Relational trust-building initiatives focus on establishing personal, face-to-face relationships within the community to foster trust. Within Montgomery County, these initiatives take many forms, such as the Citizens Academy, which has operated since 1994 and increases resident awareness of police department functions during a 15-week course. Other less intensive examples of relational trust building are the “[Coffee with a Cop](#)” events, held throughout the county by MCPD and the Sheriff’s office. These facilitate a relaxed atmosphere where citizens can express concerns and receive open communication from an officer.

Informational trust-building initiatives focus on building trust through transparency by sharing data on police activities. This includes publishing datasets, creating dashboards to understand activities better, and releasing reports that contextualize data. Many public safety datasets in Montgomery County are published to [DataMontgomery](#), the county’s open-source data platform. In addition, a collection of annual and monthly reports is also published on the [MCPD Public Safety Data webpage](#), many of which also contain valuable contextual information.

Research on the Impact of Trust-Building Initiatives

Outreach initiatives by a police department take many forms, intending to educate the public on specific issues or facilitate non-enforcement interactions with officers. Research on police outreach has demonstrated positive shifts in the perceptions of law enforcement officers and police department initiatives driven by both relational and informational trust-building initiatives.

Relational trust-building initiatives, or traditional outreach, can take many forms. Perhaps the most basic is the town hall, where officers present to members of the public on their operations, or a specific program being implemented in their area. A study of one such program, the [Pennsylvania State Police’s Building Bridges Community Outreach Program](#), empirically assessed the influence that the police program had on participants’ perceptions of police before and after completing the program. Statistical analyses indicated significant improvements in perceptions of law enforcement effectiveness, procedural justice, and legitimacy. While this was a state police program, carryover effects

were also found, leading to improved perceptions of police more broadly, such as municipal and local police.⁵ Relational trust-building initiatives make up the bedrock of how information is relayed and community trust is generated.

Research has indicated that informational trust-building initiatives can also significantly impact public perception. A [2013 study by Mason, Hillenbrand, and Money](#) studying policework in the United Kingdom analyzed how knowledge of police performance impacts citizens' trust in police. Researchers found that being informed of performance data impacts the citizens' trust of public safety officers statistically significantly. Those exposed to the data were inherently inclined to believe it, and, perhaps most importantly, the positive shifts in the opinions of police officers that took place were the largest among individuals with low initial perceptions of police performance.⁶ Larger shifts among those with low perceptions suggest that public data sharing may have an outsize impact on improving community trust with low-trust demographics.

The [International Association of Chiefs of Police](#) has expressed its support for informational trust-building initiatives and the positive impact they have, stating:

“Implementing a proactive public-facing data-sharing policy fosters accountability within the agency and ensures transparency to the community. By committing to openly sharing data, departments can enhance trust and alleviate concerns about selective information sharing. Furthermore, this approach helps to address public criticism of the police department and reinforces their dedication to collaborative governance, allowing community members to engage meaningfully with data that directly impacts them.”⁷

Together, these national and local developments, along with research findings, underscore the increasing emphasis on not only practicing community policing, but also rigorously assessing its outcomes, particularly through the lens of community trust. While Montgomery County has implemented legislation like Bills 33-19 and 45-20 to institutionalize community policing and increase data reporting, to the Council and the public, the tools to measure community trust are far less developed. The historical context provided by Sir Robert Peel’s principles, alongside modern statements by MCPD leadership, reinforces a longstanding belief that community trust is essential for effective policing. However, without robust, recurring metrics to evaluate the community's level of

⁵ [Building bridges with the Pennsylvania State Police: A pilot assessment of a Law Enforcement Community Outreach Program](#)

⁶ [Are Informed Citizens More Trusting? Transparency of Performance Data and Trust Towards a British Police Force, David Mason, Carola Hillenbrand, & Kevin Money](#)

⁷ [International Association of Chiefs of Police | Using Data Transparency to Increase Community Trust](#)

trust in the police, efforts to assess the success of outreach initiatives or identify areas for improvement remain limited.

Relational Trust-Building Initiatives

Relational trust building, or direct, face-to-face engagement, has forever been a cornerstone of community policing efforts. It allows officers and community members to develop mutual understanding in non-enforcement settings, which can help reduce stereotypes and foster positive relationships. As emphasized in the [IACP handbook, *Enhancing Community Trust One Interaction at a Time*](#), non-enforcement interactions, such as town halls, allow officers and community members to see each other as individuals rather than in roles, laying the groundwork for information sharing and more trusting relationships.

In Montgomery County, relational trust building takes a myriad of forms. One of the simplest would be the town hall, where community members are invited to a public meeting to hear about any one of many police initiatives, programs, or policies that may affect them. While these are open to any members of the public, there are also initiatives targeted at youth, one example being the Community Opioid Prevention Education (COPE) Trailer, an often-requested means of educating community members on the appearance of drugs and paraphernalia. The 2023 Community Policing Annual Report, which the CED submits yearly to the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission, highlights 18 different groups that the division partners with or operates to engage with all segments of the community.⁸

Overall, MCPD is very active in community events in their many forms, averaging slightly less than one per day over the last two years. The [2024 Police Statistical Data Report](#) cites 355 community events in 2023 and 313 in 2024. Members of the community recognize the importance of these outreach events, in an interview with one of the leaders of a local community advocacy group, they cited the value of interacting with law enforcement officers in non-enforcement settings as an incredibly valuable method of humanizing officers and supporting community interactions with MCPD, noting the county's [National Night Out](#) as a highlight event.

While MCPD engages in numerous events that build community trust, this process can be more involved for new policing programs that do not have the community's trust and must work to develop it through trust-building initiatives. Several interviews with officers and staff involved with newer and more innovative police programs yielded valuable insights

⁸ [MCPD 2023 Community Policing Annual Report](#)

into how officers see relational trust-building initiatives impacting community trust, in this context, the community's trust of specific programs implemented by MCPD.

Drone as First Responder Program

One such example is the [Drone as First Responder \(DFR\) program](#). This program, which began operating in November of 2023, positions an unmanned aircraft (i.e., drone) at strategic locations around the county. Officers listening to 911 calls can fly a drone to a report location, often before officers arrive on the scene. Pilots are then able to assist in evaluating the scene and circumstances. One valuable element of the program is that occasionally, pilots can discern that a police response is unnecessary and cancel dispatched patrol officers, allowing them to be directed to more pressing calls. The DFR program is considered a resounding success, responding to almost 3000 calls to date, arriving first on scene approximately 70% of the time, and avoiding a patrol unit dispatch approximately 16% of the time.⁹

During the initial community engagement process, a number of citizens and community groups expressed concerns about how the drones might violate individuals' privacy. In response, relational and informational trust-building initiatives took place, grounded in standards set by a police policy. MCPD adopted [Policy FC460](#), outlining a series of constraints under which the DFR program could operate. Among other restrictions, the pilots will keep drone cameras pointed at the horizon, not record until they arrive on the scene of an incident, and only use the drones to respond to a specific subset of 911 calls.¹⁰ Unlike other DFR programs nationwide, which use drones for limited patrolling. Additionally, the program must record and publish the flight data and comment on the reason for dispatch for each drone flight, which is [published on their website in dashboard format](#).

MCPD engaged in a series of town hall meetings throughout the county, focusing on the high-call-volume areas initially targeted by the program, Silver Spring (3rd Police District) and Wheaton (4th Police District). One of the lead officers in the DFR program discussed how, at the beginning of these series of meetings, many community members expressed their concerns about the program, and the setting enabled officers to speak directly about the issues. In the officer's opinion, this brought about a clear development of community trust. After the town hall series, community members had their concerns assuaged and had largely come to understand how the DFR program's implementation could positively impact the community.

⁹ [Montgomery County Police Department – Drone as First Responder \(DFR\) Dashboard, as of July 14, 2025](#)

¹⁰ [Montgomery County Police Department – Directive FC0460](#)

At a recent DFR town hall in Germantown,¹¹ After the initial program had operated for almost two years, and an expansion of the program was soon to take place, officers again spoke to community members on how they might be affected. However, the participants expressed largely different views than past town halls, instead of expressing privacy concerns, one member asked if the program was considering expanding to patrol use for the drones and noted their clear belief in its positive impact in the community, a responsibility the program is currently explicitly prohibited from performing, included in operational policy in direct response to initial community concerns.

While only one town hall, with a handful of members of a particular community, these sentiments suggest a potential change in public opinion. While this town hall may be limited in the extent to which it suggests a general shift in public opinion, it represents a community trust building success on the part of MCPD. The informational trust-building elements of the program, such as sharing data on their website, have certainly supported community trust in the program. However, it was the relational trust-building initiatives, in the form of town halls before any data could be shared, that developed the initial community trust in the program that allowed it to, quite literally, get off the ground in the first place. The officer interviewed cited the unit's "Quasi-open-door policy" as a major driver of community trust: By making time to provide nearly every community group, news station, legislator, lawyer, or public official with a tour of the operations room, the officers believe they have supported community trust in the program. In their estimation, the tours achieve this by allowing individuals typically trusted within the community to serve as potential program advocates by providing them with a wealth of accurate information on how the program operates. This information allows them to speak accurately about the program's goals and methods to community members who look to them for advice.

Autism/Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Alzheimer's and Dementia Outreach Program

Another example of an MCPD program focused on developing community trust to facilitate success is [the Autism/Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Alzheimer's and Dementia Outreach Program](#). The program was established in 2005, partly in response to the growing number of police calls for service involving missing residents with developmental disabilities, and now provides a total approach¹² aimed at supporting residents and officers.

¹¹ Held on Thursday, June 12th 6:30 pm at the Upcounty Regional Services Center in Germantown.

¹² The program provides a "total approach" to issues that these residents and police encounter through: Education, Outreach, Follow-up, Empowerment, and Response, please explore the [program's website](#) for further details.

In an interview, Officer Laurie Reyes, who spearheads the program, discussed two particularly impactful relational trust-building initiatives used to develop community trust and encourage community members to best take advantage of the support provided by the unit and the broader MCPD.

The first is direct access to knowledgeable officers: Officer Reyes discussed how a number of members within the community have access to her cell phone and are encouraged to contact her directly when in need. The second is her consistent public presence, through social media and media appearances, which she uses to develop her presence as a subject matter expert, explain police procedures, and demystify the resources available to the community.

By developing meaningful, personal relationships with at-risk individuals and their caregivers, Officer Reyes has positioned herself as a trusted and approachable conduit to MCPD support—helping to humanize the department and strengthen community trust of MCPD.

The success of the program is deeply tied to community trust. A caregiver's willingness to call the police when their child or dependent has eloped¹³ depends not only on their awareness that the police have appropriate training and resources, but also on their trust that the officers will respond effectively and compassionately.

That trust is reflected in the program's outcomes. As of July 2025, the unit has completed approximately 470 follow-up phone calls, approximately 100 more than year-to-date in 2024, and has assisted in approximately 30 successful recoveries of missing individuals. These figures underscore the program's operational value and the strong relationships of trust and collaboration it has built with the communities it serves.

Summary

Relational trust building is foundational in MCPD's community outreach, particularly in implementing new programs that have yet to produce supportive data. Whether through CED's many methods or the direct-to-community outreach conducted by specialized units like DFR or the Autism/IDD Outreach Program, MCPD has demonstrated a commitment to building community trust through meaningful personal engagement between community members and sworn officers.

¹³ [Elopement](#), also known as wandering, refers to a situation in which someone with a disability wanders away from a safe area or person, possibly putting themselves at risk of harm. Elopement is common in children with developmental disabilities, especially autism.

Informational Trust-Building Initiatives

Community trust in police is also driven by informational trust building. The majority of public data sharing within the county, as it pertains to public safety, takes place in two primary locations. The first is [DataMontgomery](#), the county's open-source data platform. Restricting a search to only public safety datasets shows 52 available for download, and many more for a wide range of data on county activities. The second location of public data related to public safety is the [MCPD Public Safety Data webpage](#), which is easily accessible from the main site. DataMontgomery provides the largest amount of up-to-date data, but the risk of misinterpretation emerges due to the data's unprocessed nature. MCPD Annual reports, while released less often and fewer in number, provide a narrative to accompany processed data, allowing for much clearer conclusions, guided among other things by the knowledge of the writers on the policy landscape that may affect report numbers. Nearby jurisdictions were evaluated, and it was found that open-source data and annual reports were commonplace among public safety departments. However, many of these areas also maintained a crime dashboard that processed raw data to some extent and provided users a more streamlined interface than in Montgomery County.

DataMontgomery

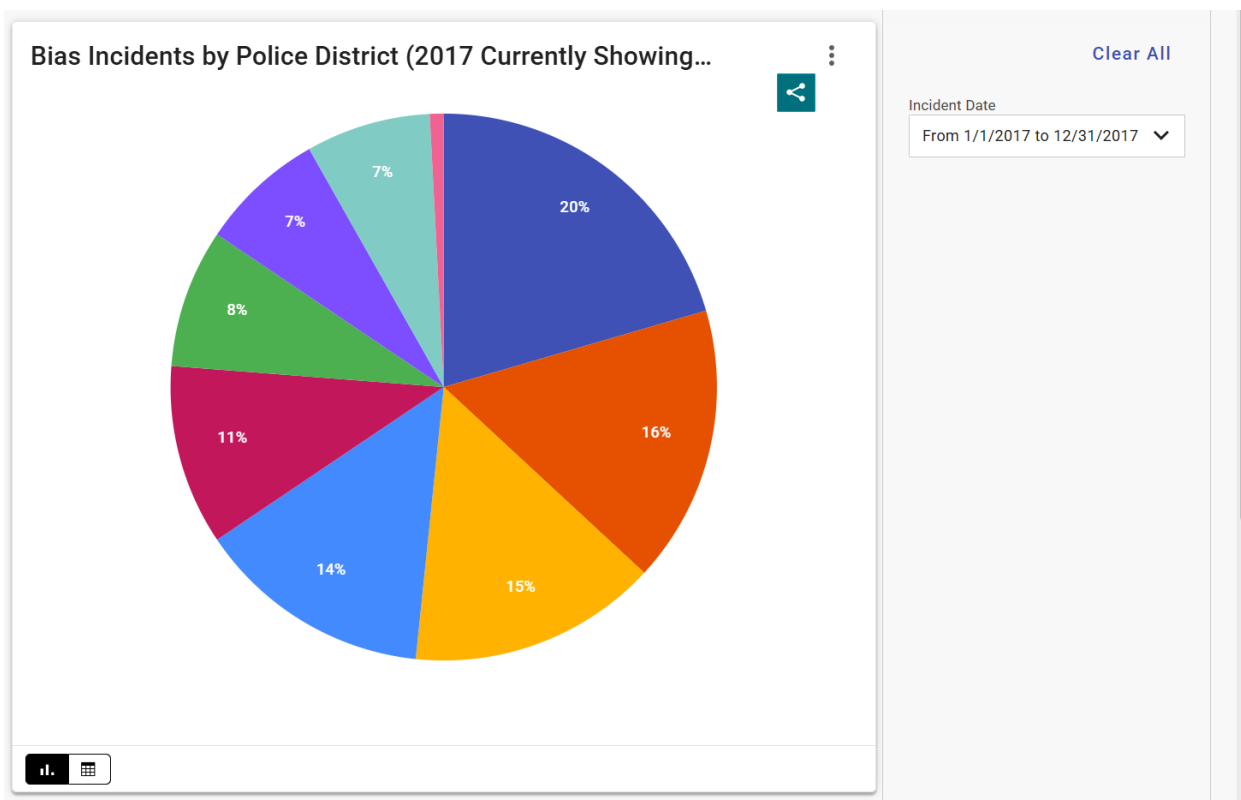
This open-source data platform is recommended and linked to by agencies' webpages across the county and has the most complete data available on ongoing processes and events. However, ease of access remains an issue and may prevent users without necessary technology skills from translating raw data into insights. Additionally, the lack of contextual information may lead some users who can process the raw data to reach false conclusions about results.

DataMontgomery is unmatched in its ability to provide raw data to interested consumers. By presenting the data in the raw coded format from the PD's reporting system, the largest possible amount of information is available (identifying markers and sensitive information are withheld; residential addresses are rounded to the nearest hundred block). A small paragraph provides a general summary and information on the update frequency of the dataset. Many public safety datasets update at least weekly, with a large portion updating daily.

However, due to the large amount and unprocessed nature of the data provided, interpreting the large volume of data available can be challenging, especially for those with limited technological capabilities. Only a small number of the public safety datasets have charts attached. One example is the MCPD Bias Incidents dataset, which captures all incidents that may be motivated by an offender's bias. This dataset has three charts attached, detailing the police district where bias incidents have occurred (Figure 2), the proportions of different motivations (such as Anti-Black, or Anti-Jewish), and a breakdown

of the age of known suspects. Each chart has one or two manipulable functions, typically the date range. Information at the bottom broadly defines each of the variables, but interpreting most of the data available is left to the user, and the charts themselves are not very intuitive. DataMontgomery does allow users to make their own graphics within the application, under an “actions” button in one corner. However, this element of the application is hard to locate, and the graphics can be challenging to make when located. One crime analyst, with years of experience processing and understanding crime data, discussed utilizing DataMontgomery to understand crime trends within the county and prepare for their job interview. Even they, as someone with years of experience in data analysis, found the application confusing and struggled to gain an understanding of current trends.

FIGURE 2: BIAS INCIDENTS BY POLICE DISTRICT (2017) SOURCE: DATAMONTGOMERY, BIAS INCIDENTS DATASET

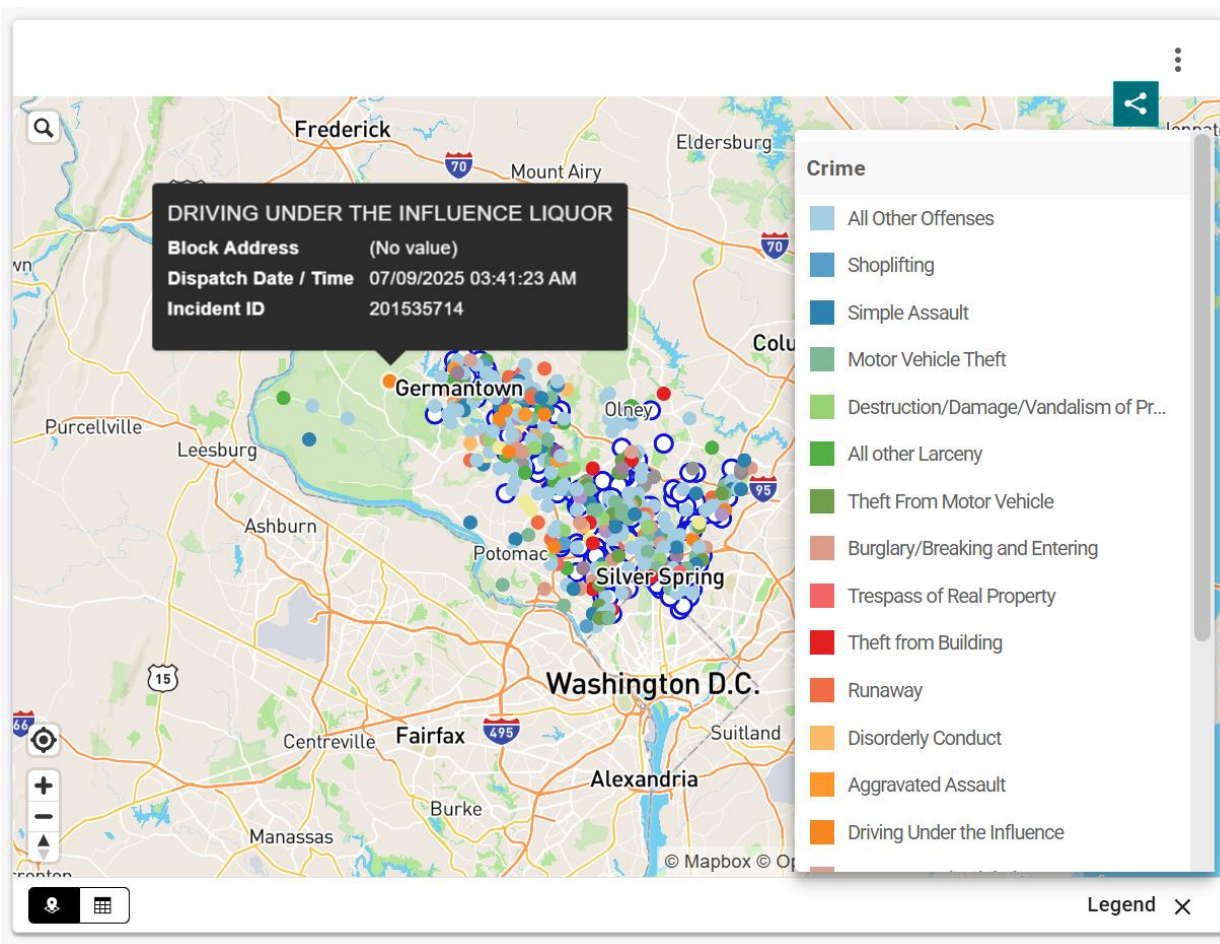


CAPTION: THE PIE CHART DISPLAYS THE SHARE OF BIAS INCIDENTS OCCURRING IN EACH POLICE DISTRICT IN 2017.

Perhaps the most developed tool within the public safety datasets is [the crime incident map](#) (Figure 3), which displays a visual of all crime events within the county and contains

five filters to allow users to filter crimes to specific areas over certain date ranges, notably absent is the ability to filter by crime type. A manager within the Information Management and Technology Division (ITMD) shared that they will receive emails from individuals who cannot utilize the map, find it too complex, or are led to a concerning false conclusion. They attributed this to the program presenting the users with so much data that it can be hard to navigate. In response, a tutorial on successful use was written and is on hand for community service officers and central public safety staff to share with confused users. However, it has not been published on the MCPD's or DataMontgomery's website.

FIGURE 3: CRIME INCIDENT MAP, DATAMONTGOMERY



CAPTION: THE CRIME INCIDENT MAP PROVIDES A WEALTH OF INFORMATION TO USERS, BUT CAN BE CHALLENGING TO OPERATE.

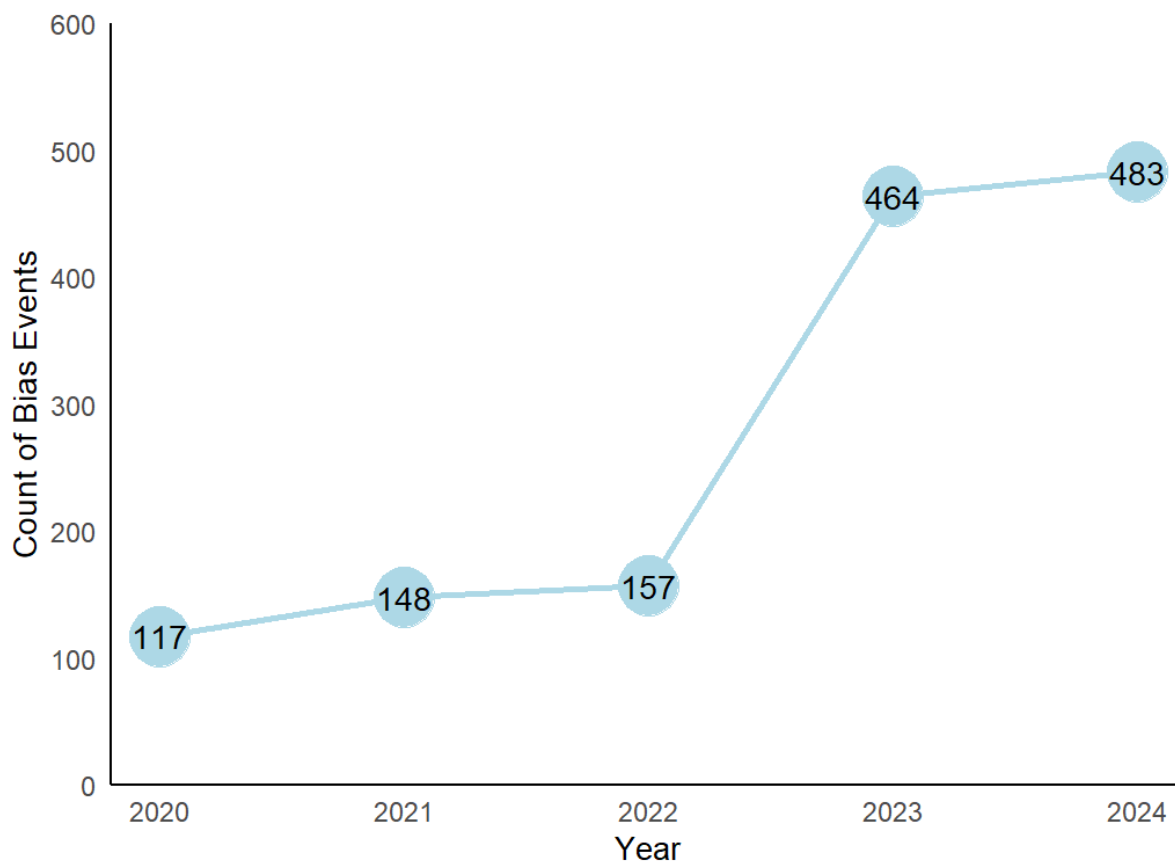
In addition to the unwieldiness of the raw data provided by DataMontgomery, the site also lacks direct access to critical background information on the data provided and provides no immediate indication that it exists. Without the necessary information for the

interpretation of data, a user could reach incorrect conclusions about how to interpret the available data.

One example of this can be seen in data retrieved from the bias incidents dataset. [A 2022 Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) between MCPD and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) changed the reporting standards for hate crimes and bias incidents, requiring a report to police for all incidents, regardless of severity. This had the effect of increasing the number of reports filed in the years 2023 and 2024. A user of DataMontgomery could download the dataset, create a chart of the count of events per year (Figure 4), and reach the concerning conclusion that between 2022 and 2023 the county experienced an approximate 300% increase in the number of bias events, when this increase was actually driven by a policy change that is not flagged on DataMontgomery.¹⁴

¹⁴[MCPS Hate Bias Response](#): MCPS again changed hate-bias event reporting standards in the fall of 2024. They will now operate on a three-tiered system, the lowest tier no longer requiring an MCPD report. While unclear, it is possible this policy change will reduce the number of overall reports. In 2025 year-to-date (July 1) there has been a 32% reduction in reports.

FIGURE 4: BIAS EVENTS COUNT IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY BY YEAR. SOURCE: DATAMONTGOMERY



CAPTION: THE BIAS INCIDENTS DATASET SHOWS A LARGE INCREASE IN REPORTS BEGINNING IN 2023. HOWEVER, THE PLATFORM FAILS TO NOTE THAT THIS INCREASE WAS DRIVEN BY A POLICY CHANGE.

While DataMontgomery provides users with a large volume of data from which to draw conclusions, the program itself does not provide accessible information for users, but rather exclusively raw data. The limited charts available on some datasets provide precursory information, and the most advanced tools are hindered by unpublished manuals and non-intuitive menus. Furthermore, DataMontgomery does not contextualize the data it presents within policy changes that may drive changes in the data. As a result, users who can download, transform, and assess the data but fail to contextualize the information they use within the policy context could reach incorrect conclusions.

MCPD Annual Reports

[MCPD's public safety data reports page](#) contains approximately eight annual reports provided to the community, including topics such as Bias Incident Reports, False Alarm Reduction Section Reports, Pursuit Reports, and Use of Force Reports. Additionally, there are weekly crime summary reports and monthly hate/bias summary reports.

While more limited in number, the annual reports provide data displayed in a digestible fashion. Tables and charts are built from the same data on DataMontgomery, clearly showing the possibilities available to those with the time and knowledge to process the raw data. Different representations of the data take place, and differences within districts and across years are highlighted and discussed.

The narrative element accompanying the data in these reports is critical for bringing changing trends that result from effective policework to the reader's attention and for explaining away trends occurring because of changing reporting standards. To extend the previous section's example, in the 2024 Annual Bias Report, the first slide following the introduction is dedicated to highlighting and educating the reader about the changes in reporting numbers occurring because of the policy change:

"It is important to note that the increase does not necessarily mean that more incidents are occurring within schools; it simply means that more incidents are now being reported to the police. Because of the changes implemented, bias data, 2023 and onward, will be analyzed differently than in prior years."¹⁵

Presenting a narrative alongside data on report numbers guides readers away from incorrect conclusions. Research has indicated that readers tend to accept the statistics they see.¹⁶ As a result, it becomes critical to present statistics in the correct light, which MCPD accomplishes by attaching narrative information in its annual reports.

Nearby Jurisdictions

An assessment of nearby jurisdictions was conducted to compare informational trust-building initiatives across different areas. Many areas released similar annual or monthly reports and provided open access to data with the ability to apply filters and download information for personal processing.

One tool in several jurisdictions, but not Montgomery County, is a manipulable crime dashboard. Typically built using Microsoft Power BI, the dashboard processes open-source data like that provided by DataMontgomery into a manipulable format that users with less technological expertise can operate. While the raw data is still accessible to users, the dashboard offers a valuable summary of information.

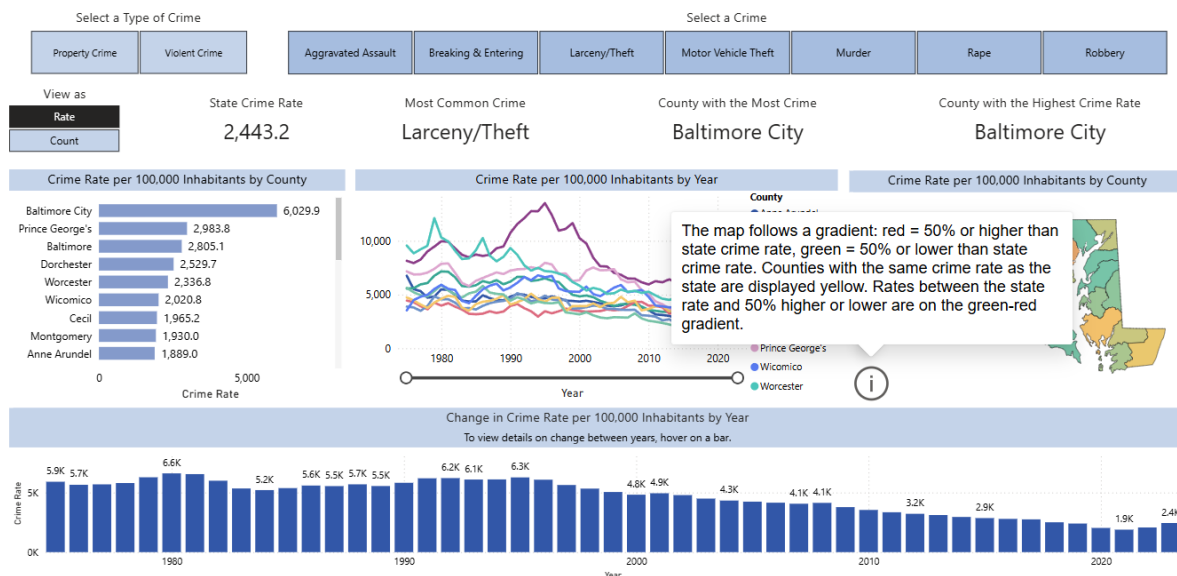
Many of the dashboards evaluated included some unique elements that provided explanatory information for users to either aid in their understanding of the data shown or

¹⁵ [MCPD 2024 Annual Bias Report, slide 7](#)

¹⁶ [Are Informed Citizens More Trusting? Transparency of Performance Data and Trust Towards a British Police Force](#)

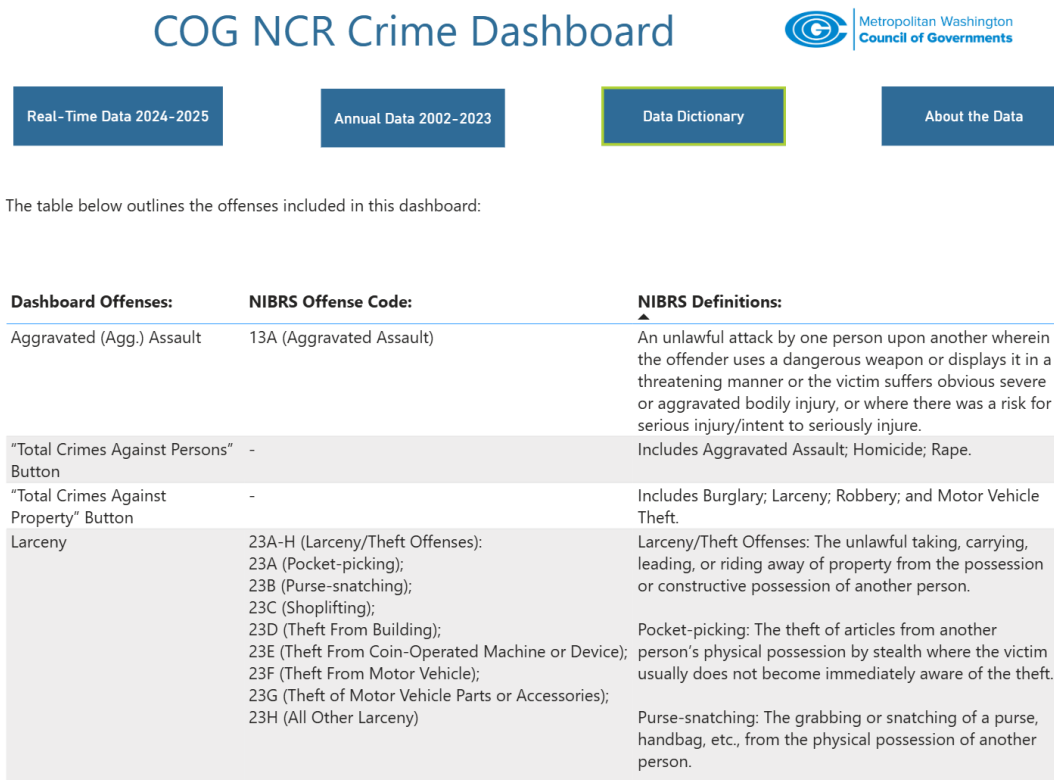
to prevent misinterpretation of trends visible because of a reporting policy change, rather than a change in the number of events taking place. [The State of Maryland Crime Dashboard](#) (Figure 5) contains several sections with a question mark “?” next to each title. Each area can be hovered over to explain what the button does or summarize what the section explains. The [Washington Metropolitan Area Council of Governments Crime Dashboard](#) (Figure 6) provides a data dictionary as a separate tab that defines each offense type. The [Baltimore County Police Data Dashboard](#) (Figure 7) asks the user to click through a series of splash pages, detailing how the data is collected, highlighting how the data reporting requirements have impacted specific trends, and allowing users to submit complaints or compliments. In addition to the splash pages, the chart defines any term the user mouses over, a valuable method of reducing the effect of jargon on a user’s understanding of terms.

FIGURE 5: MARYLAND CRIME DASHBOARD



CAPTION: THE MARYLAND CRIME DASHBOARD HAS A NUMBER OF ACCESSIBLE TOOLTIPS THAT PROVIDE USERS WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE PLATFORM.

FIGURE 6: COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NATIONAL CAPITOL REGION CRIME DASHBOARD’S DATA DICTIONARY



CAPTION: THE COG NCR DASHBOARD CONTAINS A DATA DICTIONARY, PROVIDING USERS WITH INFORMATION ON OFFENSE CODES.

FIGURE 7: BALTIMORE COUNTY POLICE DATA DASHBOARD



CAPTION: THE SPLASH PAGES ON THE BALTIMORE COUNTY POLICE DASHBOARD ENCOURAGE USERS TO READ BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE DATA BEFORE ACCESSING IT.

Summary

Public data sharing can drive community trust by providing the public with valuable information on what actions the police are undertaking and how these actions affect crime levels within the county. In Montgomery County, these informational trust-building initiatives take two primary forms: that of DataMontgomery and MCPD annual reports. DataMontgomery is valuable in the sheer volume of data to which it facilitates access, but can become unwieldy for users without the technical skills to process the data, potentially leading them to incorrect conclusions or leaving them unable to reach any conclusions. By comparison, the annual reports do an excellent job of contextualizing data and providing narrative insight into why data trends might occur. Other jurisdictions have attempted to bridge this gap by implementing crime dashboards, pages that process the open-source data as it is entered to provide users with a more streamlined platform with which to engage, which can facilitate accessibility to the data for users without the technical skills to process it from its raw format.

Measurement of Community Trust

Outreach, in the form of relational and informational trust building, is ideally complemented by efforts to assess the impact of these initiatives on the community. By

measuring the level of trust in MCPD among the residents of Montgomery County, the department can better understand the effectiveness of the many programs it supports.

In testimony before Congress as a part of the 21st Century Policing Task Force established by President Obama, researchers from the RAND Corporation cited a need for police departments to implement tools to measure the relationship between themselves and the communities they serve. These researchers go so far as to compare the quality and regularity of information needed to that delivered by most departments' CompStat systems, which use recent crime and other data to assess trends and support research allocation and tactical decisions.¹⁷

Unlike recent crime data, the results of community outreach can be hard to measure. In the 2021 CED Annual Report, then-Director Cpt. Stacey Flynn wrote, "It is important to note that many community policing efforts are not tangible, and the department must depend on citizens' feedback to track our success."¹⁸ Still, attempts must be made to understand the effectiveness of outreach activities and the level of trust between the police and the community from all interactions between the public and the police.

Legislative bill 45-20, passed in November of 2021, which required increased data reporting from MCPD (which is reflected in the [MCPD Annual Statistical Reports for County Officials](#)) also called for an annual survey in section 1(d): "The Department annually must conduct an anonymous survey of residents and officers regarding police-community relations, including, at a minimum, the levels of trust communities have in the police."¹⁹ This survey was also required to be distributed in multiple languages and to disaggregate resident responses by demographics. This survey, estimated by MCPD to require \$100,000 per year, was requested by the County's Executive in FY24, but was not funded by the Council and was not requested in FY25 or FY26.²⁰

Without an annual survey on relations, assessing existing measurements of community trust becomes complex. One repeated measure that allows for the analysis of trends over time is the [National Community Livability Survey](#) (NCS). This survey was administered in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2024 and contains two series of questions that assess residents' feelings of safety in various environments within the county. More recent versions include an additional series of questions asking residents about the quality of service received in

¹⁷ [Strengthening Trust Between Police and the Public in an Era of Increasing Transparency; Before the Republican Policy Committee Law Enforcement Task Force United States House of Representatives, October 6, 2015](#)

¹⁸ [Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission Community Policing Program Annual Report 2021](#)

¹⁹ [Montgomery County Council - Legislative Information Management System – Bill 45-20](#)

²⁰ [County Council Briefing on 2024 MCPD Statistical Data Report, Council analyst staff report, July 16, 2025](#)

their interactions with MCPD. Snapshot surveys have also taken place in the county in various forms. While these surveys provide valuable information on how the police interact with the public and some insight into the level of community trust in the police, their single, rather than repeated, nature means they fail to facilitate an analysis of trends over time. Two studies in particular took place in Montgomery County: a [survey conducted by the Executives Task Force to Reimagine Public Safety](#), which released preliminary results in 2020, and a qualitative analysis of body camera footage was undertaken as part of the [Effective Law Enforcement for All \(ELE4A\) assessment](#), completed in November of 2022. MCPD conducted a community survey without funding in the fall of 2024. However, it represents an excellent step towards measuring community trust. This survey was limited by methodology and scope. Additional metrics have been mentioned in community policing reports released by MCPD. While novel methods of connecting outreach impacts to quantitative results exist, these measures have limited use for various reasons. MCPD recently announced a pilot for post-contact surveys, which represents a targeted survey that intends to assess not only the quality of service but also the community's trust of MCPD.

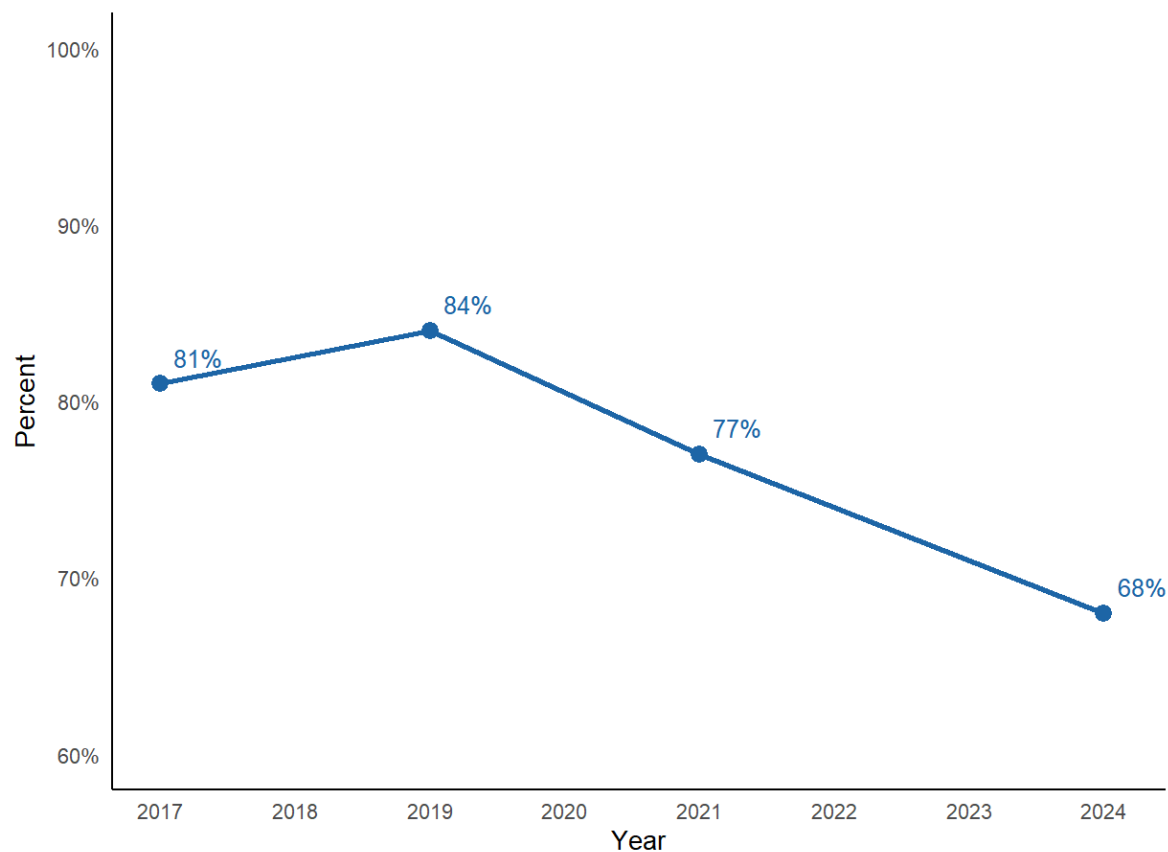
National Community Survey

The [NCS](#), operated by Polco, is a tool local governments use to collect opinion data from residents. Sometimes referred to as the “Community Livability Survey,” the survey measures various aspects of community livability and can be used in a strategic planning role for local governments, informing decisions based on community feedback. The survey focuses on three general categories of a community: Community Characteristics, Governance, and Participation. This survey was conducted in Montgomery county in [2007](#), [2009](#), [2017](#), [2019](#), [2021](#), and [2024](#). Each survey contained some questions assessing how safe residents felt in their neighborhoods and the greater community. From 2019 on, the survey has contained an additional series of questions assessing MCPD’s professionalism, approachability, and responsiveness.

There are a series of questions asking residents of the county to evaluate how safe they feel in a variety of settings and from different forms of crime (Figure 9). These metrics are combined into an overall measure of feelings on safety (Figure 8). Many of the metrics show declines in feelings of safety over the seven-year period evaluated. Most telling, the overall measure of feeling of safety declines from a high of 84% in 2019 to 68% in 2024.

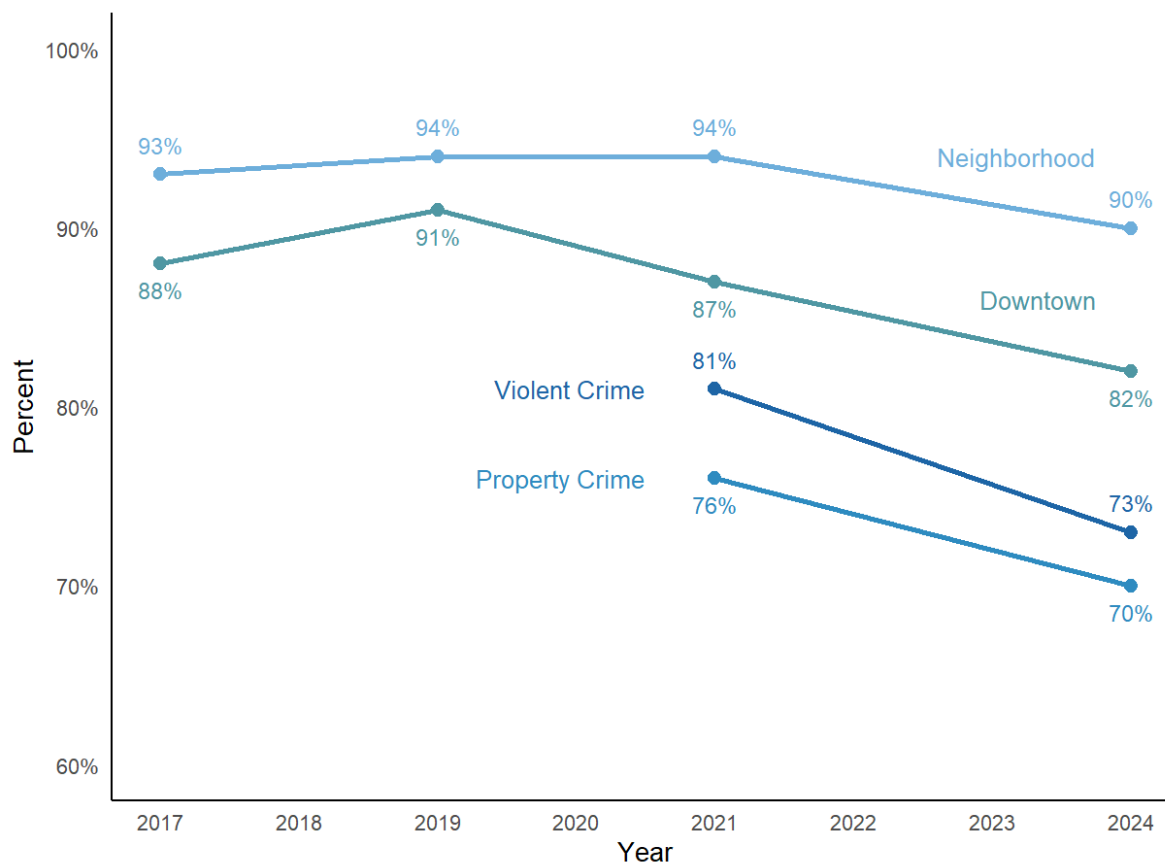
The questions and results are evaluated next. An important note is that all of the results provided by NCS were similar to national averages, which have seen decreases across the all common measures as illustrated in Figure 1. The results provided were drawn from different areas of NCS surveys or collated across different years the NCS was conducted. Their order here is not indicative of their order of presentation in the NCS.

FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO RATE THEIR OVERALL FEELING OF SAFETY AS EITHER EXCELLENT OR GOOD. SOURCE: NCS 2024, PAGES 111 AND 112.



CAPTION: 16% FEWER RESIDENTS REPORT "EXCELLENT" OR "GOOD" WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS OF SAFETY IN 2024 COMPARED TO 2019.

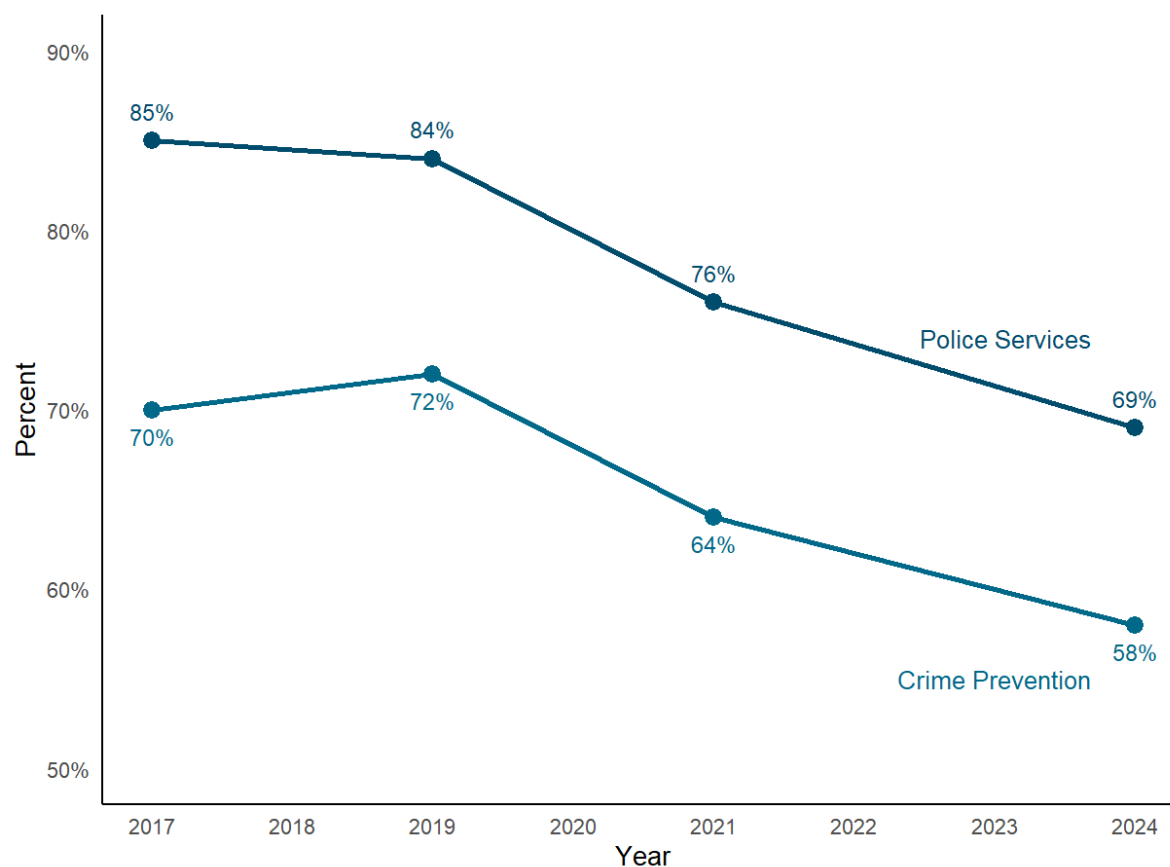
FIGURE 9: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO RATE THEIR FEELING OF SAFETY AS EITHER EXCELLENT OR GOOD IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS AND CRIME TYPES. SOURCE: NCS 2024, PAGES 111 AND 112



CAPTION: ACROSS DIFFERENT LOCATIONS AND CRIME TYPES, A DECREASED SHARE OF RESIDENTS HAVE REPORTED THEIR FEELINGS OF SAFETY AS EITHER EXCELLENT OR GOOD IN 2024 RELATIVE TO 2019.

The next series of questions asks residents to rate the quality of different services in Montgomery County; the measures connected to safety have been extracted. Similar to trends shown in overall feelings of safety, there is a clear decline in the proportion of residents answering either “excellent” or “good” (Figure 10).

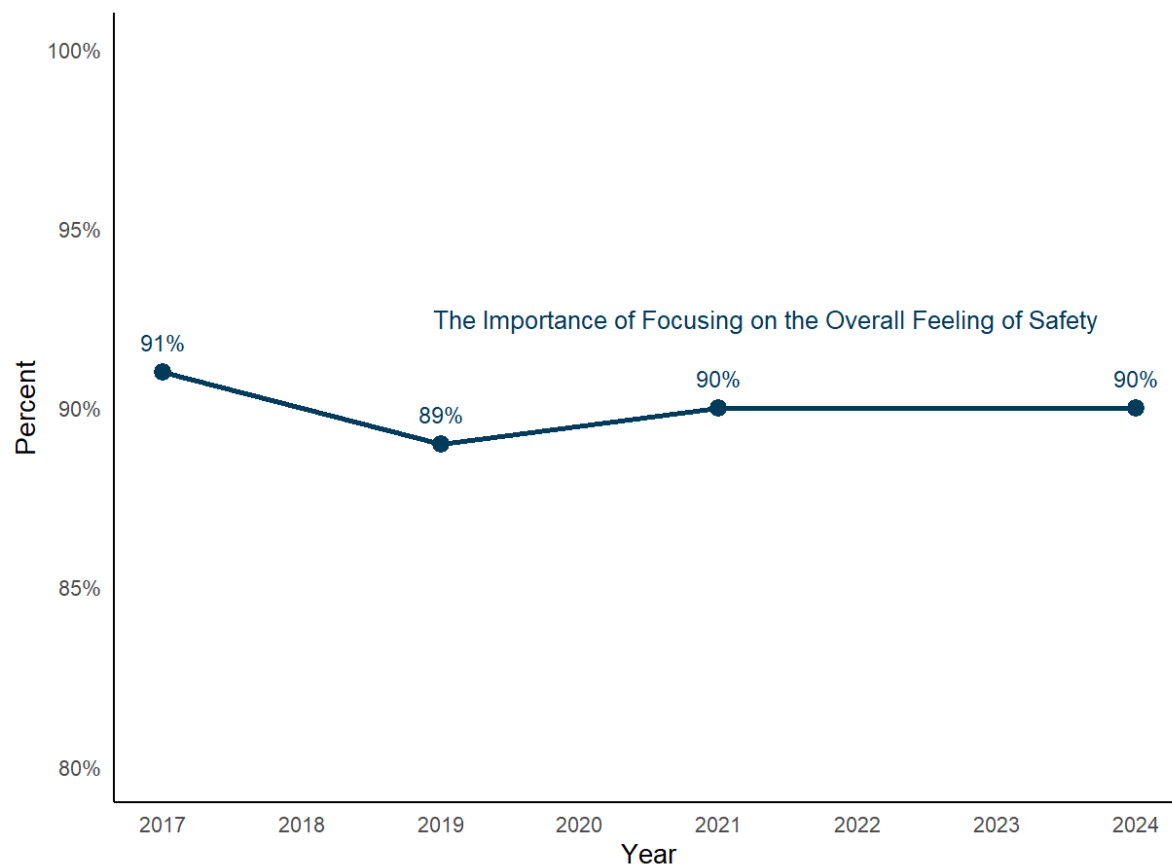
FIGURE 10: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY EITHER EXCELLENT OR GOOD. SOURCE: NCS 2024, PAGES 111 AND 112



CAPTION: A SMALLER SHARE OF RESIDENTS RATED CRIME PREVENTION AND POLICE SERVICES AS EITHER EXCELLENT OR GOOD IN 2024 RELATIVE TO 2019.

One trend that remains consistent across multiple iterations of the survey is residents' expectation that public officials focus on feelings of safety within the community (Figure 11).

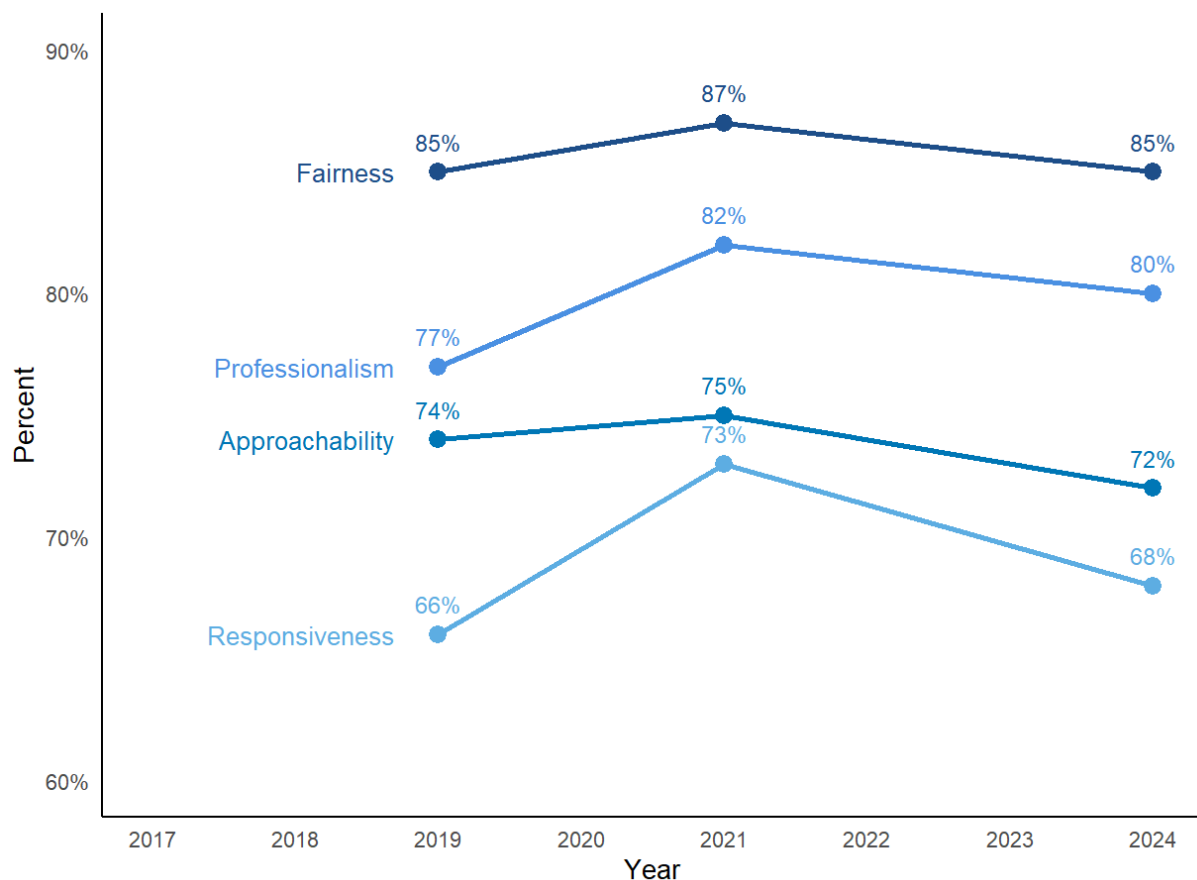
FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS RATING THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON THE OVERALL FEELING OF SAFETY AS “ESSENTIAL” OR “VERY IMPORTANT” IN THE COMING TWO YEARS. SOURCE: NCS 2024, PAGES 111 AND 112



CAPTION: ACROSS ALL SURVEYS APPROXIMATELY 90% OF RESIDENTS HAVE RATED THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON THE OVERALL FEELING OF SAFETY AS “ESSENTIAL” OR “VERY IMPORTANT.”

The final section of questions related to public safety assesses the quality of service provided by MCPD (Figure 12). These are the only questions to specifically ask about MCPD, rather than the concept of safety. These questions largely assess the quality of service provided by MCPD through three metrics: fairness in treatment, professionalism, approachability, and responsiveness. From 2019 to 2024 these values have remained largely stable, even as perceptions of feelings of safety have declined. These questions are additional questions added to the standard NCS specifically for Montgomery County.

FIGURE 12: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS RATING THE QUALITIES OF THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH MCPD AS EITHER EXCELLENT OR GOOD. SOURCE: NCS 2019, PAGE 11; 2021 PAGE 151; 2024 PAGE 173-174



CAPTION: THE PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS RATING THE QUALITY OF THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH MCPD HAVE REMAINED RELATIVELY STABLE OVER TIME.

While the quality of service provided by MCPD has some legitimacy as a proxy measure of the community's trust of MCPD, it is not a perfect representation.

Notably absent from the NCS, except for 2019, are disaggregated responses by demographic. The 2019 survey was the only survey that provided disaggregated results by demographic, the tables containing questions relating to safety and interactions with MCPD are provided below. There are only minor differences across different demographic groups when assessed on their feelings regarding safety. For questions assessing MCPD, assessments of fairness jump 13% when moving from the low to middle income classification, and a difference is present when divided by race/ethnicity—"White alone, not Hispanic" is 12% more likely to feel they are treated fairly than "Hispanic and/or other

race.” Similar trends are present for the series of questions assessing interactions with MCPD, with larger jumps in approval when moving from the first age group (18-34) to the second (35-54), specifically with regards to approachability and responsiveness. It is unclear why future versions of the survey were not disaggregated in this manner.

TABLE 1: COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS – SAFETY DEMOGRAPHIC CROSSTABS (1 OF 2). SOURCE: NCS 2019, TABLE 2 PAGE 3.

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)	Number of years in Montgomery County			Annual Household Income		
Demographic divisions:	5 years or less	6 to 20 years	More than 20 years	\$49,999 or less	\$50,000 to \$99,000	\$100,000 or more
Overall feeling of safety in Montgomery County	88%	84%	81%	79%	83%	88%
In your neighborhood during the day	95%	95%	91%	93%	94%	94%
In Montgomery County’s downtowns / commercial areas during the day	92%	93%	88%	88%	89%	93%

TABLE 2: COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS – SAFETY DEMOGRAPHIC CROSSTABS(2 OF 2). SOURCE: NCS 2019, TABLE 2 PAGE 3.

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)	Race/Ethnicity		Age			Overall
Demographic divisions:	White alone, not Hispanic	Hispanic and/or other race	18-34	35-54	55+	
Overall feeling of safety in Montgomery County	83%	85%	88%	81%	85%	84%
In your neighborhood during the day	95%	93%	95%	94%	93%	94%
In Montgomery County’s downtowns / commercial areas during the day	91%	92%	93%	92%	88%	91%

TABLE 3: FAIRNESS AND ASPECTS OF INTERACTION WITH MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEE DEMOGRAPHIC CROSSTABS (1 OF 2). SOURCE: NCS 2019, TABLES 32 AND 33 PAGE 18.

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat positively)	Number of years in Montgomery County			Annual Household Income		
Demographic divisions:	5 years or less	6 to 20 years	More than 20 years	\$49,999 or less	\$50,000 to \$99,000	\$100,000 or more
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the MCPD employee(s) you interacted with treated you fairly?	92%	83%	85%	74%	87%	89%
How would you rate MCPD’s: Professionalism	87%	81%	76%	77%	82%	81%
How would you rate MCPD’s: Approachability	82%	73%	73%	69%	77%	76%
How would you rate MCPD’s: Responsiveness	67%	75%	71%	66%	74%	74%

TABLE 4: FAIRNESS AND ASPECTS OF INTERACTION WITH MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEE DEMOGRAPHIC CROSSTABS (2 OF 2) SOURCE: NCS 2019, TABLES 32 AND 33 PAGE 18.

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)	Race/Ethnicity		Age			Overall
Demographic divisions:	White alone, not Hispanic	Hispanic and/or other race	18-34	35-54	55+	
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the MCPD employee(s) you interacted with treated you fairly?	92%	80%	81%	87%	90%	86%
How would you rate MCPD’s: Professionalism	84%	77%	74%	82%	84%	80%
How would you rate MCPD’s: Approachability	80%	70%	62%	79%	81%	75%
How would you rate MCPD’s: Responsiveness	76%	69%	57%	78%	78%	72%

The NCS is a valuable element of the resident surveying within Montgomery County, as it is the only measure that appears to evaluate community opinions on public safety in a way that facilitates analysis over time and allows insight into trends in the community. Residents' feelings of safety have appeared to decline over time, while the value they place on focusing on safety has remained constant. It should be noted that the results in Montgomery County have remained similar to the national benchmark across all years. The community's views of MCPD's quality of service have remained stable over time. However, the limited number of questions in the NCS that evaluate the public's relationship with

MCPD leaves gaps in understanding the community's trust of the department. Of note, the questions assessing MCPD quality of service are questions unique to Montgomery County. If feasible, a straightforward method of gaining additional insight into community trust may be to add an additional set of Montgomery County-specific questions that assess the community's trust in police. Furthermore, apart from 2019, the results have never been disaggregated by demographic, which at that time provided valuable insight into diverging views of police within different demographics and would likely continue to do so if included in more recent iterations.

Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Survey

The Reimagining Public Safety Initiative Fall 2020 Community Survey was developed to allow Montgomery County Residents to provide input into the task force's work. This survey asked a series of questions targeted at understanding whether responsibility for various services should lie solely, partially, or not at all with MCPD. It was advertised to the community at large and offered in multiple languages, and it received 6,543 responses.²¹

For most of the services and issues identified in the survey prompts, respondents noted a role for the police department. However, 72% of respondents favored shifting responses for particular, typically less severe, crimes and behavior away from MCPD to other agencies or for MCPD to work in partnership with other agencies rather than being solely responsible. Residents were also asked if funding were to be reallocated from MCPD, where it should be allocated, and 28% responded "Do not take funding away from the police department."

While the public's opinions on whether MCPD should be solely, partially, or not responsible for responding to specific crimes or behaviors or whether their funding should be reallocated, might provide some limited value in assessing how much the community trusts the police department to serve the community properly, the survey appears to lack any questions that directly assess levels of community trust.

²¹ [Reimagining Public Safety Initiative Fall 2020 Community Survey](#)

FIGURE 13: MCPD RPS COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS SLIDE 4

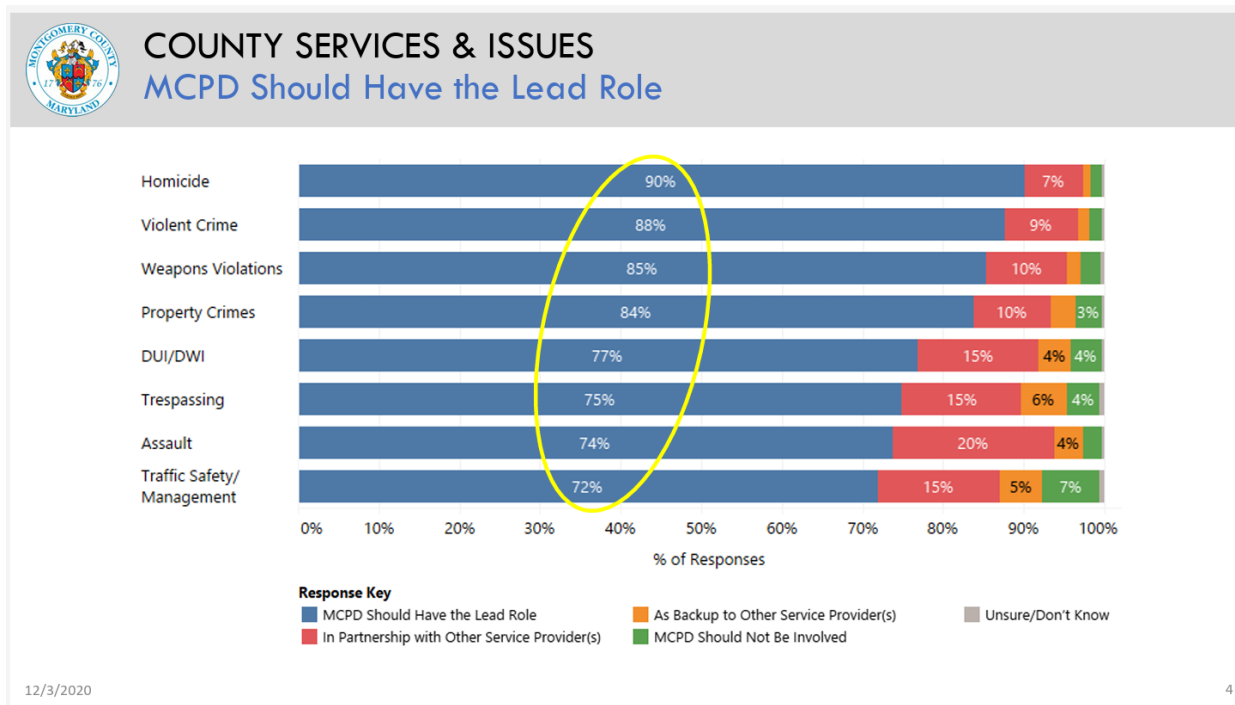


FIGURE 14: MCPD RPS COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS SLIDE 5

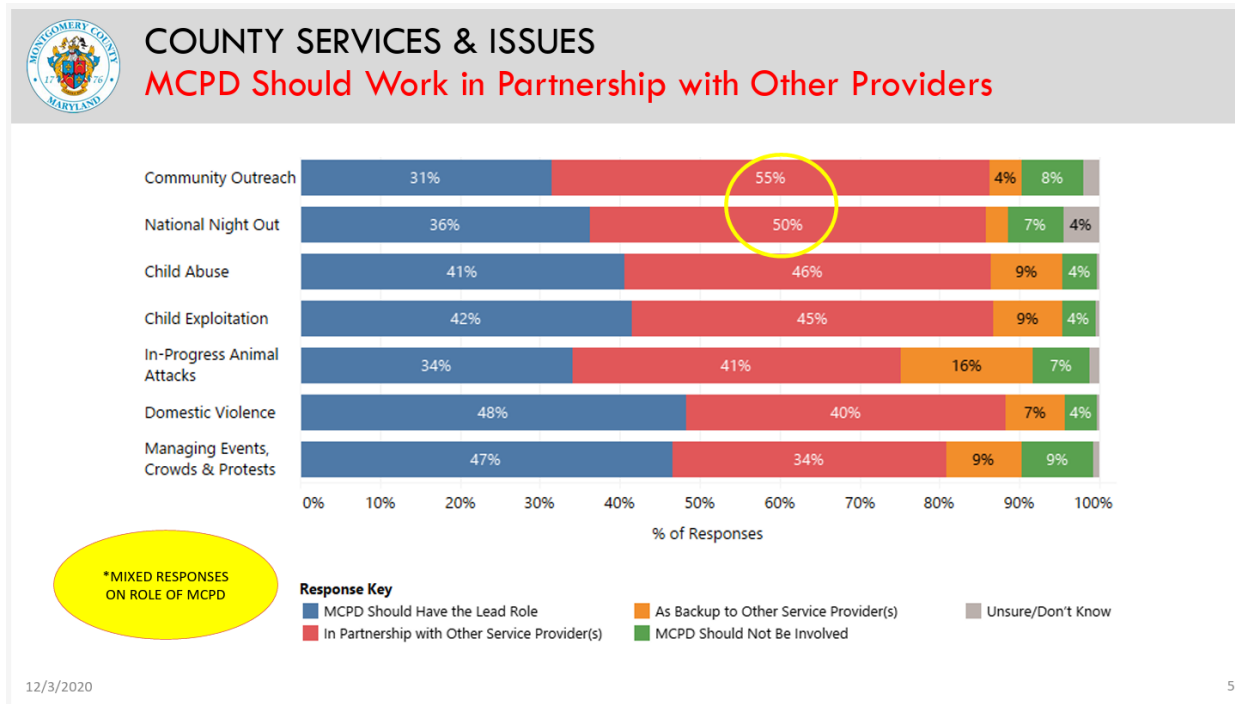


FIGURE 15: MCPD RPS COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS SLIDE 6

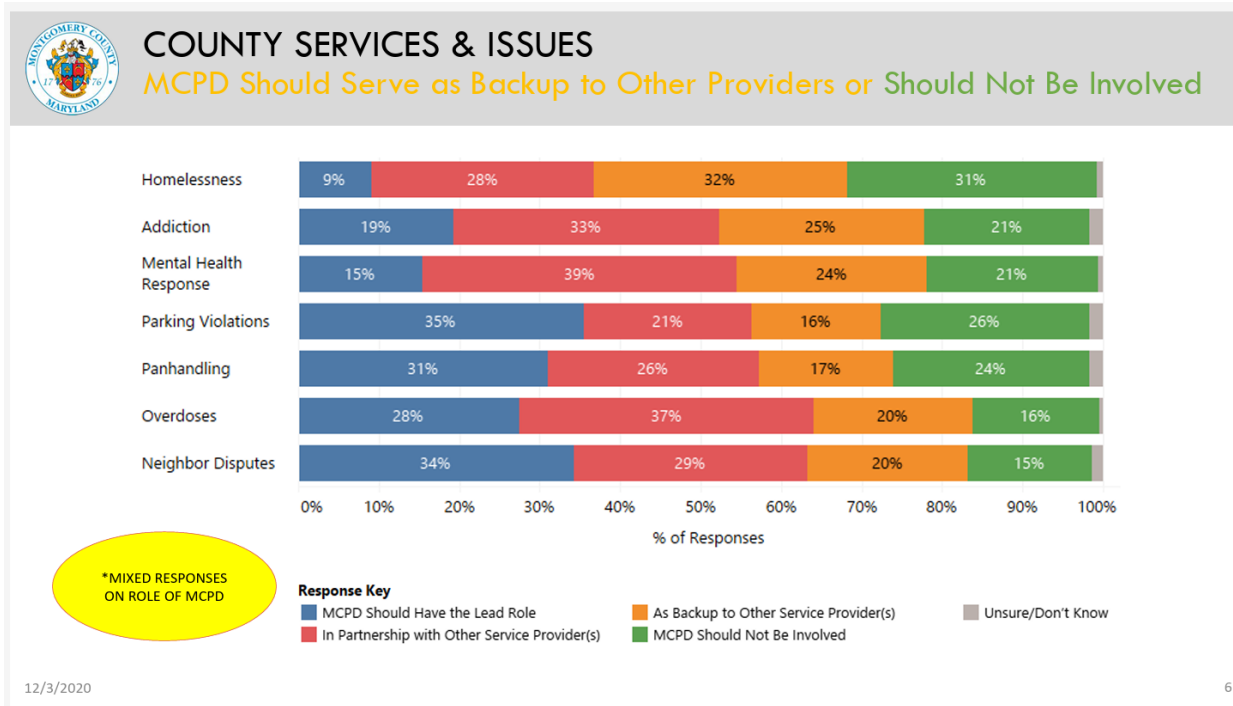
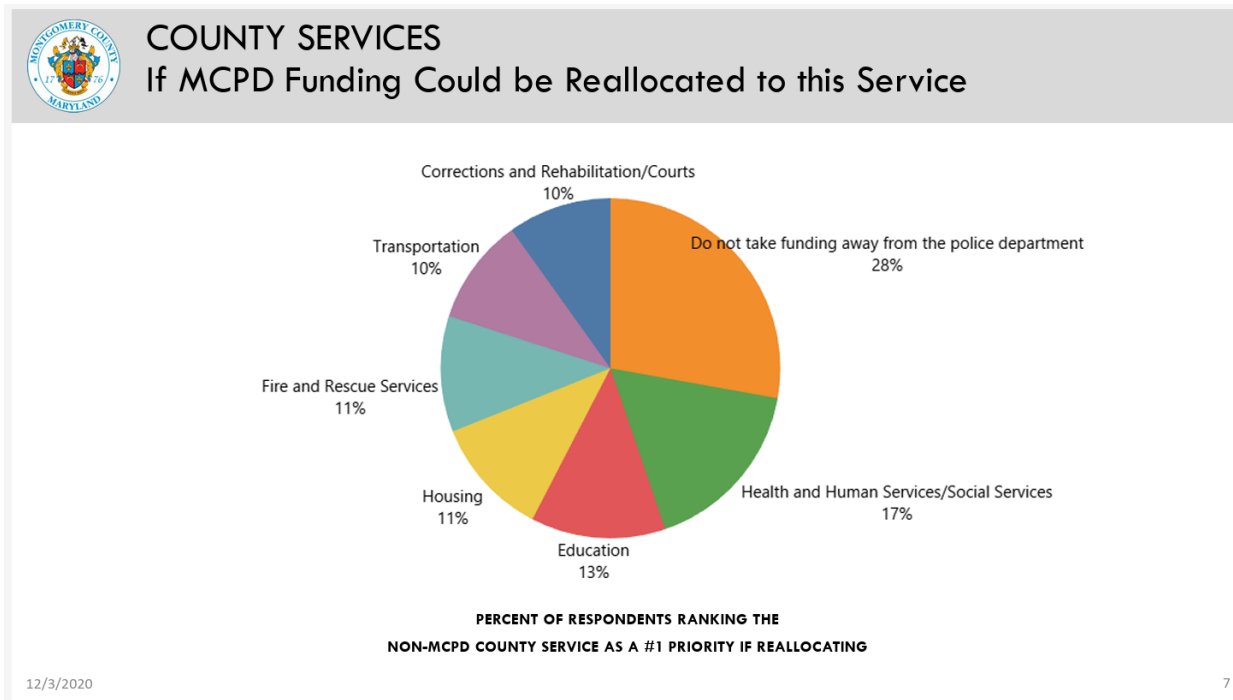


FIGURE 16: MCPD RPS COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS SLIDE 7



ELE4A Body Worn Camera Review

Effective Law Enforcement for All (ELE4A) is an organization that partners with public leaders and police departments to achieve effective public safety practices. From July 2020 to November 2022, ELE4A partnered with County officials, MCPD, and the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force to recommend improvements in pursuit of safe and effective law enforcement. As part of this assessment, ELE4A reviewed over 500 body-worn camera (BWC) recordings to consider department interactions with the community.²²

ELE4A reviewed BWC footage connected to traffic stops, domestic violence incidents, and use-of-force incidents. The evaluators concluded that most officers were courteous and friendly in all reasonable situations, regularly went beyond departmental requirements when offering aid to individuals in need, and overwhelmingly followed departmental procedures. However, this assessment exclusively evaluated the performance of police personnel. It failed to gather information from community members who had interacted with officers on their opinions of the department.

MCPD Community Survey

In the fall of 2024, MCPD conducted a community survey through social media and on NextDoor using a Microsoft Form. This survey included multiple-choice and open-ended questions that captured community sentiment and was available in English and Spanish.

Questions examined residents' feelings of trust in MCPD to provide for their public safety and their feelings of safety in their neighborhoods. They asked whether residents had had a personal interaction with an MCPD officer. The survey also included open-ended questions, which were consolidated into general categories and themes. These questions asked residents to specify what the department can do to increase levels of trust, the most popular being "be visible/more patrols."

There were two primary limitations of the survey: methodology and scope. The survey was methodologically limited in the way it was implemented, by presenting the survey over social media and NextDoor, the potential exists for selection bias, as only a certain share of the community might be exposed to the survey, and that share of the community might fundamentally differ from the community, skewing the results. The second issue was the scope of the survey, receiving only 84 responses; this sample size is much smaller than the respondent pool for the NCS, which received 761 responses in the 2024 iteration, or the RPS community survey, which received 6,543 responses. Due to the small sample size, it is unclear how applicable the results are to the community at large.

²² [ELEFA Issues Final Report of Montgomery County Police Department November 29, 2022](#)

The issues with implementing the MCPD's community survey should not diminish the valuable steps toward effective measurement of community trust achieved through the survey's implementation. The types of questions represent an increased recognition of the need to survey residents not only on the quality of service they receive, but also their overall trust in the department. This survey is an important jumping-off point that can be developed and expanded upon in the coming years.

Additional Metrics

The Community Policing Annual Reports, which are submitted each year to the [Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission](#), contain a series of questions the director of CED is asked to respond to each year. The final question, of which there are six, asks directors: "How does your agency measure the effectiveness of its community policing program?" Responses to this question suggest additional potential metrics that could be used to measure the impacts of police trust-building initiatives on community trust. In the [2023 Report](#), three metrics are noted that may suggest positive impacts: increases in the number of hotline tips leading to arrests, changes in the number of entities contacting MCPD for information on presentations, and more empowered neighborhoods.

Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most quantitative in nature, is, "the willingness for people to come forward with information about crime. Over the past several years we have seen an increase in our hotline tips that have lead [sic] directly to arrests."²³ While many factors may have contributed to this change, the author believes a primary factor was community engagement efforts. This statistic has the potential to be valuable, not only as a measure of community trust in the police, but also as a concrete representation of the returns that positive relationships between the community and law enforcement officers may bring. Unfortunately, data is not available. [Crime Solvers](#), an independent non-profit community organization that works with MCPD and other county police departments and offers rewards for tips (submitted through [P3Tips.com](#)) that result in solved crimes, does not release information on either the number of tips received or the proportion of tips that lead to arrests.

Changes in the number of entities contacting MCPD for information or presentations does serve as a reasonable representation of the community demand for trust-building initiatives from police, and perhaps in turn, the community's trust in public safety officials. However, it is unclear if the count of individuals who contact, rather than receive, information or presentations is maintained. The number of community events held, released by MCPD in [Annual Police Statistical Data Reports](#), has trended downward for the

²³ [Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission Community Policing Program Annual Report, Montgomery County Police Department, Submitted 10/29/2024, quotes from page 6 question 6.](#)

last three years, with 541 events in 2022, 355 events in 2023, and 313 events in 2024. If all, or a consistent proportion of requests are fulfilled, this suggests a year-over-year decrease in community interest in trust-building efforts. It is unclear what this decrease may suggest; it is possible that fewer community engagement events took place because the community already has high trust in the police and requires fewer informational events as a result. The distribution of community events has not been explored; it is also possible that a greater number of events that fall into the category referenced in the community policing report are taking place, and greater reductions in other categories are leading to an overall decrease. Regardless, 313 events in 2024, while fewer than 2023, is an average of six events per week, still an impressive number of events.

The final suggested metric, empowerment of neighborhoods, is a subjective measure made by the CED director from their experiences going on community walks in high-crime neighborhoods. The subjective nature of this metric does not mean it is without value, especially in this situation, where a veteran officer and division director presents it. However, beyond the opinion of this specific individual, year-over-year changes in the level of empowerment a neighborhood feels is impossible to measure. Rather than discarding the metric, this qualitative opinion can be recognized as an opportunity for further research. This opportunity could take the form of implementing a standardized survey tool, which could be used in a pre/post method to assess the impact of targeted police initiatives in target neighborhoods.

All three of the suggested metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of the community policing program have some value in indexing the community's trust in the police. However, due to the restricted data regarding tips, the unclear count of requested community events, and the qualitative nature of community empowerment, all three metrics are lacking regarding their ability to evaluate community trust in the police.

Upcoming Metrics

For FY25, MCPD has contracted with Axon to provide its Officer Safety Plan.²⁴ The department maintains contracts with Axon for access to several products, including tasers, video storage, and body-worn cameras. The Officer Safety Plan includes a suite of products, including [My Community Request](#), an element of which is [My90](#).

One element of the My90 platform are post-contact surveys. In the hours following the 911 caller's interactions with a call operator and then an officer, they receive a survey over the phone, via text, that requests information on the quality of their interaction with law enforcement. In a briefing with the Public Safety Committee on July 21, 2025, members of

²⁴ [MCPD FY25 Recommended Operating Budget, Summary of Key Issues, Page 3, bullet 2.](#)

the Management Services Bureau discussed an upcoming pilot of this program in Montgomery County, with an anticipated rollout of the program in August of 2025. The briefing also detailed some of the questions present in the survey, which include measures that specifically pursue details of community trust.²⁵ The survey is expected to include questions about demographics and thus support disaggregated data.

This survey will certainly provide valuable information to MCPD on community trust and other critical elements of emergency response. However, some aspects of the survey contribute to and limit the quality of the measure. The survey will provide valuable information about the targeted group, those calling 911, but potentially limited information about the broader community, as it is unclear that the share of the community calling 911 is a representative sample of the community as a whole. Additionally, care must be taken to recognize that the survey, by nature, targets a vulnerable population, people who have just recently had to call 911. The survey may initiate contact only after their having placed the call. The police department is aware that not all victim types should receive the survey, noting the risk of re-victimization. This awareness of how the timing of the survey may affect responses, and the incomplete share of callers considered appropriate to survey, should be carried over into the analysis of results.

The post-contact survey, soon to be implemented by MCPD, represents another useful tool for gathering community information. MCPD's inclusion of questions focusing on the community's trust represents a desire to pursue information about this specific aspect of their relationship with the community. The targeted nature of the survey has both positives and negatives that will need to be considered in both the implementation of data gathering and the analysis of the results.

Summary

While a number of survey efforts involving the police have been completed in recent years, these assessments remain fragmented and incomplete. Even though legislation, in Bill 45-20, calls for a comprehensive annual survey disaggregated by demographics, this tool has not been funded as intended, and while recent measures show promise, a gap in measurement still exists. The current patchwork comprises one-time surveys, qualitative assessments, limited measures, and the NCS. The NCS provides valuable information, offering trend data showing a decline in residents' feelings of safety over time, while perceptions of MCPD professionalism and fairness have remained largely stable.

While it is the most useful measure, the NCS includes only four questions directly related to MCPD interactions and provides disaggregated data in only one iteration. Other tools,

²⁵ [Public Committee work session, July 21, 2025. Beginning approximately minute 16.](#)

like the Reimagining Public Safety survey and the ELE4A body camera review, offer additional insight but lack direct measures of trust or resident perspectives on police encounters. Annual MCPD reports have identified potential alternative metrics—such as tips leading to arrests or requests for outreach—but are limited by data availability or ambiguity in measurement. The community survey implemented by MCPD in the fall of 2024 represents a valuable first attempt at collecting community data, and the upcoming post-contact survey also represents a new method of collecting information from a critical group.

Ultimately, while several indicators speak to community trust, the absence of a dedicated community-wide, regularly repeated, and demographically disaggregated survey leaves gaps in the county’s ability to evaluate how effectively MCPD is building and sustaining trust with the community.

Recommendations, Challenges, and Limitations

The previous sections have explored how MCPD engages in both relational and informational trust-building initiatives, as well as the efforts that have taken place within the county to understand the level of trust the community has in the police. The following recommendations are intended to explore how the Council might support and enhance these efforts. No changes are recommended regarding the relational trust-building initiatives led by MCPD and specific units—the culture of outreach is deeply embedded and effectively executed within the department, and the returns on investment in either informational trust-building initiatives or the measurement of levels of community trust in the police are likely to be far greater.

Recommendations Supporting Informational Trust-Building Initiatives

#1 Increase the accessibility of DataMontgomery:

The Council should support the investments already dedicated to dataMontgomery. The value of these investments can be better realized by implementing strategies for improving accessibility. There is value in ensuring the site is accessible to non-native English speakers. However, a specific focus on making the site more accessible to users with different levels of technical proficiency may be both simpler and represent a significant increase in accessibility. Accessibility to less skilled users can be achieved through a combination of alternatives. While this report has focused on public safety information, data from all departments are published on DataMontgomery, and as such, many departments in the county could benefit from increased accessibility. After building the necessary framework, it would become the responsibility of each department’s DataMontgomery point of contact to update data on the site and support its accessibility.

- A. Include splash pages: Splash pages, which users must click through before accessing data, could contain valuable information on the data they are accessing. These could be developed so that the DataMontgomery point person within each department could update them as necessary. These splash pages could contain background information on how the data was sourced, how often it is updated, links to annual reports with processed data, and narratives on department websites, and flags highlighting when policy changes have generated changes in levels of reporting that do not represent changes in the actual number of events.
- B. Increase the number of attached charts: Attaching 3-5 basic summary charts to each dataset, outlining major trends within the data, would facilitate broad interpretation of trends for users without the technological skills to process data themselves. This would likely require little to no time for skilled users to develop and could be accomplished using the built-in chart generator, which would have the added benefit of demonstrating to users what they could use the tool for themselves.
- C. Publish tutorials on the chart builder and department-specific tools: For departments that have developed advanced tools within DataMontgomery, support them in developing and publishing tutorials that support users with limited technological skills. An existing example of this is the [MCPD crime incident map](#) and tutorial, which currently is unreferenced, unpublished, and only obtainable via contacting a Community Engagement Officer or the Information Technology Management Division.

#1 Challenges and limitations:

A challenge of introducing splash pages to each dataset may be developing uniformity or consistency across datasets, within and across the various departments. Ideally, each splash page would be adapted to the changes and necessary information each unit or program needs to share to provide basic information. However, this may differ significantly for different units and programs. Furthermore, websites are generally optimized to require fewer clicks from users. Increasing the number of clicks has the potential to decrease the number of users who end up accessing the data. The benefits gained from requiring users to complete additional clicks must be weighed against the risk of reducing the number of users who access the data. Perhaps, one position, working across departments and units, could aid in adapting the unique needs of each dataset's splash page to the desire for uniformity across different pages.

A similar concern arises for section B, which proposes attaching charts to each dataset. It may be valuable to standardize what information is summarized in the provided charts; certainly, whatever is provided will drive the most prominent conclusions drawn from the data. However, needs may differ by datasets. This is ultimately a strategic decision.

A final concern is the workload of updating a splash page for the many datasets that might be present. Data reporting requirements can change often, making comparing trends between different reporting periods challenging. This recommendation suggests reporting on policy changes that may affect reporting levels on DataMontgomery and within other annual reports. This can prove challenging, as changes in data reporting standards can take place regularly, and policy changes are not always implemented immediately, in ways that further risk causing confusion.

#2 Develop a crime dashboard:

Montgomery County is unlike several nearby jurisdictions in its lack of a crime dashboard. These tools process and display large quantities of data in formats that are more accessible for users with all levels of technological expertise. Supporting a crime dashboard for the county that processes the information already available on DataMontgomery would greatly expand the accessibility of crime data within the county.

- A. Use existing models and expertise at the Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS) to support development: Dashboards built using Microsoft Power BI, the de facto tool for existing dashboards, already exist within the county. One example is the [Reimagining Public Safety dashboard](#), which provides data on the County's progress on the recommendations from the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force, the Maryland Police Accountability Act, and the Effective Law Enforcement for All (ELE4A) MCPD Audit. A second internal dashboard supports the Police Accountability Board in processing complaints regarding police departments and is referenced in [Police Accountability Board reports](#).²⁶ These existing in-county Power BI dashboards, built by TEBS, indicate that the skills necessary to create a crime dashboard are already on the county payroll and can be directed to this project.
- B. Encourage MCPD collaboration with other police departments to support development: Interviews indicated that police departments across the country have a deep-seated culture of leaning on one another for support, often electing to solicit advice and assistance from the police departments in other counties on new issues, rather than other departments within the county, because of the similar regulations placed upon police departments across counties. Another police department gave the DFR program the code for the flight reporting dashboard on their website, drastically reducing the development cost and production time. It is

²⁶ [Police Accountability Board, Annual Report for Calendar Year 2024, Section 3](#)

possible that encouraging the police department to reach out to another county with a functioning dashboard, such as Baltimore County, could aid in the development process and potentially reduce development costs and time to implementation.

#3 Require programs to include a data recording and sharing plan:

Driven by the privacy concerns of residents, the MCPD DFR program's ability to operate is directly linked to its ability to publish flight data: "If collecting and publishing specified flight data on a daily basis is not possible, the DFR will not be deployed."²⁷ This program's success in developing community trust since its inception is directly related to the face-to-face outreach conducted before and during operation, and has been supported by informational trust building accomplished by sharing a wealth of readily accessible data. By requiring new units and programs to include a data recording and sharing plan from their inception, the Council can support the recording of information that can quantify the actions of a program to the public.

#3 Challenges and limitations:

Requiring a data sharing plan for new units and programs may stifle innovation. The police department continues to face staffing challenges. Over the last decade, expectations for data collection and reporting — whether to the County Council, through dataMontgomery, or in annual reports — have increased. Meeting these expanding requirements increases the workload for a department with limited resources. Further increasing these requirements may unintentionally discourage innovation in future policing initiatives. It is important to balance the benefits of transparency and data-sharing with the operational capacity of police personnel.

Recommendations Supporting Measurement of Community Trust

#4 Fund additional measures of community trust:

The legislature should dedicate additional funding to understanding the community trust of policing within the county. An existing measure within the county, the NCS, has indicated a downward trend in residents' feelings of safety over its last four iterations. Questions assessing community members' interactions with police have remained relatively durable in terms of the quality of service. However, these data are not disaggregated by demographics. Because the limited existing measures show decreasing levels regarding feelings of resident safety, additional information gathering should be encouraged. This

²⁷ [County Council Supplemental Appropriation #24-21 to the FY24 Operating Budget, Drone as First Responder Pilot Program.](#)

could take a variety of forms. In the past, cost has been an issue, with the annual survey in Bill 45-20 estimated to cost \$100,000 annually and remaining unfunded. Funding a general survey would represent the greatest commitment to understanding community-police relations; other viable options with different funding requirements are explored. The cost of this survey has likely been significantly reduced as a result of MCPD's procurement of the Axon Officer Safety Plan. The My90 platform, in addition to having a platform to conduct post-contact surveys, which will be piloted in August of 2025, also contains a platform to conduct community surveys. In all scenarios, the results of surveys should be disaggregated by demographics and made public.

- A. Fund the annual survey laid out in bill 45-20: An annual survey assessing community-police relations by surveying community members and officers would facilitate the greatest understanding of relationships. Conducting this survey annually would quickly generate trends over time that could be analyzed and support attempts to understand what elements might drive changes in this relationship. MCPD's procurement of the Axon Officer Safety Plan and access to the My90 platform will, in all likelihood, reduce the cost of implementation.
- B. Consider other cost-reduction modifications if necessary: If funding the survey as intended is cost-prohibitive, measures that allow a scaled-back survey to proceed may be available. Running the survey biennially would still allow trends to appear over time, and changes in community-police relationships could be tracked, while the cost of implementation would likely be greatly reduced. The size of the survey could also be reduced. While reducing the number of participants will increase the margins of error within the survey, if a representative sample from the community is selected, then the survey results will still be accurate, only less precise.
- C. Add questions on community trust to the next iteration of the NCS: The NCS has established procedures and methodologies within Montgomery County and supports adding supplemental questions; the questions about MCPD interactions and fairness are supplemental. Additional questions that assess community-police relationships could be added to the survey. The cost level of additional questions is unclear, but it is likely lower than implementing a standalone survey. This solution would also likely return accurate information. The results of additional questions and all questions related to safety or the MCPD should be disaggregated by demographics.
- D. Exit surveys for face-to-face events: While only soliciting the opinions of involved community members, voluntary surveys offered at the conclusion of outreach events, such as town hall meetings, would provide information on the quality of outreach activities and the impact they have on the opinions of community members.

- E. Set aside funds for targeted surveys on specific police initiatives: Rather than pursuing county-wide surveys on community-police relations, targeted surveys would solicit information on the changes in public opinion caused by specific police initiatives. Targeted surveys could be implemented in a pre-post design, where residents could be asked about their feelings of safety, exposure to crime, and/or feelings about police before a specific initiative—like the DFR program setting up a station in their town, increased presence in a high crime neighborhood, or a enforcement corridor along a dangerous stretch of highway—and then again in the period following the conclusion of the initiative. Changes in public opinion would be an effective method of evaluating the impact of a police initiative on public opinions of law enforcement, in addition to the analysis already being conducted on how specific initiatives impact crime levels.

#4 Challenges and limitations:

Developing methodologically sound surveys with limited funding presents a significant challenge to implementing additional measures of community trust. While the full annual survey outlined in Bill 45-20 would provide the most comprehensive understanding of public trust, its estimated \$100,000 cost may present a barrier. Scaled-back alternatives, such as biennial administration or reduced sample sizes, may still carry non-trivial costs, particularly when accounting for translation, outreach, and data processing needs. Efforts to reduce the costs of implementation should not compromise methodological soundness.

Successfully executing repeated measures is an ever-present challenge. Longitudinal measures require consistency in content, administrative methods, and sampling procedures. All of these can be vulnerable to shifting priorities, staffing changes, and funding interruptions.

Finally, while targeted or event-based surveys offer a lower-cost alternative for assessing the impact of specific police initiatives, they are inherently limited in scope. These surveys will only capture feedback from particular slices of the community and may fail to represent broader community sentiment. These surveys may also experience response bias, limiting the findings' validity. Ultimately, balancing cost, rigor, and reach will be a concern for all forms of community trust measurement.

Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Statement

The purpose of the RESJ impact statement for these recommendations is to evaluate their anticipated impact on racial equity and social justice in the County.

Improving informational trust-building initiatives outlined in recommendations 1, 2, and 3 would likely have a marginally positive impact on racial justice and social equity. Improving the accessibility of publicly available data through the implementation of charts, tutorials,

and a dashboard would allow users with limited technology and data processing skills to understand and comprehend the data, where before they would have been unable to do so. However, it is unclear how aware these users are of publicly available data or whether their access to technology is limited in such a way that would prevent them from accessing the publicly available data entirely, rendering them unable to benefit from the increased accessibility.

Recommendations on improving measures of community trust, outlined in recommendation #4, would likely positively impact racial justice and social equity. Research has shown that police outreach has the largest impact on those with the lowest levels of trust in policing.²⁸ A greater understanding within the county of the groups with the lowest levels of trust, obtained by disaggregating survey results, would facilitate more targeted outreach that has the potential to focus on low-trust groups and maximize the impact of outreach. Furthermore, the IACP believes face-to-face outreach is a two-way street, exposing the public to law enforcement officers and officers to the public, with positive impacts for both.²⁹ If officers within the department increase their exposure in a non-enforcement setting to specific groups within the county that they have limited interaction with, it is likely their interactions in an enforcement setting would be viewed in a more positive light.

Concluding Remarks

The IACP encourages public safety officials to think about community trust like a bank account. Officers make withdrawals and deposits into this account each time they interact with a community member, and each interaction, no matter how small, affects the account's growth.³⁰ Informational trust-building initiatives like annual reports or dataMontgomery can act like interest on the account, providing growth with limited direct action, most of the cost having been invested at some point in the past. Finally, measurements in the form of surveys, especially those with quantitative elements that can facilitate the analysis of trends over time, are akin to bank statements, giving the account holder a sense of how much wealth is in the account and providing information that could guide future investment decisions.

Community trust can also be thought of as a force multiplier. With a more engaged community that supports the police and is willing to go out of their way to facilitate public

²⁸ [Are Informed Citizens More Trusting? Transparency of Performance Data and Trust Towards a British Police Force, David Mason, Carola Hillenbrand, & Kevin Money](#)

²⁹ [ICAP Enhancing Community Trust, One Interaction at a Time. An IACP Trust-Building Campaign Resource](#)

³⁰ Ibid

safety within the community, the individual impact of each officer on the force is magnified. In many ways, MCPD does a better job with a smaller staff than surrounding jurisdictions, working with approximately one officer per thousand people, as opposed to a common standard of two officers per thousand people.³¹ As a result, they are constantly pursuing methods to leverage greater impacts. The DFR program acts as a force multiplier, saving manpower on unnecessary dispatches. Improved community trust can act as a similar force multiplier, expanding informal networks and increasing public cooperation. While far less avant-garde than drones zipping across the sky, improving weaknesses in data reporting, and routinely measuring the impacts of outreach to evaluate best practices can also lead to valuable returns.

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³¹ [From Bethesda Magazine: Marc Yamada on becoming police chief in the county he grew up in](#)