



## The Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative: Preliminary Findings and Lessons Learned

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Photo: District 25 Community Ambassadors with CPD Officers. Credit: Deondre Rutues

## “The Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative: Preliminary Findings and Lessons Learned”

by the **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)** at the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

### Background and Context

In January 2019, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) in collaboration with the Policing Project at New York University School of Law launched the **Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative (CNPI)**. CNPI is a pilot initiative designed to change the way CPD polices and to ensure communities have a voice in how they are policed.<sup>i</sup>

The initiative’s overarching goal is for CPD and communities to work together to co-produce public safety and equitable policing. CNPI was first launched in CPD District 25, which includes the neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, Avondale, Dunning, Montclare, Belmont Cragin, Hermosa, Logan Square, and Austin. The initiative recently expanded to CPD District 15, which borders District 25.

**Aims of the Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative**

			
Strengthen the relationship between the community and the police	Improve public safety and community wellbeing	Co-produce public safety and meaningful community participation	Build institutional capacity both within and outside of CPD

**District 25 is an ethnically and racially diverse area of approximately 196,828 residents<sup>ii</sup>** (see Appendix 1), of which 68.6% are Latinx and 15% are African Americans. Nearly 19% of the households in the district live below the federal poverty line, nearly 72% of residents have a high school diploma or higher, 5.3% are unemployed, and 33.2% are not in the labor force.

As CNPI’s research and evaluation partner, the **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)** has three research objectives:

<sup>i</sup> CNPI is separate from the **Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS)** which was launched by CPD in 1993. While both CAPS and CNPI include community engagement, CAPS officers primarily coordinate and implement district-wide programming for community members. Through CNPI, District Coordination Officers focus on building 1:1 relationships with community members to address community members’ specific needs and concerns, and achieve sustainable solutions.

<sup>ii</sup> District demographics are based on spatially extensive interpolation of census block group measures from the 2018 American Community Survey’s five-year estimates.

1. Document the process by which the initiative unfolds in the target CPD districts;
2. Analyze changes in perceptions of satisfaction, public safety, and community-police engagement of both community residents and police in response to those initiatives; and
3. Conduct a rigorous evaluation of the program’s impact on public safety, crime, police-community engagement, and performance metrics.

<b>Two Core Elements of CNPI</b>	
<b>The Neighborhood Policing Initiative</b>	<b>The Community Engagement Initiative</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assigns and deploys District Coordination Officers (DCOs) to particular geographic sectors</li><li>• DCOs engage in relationship-building and reciprocal problem-solving with residents in the communities they serve<sup>iii</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assigns Community Ambassadors (CAs) to orient new officers to the neighborhoods in which they work</li><li>• CAs act as liaisons between community members and CPD on an ongoing basis</li></ul>

### Evaluating the Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative

N3 began evaluating CNPI during the initial rollout and has focused its early analysis on two main components:

1. Documenting how CNPI was implemented in District 25 to understand how the neighborhood policing and community engagement initiatives would work on the ground; and
2. Analyzing CNPI’s impact on trust and approaches to police work.

Analyses of CNPI’s first year of implementation are presented in this report and include:

- Findings on officer and community perceptions of one another, perceptions of public safety, and community satisfaction with police performance;
- An assessment of CNPI’s impact on community trust; and
- Preliminary recommendations.

<sup>iii</sup> This DCO structure stands in stark contrast to officers’ typical form of engagement with the community, which entails responding to calls for service throughout a much larger community.

## What Do Officers and Residents Think of Policing in Chicago and CNPI?

A core part of our research design was to interview DCOs and community residents every six months over two years. These interviews helped us understand perceptions and experiences with the police, matters of public safety, and how, if at all, CNPI might impact those opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. At the start of the initiative, we conducted in-depth interviews with 16 officers and 14 community members. These baseline interviews provided a bench-mark from which to evaluate developments in the initiative.

Several key findings and concerns emerged from these initial interviews (see Table 1). We found that both community and police expressed a desire for safer neighborhoods by engaging with one another. Moreover, both groups expressed concerns about being stereotyped and wished to be treated as individuals. However, they understood the obstacles to better police-community relationships differently. While police generally believed community did not understand police work and required greater face-to-face interactions to bridge gaps and build trust, community members noted the lack of police visibility and cultural misunderstandings with officers as key concerns to building trust.

**Baseline interviews conducted with 16 police officers and 14 community members.**

**The community and police both expressed a desire for safer neighborhoods by engaging with one another.**

**However, they understood the obstacles to better police-community relations differently.**

**Both mentioned diversity, especially cultural differences, as leading to misunderstandings.**

**Table 1: Key Themes from Baseline Interviews**

### The Police

- The community doesn't trust us.
- Our follow-up on homicides and other public safety issues needs improvement.
- We enjoy working in a diverse community, but recognize the communication challenges that diversity also brings.
- The community doesn't understand police work.
- We want more time to be judged as individuals.

### The Community

- Police are not (visibly) policing—they are absent in some areas and do not arrest the main perpetrators of crime in other areas.
- Diversity, specifically the cultural differences between officers and citizens, can lead to misunderstandings.
- Respect should be mutual.
- We want to be treated as individuals.

## What Do Officers and Residents Think About CNPI So Far?

Since the baseline interviews, N3 has completed more than 50 in-depth interviews with officers and residents to better understand their experiences with, and opinions of, CNPI. We also followed community members and DCOs, observing them in meetings and ride-alongs for more than 100 hours to contextualize interviews. This multimethod approach allows us to analyze how perceptions of satisfaction, public safety, and community-police engagement for both community members and police changed over the initial evaluation period.

Two major themes emerged by the second round of police and community interviews (see Table 2 below). The first theme had to do with changes to community-police interactions. DCOs and community members noted some positive changes, including having more meaningful interactions and increased police visibility. However, police also noted lingering challenges connecting to residents, namely some members of the Latinx community who associate the police with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

The second theme centered on perceptions of CNPI. Officers expressed increased job satisfaction with the initiative, often praising colleagues and bosses. Officers appreciated, for example, being paired with like-minded officers and working in teams that valued community-oriented work. They also noted that certain departmental management decisions made their duties difficult to perform, such as changes to their shift schedules and assignments that impacted their ability to consistently connect with residents.

In general, many community members and police officers believed CNPI helped facilitate relationship-building. However, there are still challenges impacting the DCOs' ability to reach more residents in their district, and DCOs report difficulty obtaining resources and internal support to fully carry out their roles as intended.

**Many community members and police officers reported that CNPI helped facilitate relationship-building.**

**DCOs reported more frequent and meaningful interactions with the community.**

**Community members noticed an increased police presence.**

**Less-engaged community members say officers do not focus on public safety issues they care about.**

**Table 2: Key Themes from Second Round Interviews**

**The Police**

- DCOs reported more frequent and meaningful interactions with the community.
- They are satisfied with their team of DCOs and sergeants.
- DCOs do not like being pulled off their duties (e.g., odd shift changes, tactical assignments).

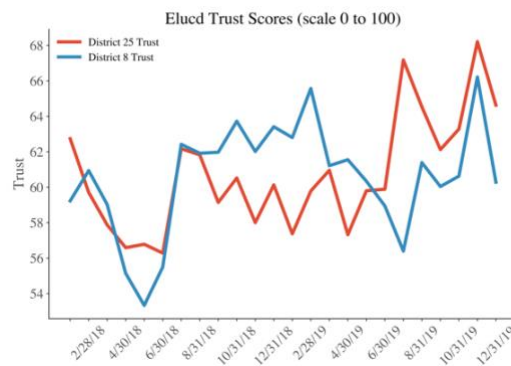
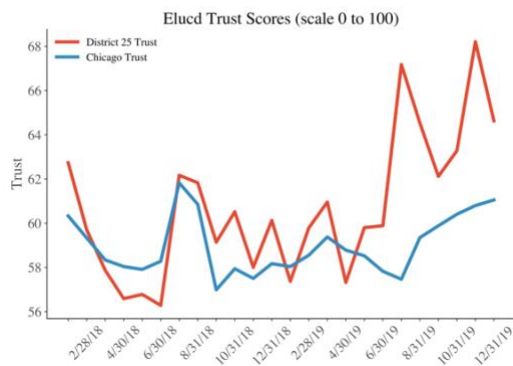
**The Community**

- Community members noticed an increased police presence.
- Less engaged community members (residents who do not have any direct engagement with CPD or any public safety organizations) say officers still do not focus on the public safety issues they care about.
- Ambassadors, active in the CEI, witnessed growing community interest in the program.

**Measuring Community Trust**

N3 is also in the process of completing a quasi-experimental analysis of the initiative’s impact by examining levels of community trust before and after CNPI and comparing District 25’s levels with districts where CNPI is not present. To capture residents’ trust in the police, we use monthly survey data of a representative sample of community residents collected by Elucd, a private vendor providing citywide and survey data on community trust and sentiment, between January 2018 and December 2019 in District 25 and in districts with similar crime and demographic profiles.<sup>iv</sup>

**Resident-Reported Levels of Trust in Police from January 2018–December 2019**



<sup>iv</sup> To measure community trust, Elucd asked a sample of residents to rate whether they strongly disagree to strongly agree with the following statements on a scale from 1 to 10:

- Police in my neighborhood treat residents with respect.
- Police in my neighborhood listen to and take into account the concerns of local residents.
- Police in my neighborhood take actions based on the facts, not their own personal biases.



**Table 3: Elucd Findings**

CNPI vs. City	CNPI vs. Comparable Neighborhoods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trust levels in District 25 have <b>increased by 7.2%</b> since the initiative started.</li><li>• This change is <b>statistically significant</b> when compared to the rest of the city.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• District 25’s increased community trust scores also outpace those in a district with comparable demographic and crime levels, although the finding is not consistently significant.</li></ul>

Overall, preliminary statistical analyses show that **community trust levels related to program impact are trending in a positive direction and are statistically significant.** Compared to trust levels in the rest of Chicago, District 25 residents report higher levels of trust in the police, and increases in trust appear to align with the start of CNPI. Compared to trust levels in CPD District 8, a statistically similar district, District 25 residents seem to be reporting a more consistent increase in trust levels—an important trend N3 will continue to monitor.

### Key Findings and Recommendations

In summary, results from the first year of program implementation suggest that both community and police believe CNPI to be useful for building trust and fostering meaningful community engagement. Qualitative and quantitative results indicate that community engagement and trust levels are headed in a positive direction. Still, several obstacles remain to improve long-term, consistent interactions between police and community. Accordingly, we offer the following recommendations to strengthen CNPI in District 25 and beyond:

**INCREASE CAPACITY. Enroll additional officers to better achieve the initiative’s goal of building trust through consistent interactions between police and community.**

DCOs need additional support from non-DCO officers. Currently, there are only 10 DCOs, 3 sergeants, and 1 lieutenant charged with implementing CNPI across a large district. All officers should be oriented to this new approach to see greater effects in community engagement and trust, as well as encourage officer collaboration.

**ENSURE CONSISTENCY. Avoid pulling officers away from their DCO scope and responsibilities.**

Changes to DCOs’ shift schedules and assignments make it difficult to consistently connect with residents in ways that generate trust.

**INVEST TIME. Allow the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI)—one of the two core elements of CNPI—the time it needs to mobilize.**

CEI has taken time to mobilize in District 25. Coordinated opportunities—such as joint planning meetings and community-facing events crafted by both DCOs and Community Ambassadors—are needed for both elements of CNPI to interact collectively and cooperatively, rather than ceding the responsibility to individual officers and Community Ambassadors to connect.

N3's next step is to evaluate CNPI's second year of implementation. We will pay particular attention to the impact of COVID-19 on CNPI, which relies heavily on regular contact and face-to-face engagement. In addition, N3 has also begun collecting data on CNPI's recent expansion into District 15. Implementation and impact in the expansion program will be monitored and compared with these initial results.

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The **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)** promotes new ways for faculty, experts, and students at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research to engage communities, civic partners, and policymakers to address core problems facing the residents of Chicago and surrounding communities. Specific projects and types of engagement will be linked by a focus on how the social relationships among networks, geographic communities, and the constellation of groups, organizations, and civic partners affect what we feel, think, and do—and how understanding, building, and leveraging this sort of network-thinking can improve neighborhoods, the city, and our region.

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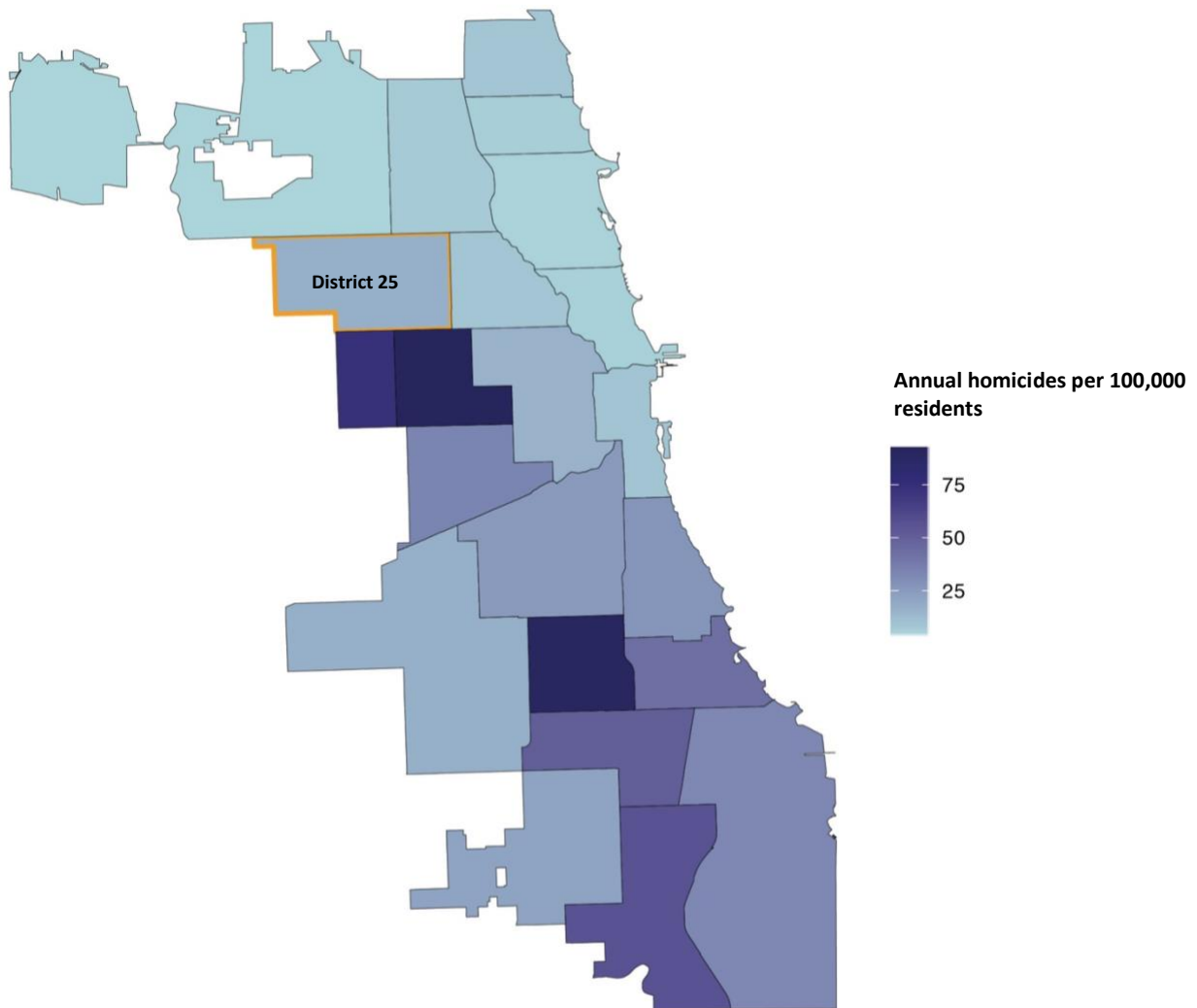
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## Appendix 1: Chicago Police Department (CPD) District 25

The Chicago Neighborhood Policing Initiative (CNPI) was first launched in CPD District 25, which includes the neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, Dunning, Montclare, Belmont Cragin, Hermosa, Logan Square, and Austin. District 25 is an ethnically and racially diverse area of approximately 196,828 residents,\* of which 68.6% are Latinx and 15% are African Americans. Nearly 19% of the households in the district live below the federal poverty line, nearly 72% of residents have a high school diploma or higher, 5.3% are unemployed, and 33% are not in the labor force.

### Homicide Rates by CPD District 2014–18\*\*



Source: Chicago Police Department [website](#)

\*District demographics are based on spatially extensive interpolation of census block group measures from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates.

\*\*Annual homicide rates are based on data from the Chicago Police Department and interpolated-population-size estimates are from each year of the ACS' five-year estimates.