



Strategic Solutions • Focused Action • Reduced Violence

Strategies to Improve Homicide Investigations and Increase Clearance Rates

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OBJECTIVES OF THIS WEBINAR



- Learn about proven strategies for investigating homicides and improving clearance rates based on the collective experience of seven law enforcement agencies
- Discuss the relationship of homicide investigators with other law enforcement units and prosecutors
- Identify resources available for homicide investigators and law enforcement executives at the local and state levels
- Examine the critical tasks during the first 48 hours of a homicide investigation

TODAY'S SPEAKERS



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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE HOMICIDE PROCESS MAPPING PROJECT



- Findings from two BJA homicide technical assistance projects at law enforcement agencies showed that each agency had high homicide rates and very low clearance rates
 - With these two projects, we learned what did *not* work
- This prompted BJA to ask: *What are law enforcement agencies with high homicide clearance rates doing to achieve that success?*



CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE HOMICIDE PROCESS MAPPING PROJECT



- Purpose: Identify best practices in homicide investigations that will result in an increase in quality homicide investigations and homicide clearances
- Identify investigative practices that were consistent across multiple agencies (this adds validity and reliability)
- Identify critical factors in the first 48 hours of the investigation that lead to a clearance

AGENCY SELECTION CRITERIA

- Geographically representative law enforcement agencies
- Both municipal and county agencies
- Had at least 24 homicides in 2011
- Had a clearance rate of 80 percent or higher



AGENCIES SELECTED



- Baltimore County, Maryland, Police Department
- Denver, Colorado, Police Department
- Houston, Texas, Police Department
- Jacksonville, Florida, Sheriff's Office
- Richmond, Virginia, Police Department
- Sacramento County, California, Sheriff's Department
- San Diego, California, Police Department



IMPORTANT OVERARCHING FINDINGS



- Executive buy-in to the approach of homicide investigations and support of resources is essential
 - This ranges from ensuring there is an adequate overtime budget and providing organizational flexibility to support homicide investigation needs
- The fundamental role of the lead homicide investigator is changing—from “individually persistent investigator” to “communicator and information manager”
- A solid foundation of community support is essential
- The effective use of intelligence can be an important factor, particularly when the homicides are tied to criminal enterprises

IMPORTANT OVERARCHING FINDINGS



- The role of the patrol force in homicide investigations was expanded in agencies with high clearances
 - In these agencies, first-responding patrol officers essentially began the investigation
- Providing attention and support to family members and witnesses not only supports the investigation but is also “the right thing to do”
- Successful homicide clearances can more readily be achieved when different units within the agency work cooperatively with homicide investigators
- An effective public information capability—including social media—not only aids in the investigation but also reduces the fear of crime among community members

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES

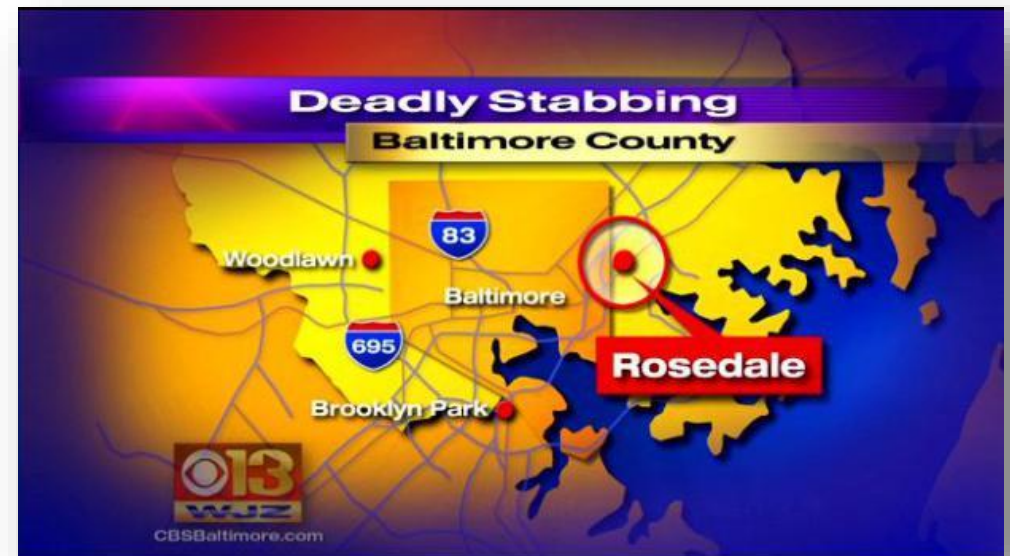
- Selection of homicide investigators
- Staffing
- Staff scheduling
- Training and professional development
- An effective community foundation
- Crime and intelligence analysis capability
- Sufficient equipment and resources



TACTICAL INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES



- Understanding the character of homicides in the jurisdiction
- Overtime funding
- Ensure that homicide investigators have sufficient committed case time
- Role of patrol/uniformed officers
- Crime scene investigators (CSI)
- Forensics laboratory
- Team approach to investigations
- Working with external agencies



TACTICAL INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES



- Fugitive squads
- District/prosecuting attorney relations
- Medical examiner
- Victim-witness advocate
- Technology investigations and analysis
- Public information
- Crimestoppers and citizen tips

VALUABLE TOOLS



- Timely requests for cell tower data download for the towers covering the crime scene
- Working with other relevant units and agencies provides the most productive approach
 - Violent crime units, gang and drug units, regional and federal task forces
- Resources make a difference: adequate staff vehicles, cell phone, digital camera, digital recorder, and laptop with mobile networking

VALUABLE TOOLS



- Crime analysts and intelligence analysts provide important information
- Digital forensics analysis is as important as a crime lab
- Victim-witness advocate engagement is vital
- Crimestoppers and other methods for anonymous tips can be invaluable

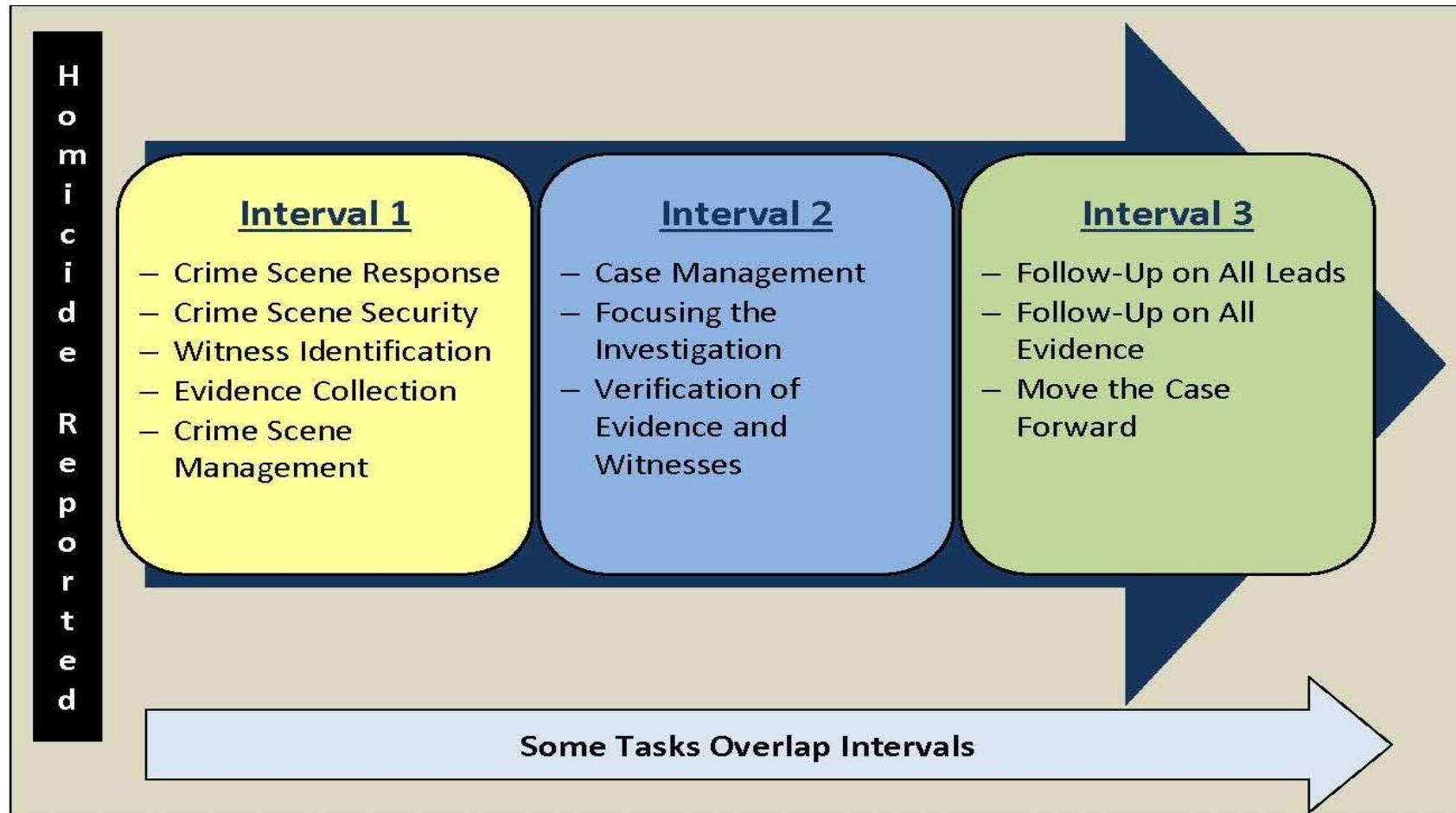


THE “FIRST 48”



- The first 48 hours after the report of a homicide are critical to clearing the homicide because:
 - Evidence is present and has experienced minimal degradation
 - Witnesses are more easily identified
 - Witness recollections are clearest and less likely to be distorted
 - The suspect is likely to still be within a reasonable proximity
- What can be done in the first 48 hours to maximize the impact of these factors?
- The project identified three distinct time intervals in the first 48 hours that have a somewhat different purpose
 - Tasks in each time interval are directed toward each interval's purpose

THE “FIRST 48”



THE “FIRST 48”



- Roughly 90 specific tasks were identified to be performed in the first 48 hours—includes many persons, not just homicide investigators
- Keys are:
 - Timeliness
 - Documentation
 - Communication
 - Coordination of effort

THE “FIRST 48”



INTERVAL 1	
Hours 0-1	
Patrol Supervisor	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves as crime scene manager until investigators arrive • Assigns patrol officer as crime scene scribe • Assigns officer(s) for traffic control at scene • Contacts child protection services if child is a witness or abandoned at scene • Establishes a media assembly point staffed by a patrol officer that is safe and does not interfere with the investigation but is convenient (send all media representatives to that point) • Conducts initial assessment at scene to determine whether there is gang or narcotic involvement—if so, notifies those units 	
Patrol Officers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Render aid if needed • Apprehend suspect if at scene • Assess safety at scene • Confirm death of victim • Determine whether to request homicide to respond • Secure crime scene—officer assigned for security • Evaluate to determine whether possible second scene—if so, locate and secure • Create crime scene access log • Identify suspects and witnesses at scene • Record weather and environmental conditions • Ensure that chain of custody is maintained • Document vehicles in area and check licenses/vehicle identification numbers • Conduct neighborhood canvass • Conduct preliminary interviews of witnesses • Brief investigators on actions and circumstances 	
Homicide Investigators	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive at scene • Apply for search warrant if required • Contact intelligence analyst for information needs • Receive briefing from patrol supervisor • Receive briefing from first-responding officer 	

THE “FIRST 48”



INTERVAL 1	
Hours 1-4	Hours 4-8
<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead investigator assigns investigative tasks • Check with communications for related calls around time of homicide call • Establish command post if warranted by facts • Notify and brief command • Establish and confirm identity of victim • Crime scene measurements and sketch • Photograph and video-record crime scene • Temporary witness relocation if warranted • Investigator and family advocate contact victim’s family • Make “all cars” broadcast of suspect as applicable 	<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain cell tower data dump if needed • Database checks of witnesses, addresses, and suspects • Determine whether crime scene can be released • Designate officer or investigator to accompany victim to hospital to recover clothing and evidence • Contact lab if priority analysis is needed • Follow-up interviews of witnesses—videorecorded • Case review briefing for all team members • Lead investigator attends autopsy
<p>Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigator and family advocate contact victim’s family • Locate security cameras at businesses in area—seize recordings • Debrief with all personnel after scene is processed • Conduct extended crime scene search if warranted • Document victim’s predeath circumstances and facts • Contact personnel from other units within the department who may assist (e.g., gangs) • Contact other federal, state, and local agencies that may assist 	
<p>Crime Scene Investigators and District Attorney</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIs continue to process scene • CSIs confer with investigator after scene has been processed • District Attorney arrives on scene (if appropriate) 	
<p>Public Information Officer (PIO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrives at the scene • Briefed by investigators to determine information to be released • Prepares statement for media release • Plans press conference as determined by circumstances • Tweets available suspect information and community safety information 	
<p>Crime Scene Investigators and Medical Examiner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical examiner investigator (MEI) arrives at scene • Briefs CSIs and crime scene “walkthrough” • CSIs process scene with advice from investigators • MEI coordinates/communicates with investigators 	<p>Crime Scene Investigators and Medical Examiner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIs secure evidence and transport for analysis • Medical examiner’s office removes body from scene • Medical examiner performs autopsy

THE “FIRST 48”



INTERVAL 2		INTERVAL 3	
Hours 8-16	Hours 16-24	Hours 24-36	Hours 36-48
<p align="center">Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop profile/description of suspect—all cars be on the lookout (BOLO) • Notify other agencies, fusion center, and PIO of suspect information • Document decedent’s medical, social, and mental health histories • Consult District Attorney on case status and evidentiary needs • Prepare case report • Notify community stakeholder organizations • Conduct second neighborhood canvass • Confer with analyst on leads • Have strategy meeting with team members to decide next steps 		<p align="center">Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case review team meeting—identify next steps in investigation and responsibilities • Command briefing update • Temporarily assigned personnel return to unit • Reinterview family for additional information • Meet with lab analysts to discuss evidence • Verify case file is current • Meet with District Attorney and advise of case status • If no clear suspect emerges and/or if the modus operandi is distinctive, compare facts and characteristics to other cases to determine whether this is a possible repeat offender (particularly in gang-related homicides) 	
<p align="center">Public Information Officer (PIO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News release, information push, press conference 		<p align="center">Public Information Officer (PIO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up press conference(s) and announcements/bulletins in social media as dictated by facts, suspect status, and public safety 	
<p align="center">Digital Forensics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital forensic analyses of phones, computers, and digital storage media 			
<p align="center">Homicide Investigators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage fugitive/major case squad to search for suspect¹⁴ • Follow up on tips from Crime Stoppers and tip lines/Web site • Continued contact with victim’s family by investigators and victim advocate¹⁵ • Determine whether surveillance/undercover is needed—follow department procedures, including notification of supervisor since these may require coordination with different units and/or overtime • Work suspect leads, including checking diverse information sources (e.g., phone records, credit histories, civil courts, FBI ViCAP) 			

CLOSING OBSERVATIONS



- Higher-quality investigations and increases in homicide clearance rates can be accomplished through policy changes that have little cost associated with them
- The greatest challenge is changing attitudes and behaviors of personnel within the agency regarding their role in homicide investigations

RESOURCES



- *Homicide Process Mapping*
- *10 Things Law Enforcement Executives Can Do to Positively Impact Homicide Investigation Outcomes*
- *Promoting Effective Homicide Investigations*
- National Institute of Justice: Law Enforcement Investigations Website
- Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission Website
- Peer exchanges with select law enforcement agencies



QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION



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