

2023 Policy, Research, and Analysis Division (PRAD) Research Agenda

A summary of research strategies and approaches

6/28/2023

Introduction

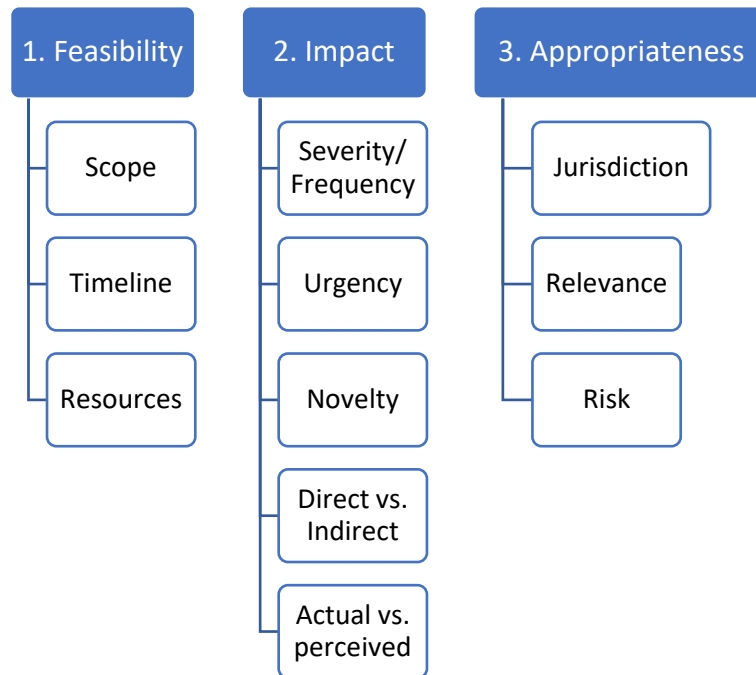
Pursuant to [2-78-120](#) of the Municipal Code of Chicago, based on information obtained through COPA investigations or identified patterns or practices of misconduct, COPA may issue reports and advisories to the Chicago Police Department, the Chairman of the City Council Committee on Public Safety, and the Police Board recommending revisions to the Police Department's policies, practices, collective bargaining agreements, programs and training in order to improve the accountability, effectiveness, integrity and transparency of the Police Department. COPA may also submit correspondence to the Chicago Police Department highlighting operational, policy, or training concerns identified through disciplinary investigations requiring immediate attention, as well as feedback to enhance training and policy development efforts to advance the culture of policing and build public trust. COPA's Policy, Research, and Analysis Division (PRAD) is tasked with undertaking this work.

This document broadly explains PRAD's strategies for project prioritization and analyses for 2023 and presents a general set of topics to be the focus of analyses and policy recommendations about patterns and practices of police misconduct. It is intended to function as guidance for the unit and communication to the public. In some cases, current events and emerging knowledge may point to an urgent area of focus, or alternative approach, that was unplanned. These kinds of projects may not fit within the forecasted topics and approaches for PRAD research projects. Ultimately, the development of PRAD is ongoing and PRAD's prioritization strategy, project topics, and approaches may shift as the unit grows and becomes more knowledgeable about the needs of the community and the possibilities of policy, research, and analysis in studying police misconduct. A reassessment of the PRAD research agenda will be completed each calendar year.

Project Prioritization

PRAD project ideas for investigations into police misconduct patterns and related practices are primarily generated by examining complaint data from those with first-hand experiences of police misconduct. However, PRAD project ideas also reflect the knowledge and insights of experts in criminal justice, policing and police misconduct investigations. The number of potential projects PRAD could consider is vast, so the prioritization of projects is guided by weighing three elements, including 1) Feasibility, 2) Impact, and 3) Appropriateness (Figure 1). Proposed projects that rate highly in all three of the categories are considered a higher priority project than others.

Figure 1. Project Prioritization Elements



Feasibility is determined by how much effort is required and how available resources are to do the project. Projects that plan to utilize existing, high-quality data, staff, skillsets, and simple analyses, and will be completed in a shorter time frame, would be considered more feasible.

Impact is determined by how much potential influence or change the project may lead to. Projects that focus on an aspect of police misconduct linked to incidents with serious injuries and/or common rates of occurrence, as well as those that examine a previously unexamined area of police conduct, are informed by/linked to the concerns of a community with direct experience of police misconduct, address an immediate public call for changes to policy or procedure, and are intended to achieve an actual reduction in police misconduct (as opposed to changes in perceptions/attitudes), would be considered as having a higher impact potential.

Appropriateness is determined by how much the project aligns with COPA’s core mission and values, how much of a risk the project presents to any research participants or audiences and how connected to community knowledge and perspectives it is. Projects about topics that are more closely and directly related to police misconduct within COPA’s investigatory jurisdiction, unlikely to harm individuals, a low legal risk, and unlikely to be misinterpreted, misunderstood, or misused, would be considered more appropriate. Projects that are informed or driven by directly impacted communities’ knowledge and perspectives would also be considered more appropriate.

Project Topics

Some PRAD projects will examine patterns of misconduct in complaint data across a wide range of circumstances and outcomes to try to identify links between them that point to practices contributing to misconduct on a large scale. However, many PRAD projects will be designed to examine patterns and

practices within specific circumstances (e.g., traffic or pedestrian street stops, off-duty conduct) and specific types of misconduct/behavior (e.g., excessive force, civil rights violations) that occur in those circumstances. PRAD projects will always support the development and publication of policy, practice, training, and other recommendations as solutions to problems identified. Currently, specific issues of focus for PRAD include:

- excessive force,
- violations of civil rights,
- sexual misconduct,
- domestic violence, and
- biased enforcement.

PRAD will also support COPA's mission by scanning for and analyzing barriers to conducting efficient, effective, and trustworthy misconduct investigations. By the end of 2023, PRAD will begin to examine:

- missing documentation,
- delays in the investigation process,
- areas of miscommunication,
- investigative bias,
- community/complainant perceptions & officer perceptions,
- and internal standards/consistency.

Analysis Framework

Police misconduct takes many forms and has many potential contributors related to the characteristics of a situation, individual, organization, and/or community. PRAD will integrate existing theories and research into the process of testing these potential contributors for correlation with police misconduct outcomes using a mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. The following are ways PRAD will examine factors at different levels:

Situational

PRAD will analyze complaint data that includes specific details like location of the event, time of the event, and the immediate circumstances of the incident, to better understand how a situation develops into a misconduct event and what circumstances make it more likely than others.

Individual

PRAD will consider the potential influence of characteristics of officers accused in complaints, which could include their level of experience and training, nature and unit of assignment, disciplinary history, management and supervision history, demographics, etc. The characteristics of civilians will also be explored in combination to better understand if there are patterns in the way complaints are made based on similarities and/or differences between officers and civilians, and what role policy, training, or practices might play in addressing those patterns, if any.

Organizational

PRAD will consider the structure, management, and operations of the Chicago Police Department as factors that may influence the likelihood of police misconduct occurring. The analysis of policing styles,

strategies and approaches, supervision and management, training, and cultural/social environment would all fall under organizational factors of interest.

Community

PRAD will examine how the characteristics of a community relate to incidents of police misconduct and why. Topics such as the presence and strength of informal social controls, collective efficacy, the level of disinvestment or disadvantage, socio-economic characteristics, perceptions, and historical events will be considered.