



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2022.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County
Program Title: Northern Virginia Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)
Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Peter Newsham
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Elijah T. Johnson
Title: Acting County Executive
Signature: 

Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) Achievement Awards Nomination Narrative

Nominees:

- **City of Alexandria Police Department**
Don Hayes, Chief of Police
- **Arlington County Police Department**
Charles "Andy" Penn, Chief of Police
- **Fairfax City Police Department**
Erin Schaible, Chief of Police
- **Falls Church Police Department**
Mary Gavin, Chief of Police
- **Herndon Police Department**
Maggie DeBoard, Chief of Police
- **Leesburg Police Department**
Gregory Brown, Chief of Police
- **Manassas City Police Department**
Doug Keen, Chief of Police
- **Manassas Park Police Department**
Mario Lugo, Chief of Police
- **Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police Department**
David Huchler, Chief of Police
- **Prince William County Police Department**
Peter Newsham, Chief of Police
- **Purcellville Police Department**
Cynthia McAlister, Chief of Police
- **Vienna Police Department**
James Morris, Chief of Police

Project: Northern Virginia Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Executive Summary / Brief Overview:

The purpose of the Northern Virginia Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) is to investigate critical incidents involving law enforcement officers within the cooperating jurisdictions. The team is comprised of seasoned criminal detectives, crime scene technicians, and commanders from the 11 participating agencies. The Chief Executive Officer of each participating agency in Northern Virginia will have the option of calling upon this multi-jurisdictional team to investigate incidents within their localities. These incidents include but are not limited to; law enforcement

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involved shootings, any action taken by law enforcement which results in the death or a life-threatening injury of a person in the performance of an officer/deputy's duties, in-custody deaths, and law enforcement officer suicides. At the completion of a comprehensive, thorough, and impartial investigation, the Critical Incident Response Team will present the facts and evidence of the investigation to the local Commonwealth Attorney's Office or designated prosecuting authority. The agency where the incident occurred will continue to conduct their own separate administrative investigation.

The creation of this multi-jurisdictional team will provide efficient, effective, and a standardized investigation for these high-profile events. The multi-jurisdictional team of tenured detectives also provides a higher degree of impartiality in these type of investigations as the team members are not solely reviewing their own peer officers' actions; the mere make-up of the team ensures checks and balances throughout the entire investigative process. The Critical Incident Response Team was created in accordance with VA Code 15.2-1726 Agreements for consolidation of police departments or for cooperation in furnishing police services and VA Code 15.2-1736 Mutual aid agreements among governing bodies of localities.

As Police Chiefs and Sheriffs, it is imperative that we serve our communities with the highest standards of professionalism, openness, and always seek justice for all people under any circumstances.

Problem:

Today more than ever, the public demands transparency and immediate answers when a police officer uses force to affect an arrest or during the interaction with a person. Especially when that interaction results in a person being severely injured or killed. The community expects that there is camera footage of every incident to show as a news clip to the public, the investigation is completed in a matter of hours and an immediate determination if the officer did something in violation of laws or policies is determined and announced immediately. In order to bring

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transparency, a thorough, accurate and timely investigation of those incidents where a police officer uses force against a person and a severe injury or death is a result, the CIRT team will conduct the criminal investigation of the incident. This team will bring experienced, highly trained and expert investigators together to conduct the investigation instead of officers from the agency which experienced the severe incident. In this way, the Chief of Police and community leaders will receive a credible, expert and accurate police investigation that has clearly reviewed all the facts and has presented those facts through our prosecuting partners to ensure clear determination of whether a crime did or did not happen. This separate but expert investigation is not controlled by the agency which was involved, and those who conduct this investigation do not hold any loyalty to the particular agency thus ensuring the fair, thorough and accurate investigation has happened.

Program Description:

The Prince William County Police Department has been working with 11 Northern Virginia Police Departments to develop a regional cooperative for conducting the criminal investigation portion of critical incidents involving a police officer. That effort has led to the organization and implementation of the Northern Virginia Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). The team is active today, and member Departments have the option to request this team to respond and lead the criminal investigation of an officer involved critical incident. A critical incident is defined as: *the discharge of a firearm, use of force, or other action by an officer(s) that results in death or serious bodily injury to any person, or the unexplained death of a person in police custody, or the suicide of an officer.*

When a critical incident occurs, the CIRT may be called out by the Chief of Police for the involved partner agency. The team will respond with trained, experienced detectives and supervisors from agencies not directly involved in the incident. At the conclusion of the investigation, a thorough report will be presented to the involved Chief of Police and Commonwealth's Attorney for review and action. When the CIRT is called to assist us, the

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processes will mirror those steps we have in policy today. The CIRT investigation will be conducted simultaneously with the internal investigation which will still be conducted by the Office of Professional Standards.

Police chiefs in the region recognized over the past few years that an impartial CIRT would foster and maintain trust and support from our community. Across the country, communities insist on transparency and accountability from their law enforcement. Without the support of our community, we are unable to fulfill our duty to protect our citizens. Our community wants verification that when the police use force upon a person that a thorough, expert, and honest investigation of the facts will be conducted, and the results will be shared with the public. The CIRT is an opportunity for an independent third-party expert to conduct these investigations, find facts, and present them for review.

Innovation:

This team concept is innovative in that each partner police department guarantees to operate under existing mutual aid agreements and provide investigative support to the other agency if a severe use of force or deadly shooting incident happens. The partner agencies have agreed to band together to share staff, training and equipment and respond to a different agency to take over the criminal investigation of these types of events. This collaboration between partner agencies requires each Chief to give up control and place trust in his or her fellow Chief to conduct a complete investigation as is described in the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed by all partner agencies. This team concept works in the Northern Virginia region because jurisdictions are close together, we have similar resources and we have worked together on multiple other projects for years. Each agency trusts the other partners to do the right thing and let the facts speak for themselves.

Results of the Program:

A small group of commanders experienced with our political climate, the public's expectations, and intimately familiar with the criminal investigations which happen when a police officer uses force against a person were combined to work through the idea. This group met during 2021 and during the COVID-19 restrictions to work toward the requested outcome, plan the necessary response to logistically taking over a criminal investigation in a different jurisdiction, and the resources needed to conduct a complete investigation. Because this team is investigating a crime, the team conferred with our local Commonwealth's Attorneys to ensure that an accurate criminal investigation could be performed in a manner which was legal and promoted the safety of the community. In the end, this group recommended a joint investigative team approach to the problem. The costs associated with making this team functionable include hourly salary, some small equipment and vehicle costs and other associated costs normal to a criminal investigation. Under existing Mutual Aid policies, each involved department could absorb these costs within its budget and no additional costs were identified as needed. Also under this program, additional training classes were identified for the team concept. However, these training needs were already present for each partner agency, this team approach pushed the timeline forward and shared our regional academy's role to obtain training for all involved. This training helps each agency with the daily criminal investigations already part of their responsibility.