

The Citation Project

A Collaborative Policing Project

The Citation Project involved development, implementation, and evaluation of a model citation in lieu of arrest policy. It was executed by the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police in partnership with the UNC School of Government Criminal Justice Innovation Lab. The research team included Policy Research Associates and North Carolina State University.



Model Policy

Developed under the guidance of the project's police chief members, the model policy provided that officers had discretion to cite, arrest, or decline to charge. It recommended use of a citation in misdemeanor encounters except when the law required arrest, there was statutory support for imposition of secured bond, or exigent circumstances existed.



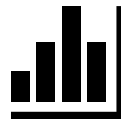
Implementation in Diverse Pilot Sites

After an application period, four demographically and geographically diverse pilot sites were chosen: Apex, Elizabeth City, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem police departments. On December 1, 2020, the sites began implementing the model policy.



Evaluation Findings

- Sites experienced implementation challenges, including limited patrol officer buy-in.
- Citation rates did not increase following implementation. However, we also found that citation rates for the most common misdemeanor encounters – traffic offenses – were high before implementation, creating a ceiling on the policy's potential impact.
- No racial/ethnic subgroup saw an increase in citation rates, and differences across races did not change.
- On average, officers saved 90+ minutes per encounter when opting to cite versus arrest.
- As context, we also assessed encounters as a whole – both whether they increased over time (“net-widening”) and changes in their racial/ethnic composition. We did not find evidence of net widening, but in three sites found that Black people were overrepresented in encounters that resulted in misdemeanor charges.



Key Limitations

- Challenges with implementation, including lack of completion of documentation, limit our ability to fully evaluate the policy's impact.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and periods of social unrest occurred during the time of the project, impacting police practices and bandwidth for implementation.



Recommendations

We offer four core recommendations to police departments that may want to implement or continue using citation in lieu of arrest.



1. Conduct a needs assessment & develop a targeted policy

Identify existing citation rates to help you target case categories or offenses where your policy can have the greatest impact. Because targeting the policy may avoid case categories or offenses where rates already are very high, it can limit officer frustration and promote buy-in.

2. Conduct an organizational assessment to guide implementation

Assess staffing, workload, and other policy changes underway or planned. The assessment will help you determine your capacity to implement a new policy, whether to implement the policy, and how to implement it.

3. Apply implementation lessons from the project

Promoting officer buy-in is critical to effective implementation. Four strategies can help:

1. Include officers in policy development and implementation. This can promote a greater sense of ownership and commitment to change.
2. Create project and training materials internally. Inviting ownership allows you to tailor efforts to your department and encourage buy-in.
3. Establish procedures for early implementation feedback. Real time monitoring can help you spot and address potential implementation issues early on.
4. Regularly use internal communications to reinforce your policy. Implementation benefits from regular reinforcement.

4. Continue to assess & address equity issues

Because the data showed racial differences in encounters resulting in misdemeanor charges, you may find it helpful to further examine this issue.



For More Information
Read the full project report [here](#).

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