



The Alternative Responder Project Examining the Scope & Effectiveness of Alternative Responder Systems

Executed by the [UNC School of Government Criminal Justice Innovation Lab](#) (the Lab) and [the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police](#) (NCACP), the Alternative Responder Project seeks to support North Carolina leaders as they explore the benefits and challenges of alternative responder systems. In the project's first phase, the team will field a statewide survey of police departments to document the types of alternative responder systems already in place in North Carolina and key details about them. The survey also will collect information about planned-for programs. The team then will execute case studies of several programs. We will present all of this information in a report and a webinar, highlighting the work of local innovators and sharing information about alternative responder system options, best practices, challenges, and advantages. In the second phase, we will execute an empirical evaluation of North Carolina alternative responder systems to help leaders understand their impact.

Why it Matters

Unaddressed social issues, like substance use, behavioral health issues, and homelessness frequently land at the doorstep of the criminal justice system. As first responders, law enforcement officers are tasked with addressing these issues, often without appropriate training or support. Using the criminal justice system to address these social problems can be more expensive and less effective than connecting people with needed services. And it can put officers and community members at risk. As a result, interest is growing nationally and in North Carolina in alternative responder systems to better promote public safety, more effectively connect people with needed services, and reduce reliance on the justice system to address social issues. These programs can take a variety of forms, including police-based, co-response, or community-led systems. While individual police departments have begun implementing such programs, there is no common understanding of how many departments are doing this work and what the programs look like. Accordingly, every community that wants to implement a program must reinvent the wheel. This phase of the project will create a detailed landscape scan of alternative response models in North Carolina, position leaders to collaborate for impact, and lay the foundation for the project's later empirical evaluation work.

Project Team & Support

The project team includes the following North Carolina law enforcement leaders:

- Deputy Chief James Avens, Elizabeth City Police Department;
- Deputy Chief Reed Baer, Hickory Police Department;
- Chief Marc Godwin, Raeford Police Department;
- Chief Marcel Goffington, Garysburg Police Department;
- Chief Stacy Harrell, Pinetops Police Department;
- Chief Chris Hatton, Sylva Police Department;
- Assistant Chief James Nolette, Fayetteville Police Department; and
- Chief Orlando Rosario, Stantonsburg Police Department.

The project's research team includes Professors [Jessica Smith](#) and [Leisha DeHart-Davis](#), both of the UNC School of Government. The team is supported by Lab Project Manager [Maggie Bailey](#).

The project's first phase is supported by a grant from the Richard J. Reynolds III and Marie Mallouk Reynolds Foundation.

Project Timeline

The project began in Spring of 2022 and is expected to conclude by May 2023.