LAS VEGAS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY SAJE^{TM} ASSESSMENT

The Policing Project at the New York University School of Law, in partnership with Microsoft and with funding from the Joyce Foundation and Microsoft's Justice Reform Initiative, has developed the SAJE^{TM} Policing Assessment – a comprehensive tool to define and measure the characteristics of a <u>S</u>afe, <u>A</u>ccountable, <u>J</u>ust, and <u>E</u>ffective policing agency. This assessment of approximately 100 metrics was developed in partnership with police leaders, researchers, and community advocates, and reflects the latest developments in social science, constitutional law, and industry best practice.

Agencies respond to each metric with a simple yes/no and provide evidence (e.g., policies, training manuals) to support their responses. SAJE^{TM} is not designed to find a "perfect" police department. Rather, the goal is to provide an assessment of a department's current standing across the four pillars, identifying both areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. In addition, because SAJE^{TM} relies on documentation rather than personal observation, it leans toward policy review over actual practice. While some of the metrics do seek to capture specific practices, they do not assess how comprehensively or effectively these practices are being carried out. Future audits may wish to delve deeper into these issues. Insights provided through this tool will help municipal leaders, police departments, and the communities they serve understand agency performance and collaboratively identify challenges and opportunities.

At the request of the Las Vegas Department of Public Safety (LVDPS), and with funding from a Smart Policing Grant (BJA), the Policing Project conducted a SAJE^{TM} Assessment of its department. Dr. Aili Malm and Dr. Carlena Orosco, independent social science researchers and policing subject-matter experts, assisted the agency in completing the tool as neutral third-party evaluators. The process took approximately nine months to complete.

Overall Score

LVDPS's overall SAJE^{TM} score is **78.86%**. As LVDPS is only the sixth agency to complete the tool, insufficient benchmarks are available. However, the Policing Project team anticipates that agencies scoring over 70% should be considered well-performing police departments and LVDPS is over this level. **LVDPS is also a smaller agency with a unique mandate and jurisdiction, so some differences in scores are to be expected.** There are some areas in which LVDPS is performing exceptionally well, and other areas in which improvement may be needed. The following sections describe LVDPS's results across the four pillars.

Pillar 1: Sound Policing

The sound policing pillar measures how efficiently and effectively the agency operates, with a focus on recruitment and hiring, workforce development and administration, and resource management. LVDPS scored **73.32%** in this area. The pillar is broken down into five sub-categories: recruitment and retention; training and officer preparedness; personnel safety and wellbeing; internal operations and culture; and resource efficiency, sufficiency, and appropriateness. Figure 1 shows the score in each sub-category.

Figure 1: Sound Policing Pillar Results
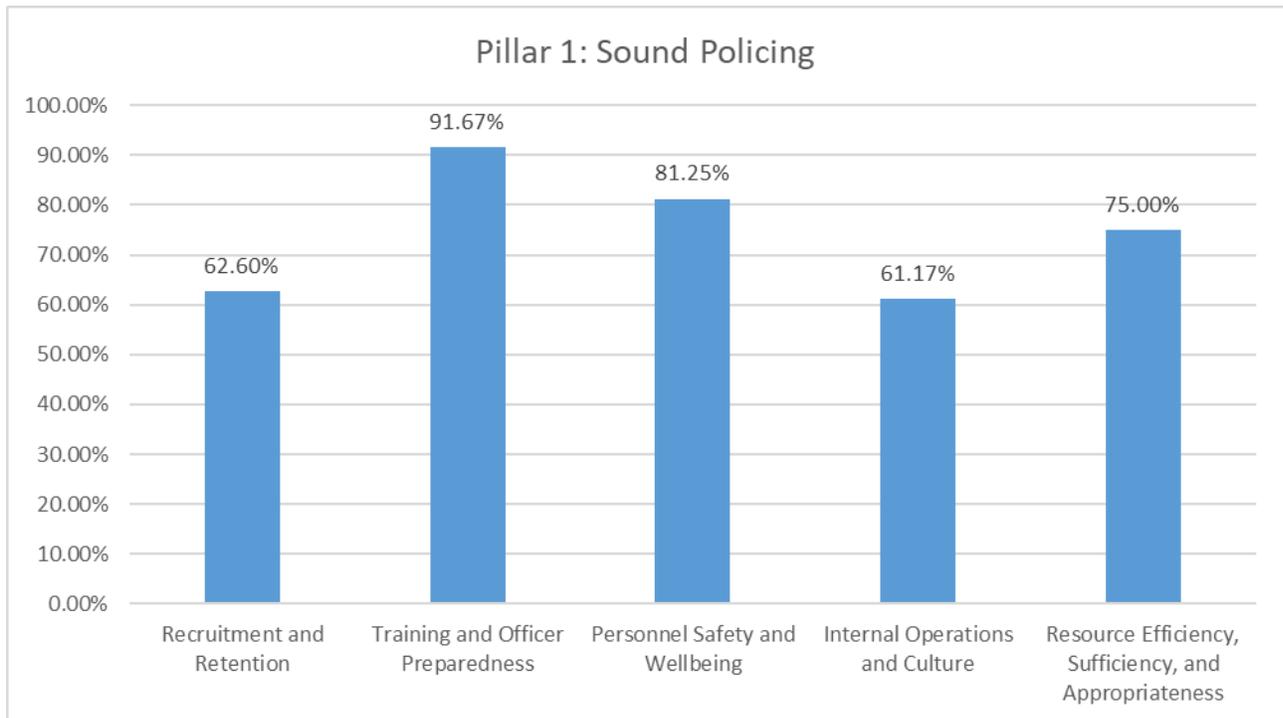
LVDPS received high marks in training and officer preparedness; personnel safety and wellbeing; and resource efficiency, sufficiency, and appropriateness. It is evident that LVDPS expends a lot of effort and resources in training and preparing its officers. Specifically, LVDPS should be commended on its efforts in the following areas:

- **Comprehensive demographic data collection:** LVDPS collects data on race, ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, and residency, helping the department track workforce diversity and recruitment trends. This practice enables data-driven decisions to identify gaps in representation and tailor outreach strategies that promote inclusivity.
- **Diverse and representative outreach materials:** Recruitment materials intentionally reflect the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of both the department and the community it serves, reinforcing LVDPS's commitment to inclusivity and helping potential applicants see themselves represented in the organization. As a 30×30 agency and early adopter of this national initiative, LVDPS demonstrates a sustained commitment to

advancing gender equity in policing. The department is also minority-majority, closely reflecting the community it serves and further strengthening trust, legitimacy, and inclusive recruitment.

- **Strong communication standards in hiring and promotion:** LVDPS incorporates communication skills into its selection and promotional testing to ensure officers demonstrate not only technical and tactical competence, but also the interpersonal abilities essential to effective, community-centered policing. The department also evaluates emotional intelligence and cognitive aptitude and maintains regular engagement with candidates through initiatives such as Discussions with DPS (Coffee with a Cop), Meet the Chiefs, and PT with Public Safety.
- **Annual performance evaluations:** The department maintains a system of annual performance reviews, providing opportunities for officers to receive structured feedback and identify professional growth goals. These evaluations help maintain consistent standards and demonstrate a commitment to accountability and development.
- **Professional education and training programs:** LVDPS supports the continuous education and professional development of its personnel through training programs that align with the department's mission and community needs. This includes opportunities for skill enhancement, leadership preparation, and community-oriented policing education.
- **Federal data reporting:** LVDPS reports to several federal data reporting systems, including: National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), the FBI's National Use-of-Force Database, the Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Data Collection program of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, and the Office of Justice Program's Deaths in Custody Reporting Act Data Collection.

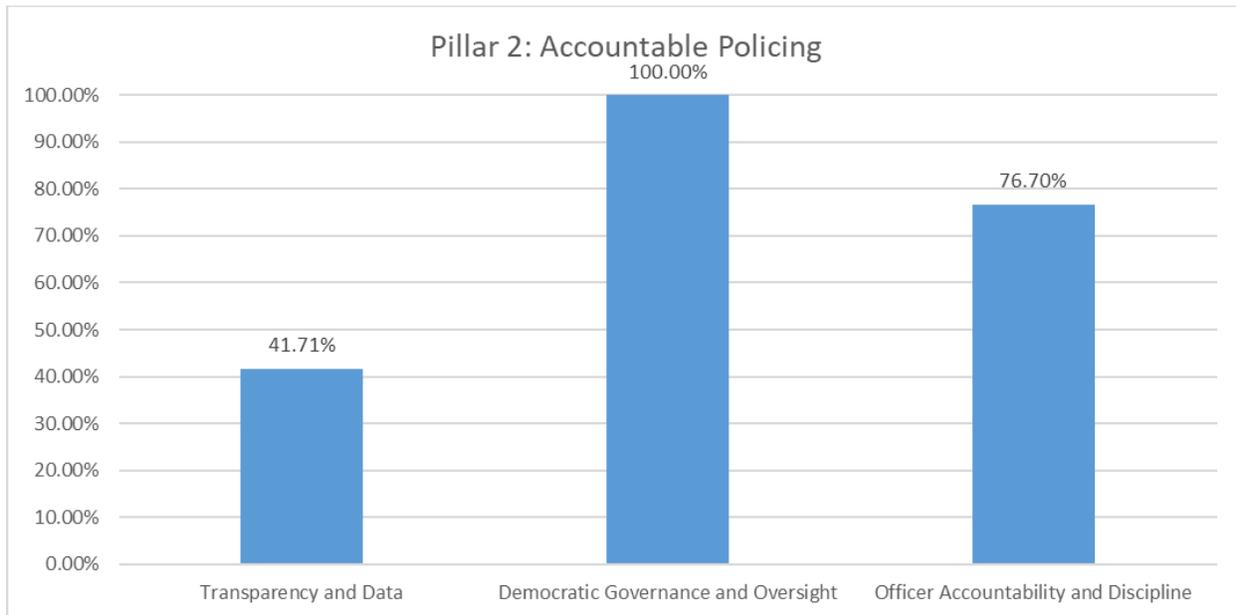There are also some areas that may be in need of improvement:

- **Formalized data tracking and analysis for recruitment process:** The department should consider implementing formal mechanisms to collect, monitor, and analyze data throughout the application and hiring process. Structured data analysis could help identify patterns in recruitment outcomes, potential barriers, attrition, or advancement that informal methods might miss.
- **Performance evaluation alignment with conduct:** Currently, performance reviews, education and training, and disciplinary history is not explicitly considered in performance evaluations. Incorporating these factors would promote transparency, reinforce accountability, and encourage consistent standards across the department.
- **Structured leadership development:** While LVDPS offers a range of leadership development opportunities [including leadership retreats, guest speakers aligned with the CARE model (Courageous, Adaptability, Resilience, and Empathy), and professional reading initiatives such as The Culture Code, Leadership and Self-Deception, 48 EBP Bytes, and Leadership on the Line], the department may benefit from establishing a more formalized leadership development framework to ensure equitable access, transparent participation criteria, and measurable outcomes. Such a framework would strengthen succession planning, enhance internal mobility, and could incorporate emerging tools, such as the exploration of the MSRES wellness and professional development app.

- **Formalize a retention plan:** While the department engages in several retention-related practices (such as leadership retreats and training opportunities, conducting exit interviews with the Chief and/or command staff in collaboration with Human Resources, and offering a $1,500 recruitment bonus to officers who successfully recruit candidates through the academy and completion of the field training program), LVDPS does not currently have a formalized retention plan. Given the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges in policing, the department might benefit from developing and implementing a comprehensive retention strategy. Such a plan could intentionally align existing efforts and include structured support for leadership development, targeted strategies to retain underrepresented groups, systematic collection of employee feedback to identify and address workforce needs, and consistent analysis of exit interview data from voluntary separations.
- **Suicide prevention:** LVDPS does not collect data on officer suicides. The department may want to consider specifically tracking officer suicide as a cause of death, and analyze relevant data related to these incidents including assessments of exposure to trauma through critical incidents, health and wellness data, and officer performance.
- **Enhanced internal feedback mechanisms:** LVDPS might consider expanding opportunities for officers and staff to provide structured feedback on internal policies, training programs, and workplace culture. Collecting this information systematically could support continuous improvement and reinforce employee engagement.

Pillar 2: Accountable Policing

The accountable policing pillar measures agency transparency and the extent to which communities have a meaningful say in the police services they receive. LVDPS scored **66.26%** in this area, which is its lowest-scored pillar. The pillar is broken down into three sub-categories: transparency and data, democratic governance and oversight, and officer accountability and discipline. Figure 2 shows the score in each sub-category.

Notably, LVDPS received a perfect score in democratic governance and oversight. Specifically, LVDPS should be commended on its efforts in the following areas:

- **Public access to agency information and planning:** LVDPS publishes its strategic plan online, allowing community members to view departmental priorities, objectives, and areas of focus. This transparency builds public trust and aligns with best practices in modern policing oversight.
- **Comprehensive data retention and redaction policies:** The agency adheres to policies that ensure compliance with privacy and data retention standards, protecting both public and officer information integrity.
- **Publication of departmental data and reports:** LVDPS commits to publishing data annually related to its operations, reinforcing transparency and performance accountability to the community.
- **Comprehensive complaint data:** LVDPS collects comprehensive complaint data including: demographics of the complainant, type of complaint and resolution, and time to resolution. Department policy includes minimum requirements for public complaint investigations including: complainant, officer and witness interviews; review of relevant body-worn camera footage; reasonable timelines for the adjudication process; and consistent communication with the complainant.
- **Community advisory board participation:** The department has established a Citizen's Advisory Committee, which provides a structured platform for community members to share feedback, offer recommendations, and strengthen the relationship between residents and law enforcement leadership.
- **Oversight of specialized acquisitions and funding:** LVDPS demonstrates strong fiscal accountability by requiring review and documentation when acquiring military or

surveillance technology or spending externally obtained funds. Policies governing these activities ensure compliance with both city and federal regulations and help maintain public confidence in procurement decisions.

- **Clear officer accountability procedures:** LVDPS maintains a written directive for handling incidents such as officer-involved shootings and use-of-force reviews. These structured procedures promote fairness, consistency, and internal accountability when critical incidents occur.

There are also some areas that may be in need of improvement:

- **Public accessibility of policy documents:** The department has recently completed LEXIPOL and plans to post its policies publicly on the department website. To further enhance transparency and accessibility for the public and researchers, LVDPS should ensure that these policy documents are easy to locate and posted in machine-readable formats, allowing for efficient review, analysis, and long-term usability.
- **Publication of misconduct data:** While the department agrees that disciplinary information should be made publicly available, LVDPS does not currently have a formal disciplinary matrix and does not publish detailed information on types and levels of officer misconduct or corresponding disciplinary outcomes. Developing a disciplinary matrix and posting it, along with aggregated disciplinary information, would enhance transparency, promote consistency, and demonstrate the department's commitment to accountability.
- **Public release of critical incident footage:** LVDPS may consider adopting or clarifying policies on the release of body-worn camera footage after critical incidents, ensuring consistency with transparency expectations while safeguarding privacy and evidentiary integrity.

Pillar 3: Just Policing

The just policing pillar measures whether an agency operates fairly, equitably, and constitutionally. LVDPS scored **84.43%** in this area. The pillar is broken down into four sub-categories: use of force; stops, searches, and seizures; First Amendment protections; and investigative procedures. Figure 3 shows the score in each sub-category.
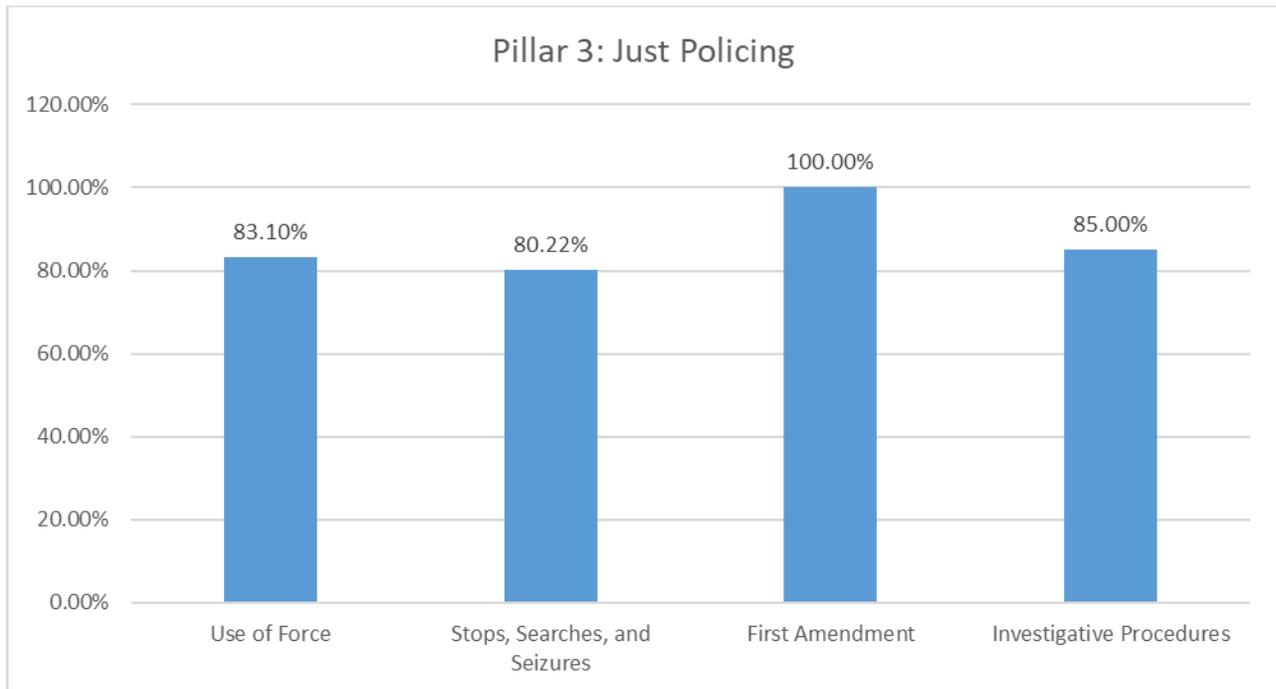
LVDPS scores well in all sections of this pillar. Notably, they received a perfect score in First Amendment protections. Specifically, LVDPS should be commended for its efforts in the following areas:

- **Commitment to the sanctity of human life:** LVDPS explicitly recognizes and respects the value of every human life, embedding the sanctity of human life as a guiding principle within its use-of-force framework. This commitment is reinforced through the department's Critical Decision-Making (CDM) model, which is prominently posted throughout facilities and consistently emphasizes preservation of life. Additionally, detention personnel have completed ICAT training and regularly reinforce de-escalation concepts such as distance, cover, number, options, and time. Together, these practices underscore the department's mission to apply only the minimum necessary force while protecting both community members and officers.
- **Comprehensive force classification and documentation:** LVDPS policy defines multiple levels of force and outlines specific factors for evaluating reasonableness. Additionally, officers are required to document every instance in which they point a firearm at an individual, reinforcing a culture of transparency and review.
- **Strict limitations on dangerous tactics:** The department prohibits no-knock warrants and carotid restraints. This prohibition reflects national standards to prevent unnecessary injury or death and demonstrates a commitment to human rights–centered policing.
- **Tight regulation of deadly force:** LVDPS limits deadly force to situations involving an immediate threat of death or serious bodily harm. Policies make clear that the sanctity of life governs all decisions in critical incidents.
- **Comprehensive vehicle pursuit policy:** LVDPS maintains a detailed pursuit policy that outlines justification, operational standards, and termination protocols. Officers must

have probable cause before engaging in a pursuit, activate emergency lights and sirens, and end the pursuit if risks outweigh public safety benefits. This structure prioritizes the protection of life and property.

There are also some areas that may be in need of improvement:

- **Continuous assessment of necessity during force encounters:** Use of force policy could be strengthened by explicitly requiring officers to continuously reassess the need for force as circumstances evolve. Embedding this standard would further reinforce restraint and situational judgment.
- **Force used on restrained or passive individuals:** LVDPS may wish to expand its policy language to more directly prohibit or limit force against restrained, passive, or compliant individuals**,** ensuring alignment with national use-of-force frameworks.
- **Post-incident review and auditing:** LVDPS conducts factual inquiries after uses of force, but they might consider adopting structured audits of officer and supervisor reporting to ensure consistency and completeness across all divisions.

Pillar 4: Effective Policing

The final pillar measures how well an agency prevents and addresses crime, and whether the strategies used are likely to improve community outcomes. LVDPS scored an impressive **94.18%** in this pillar. The pillar is broken down into three sub-categories: community engagement and policing, other policing and response strategies, and individuals in crisis/susceptible to victimization. Figure 4 shows the score in each sub-category.
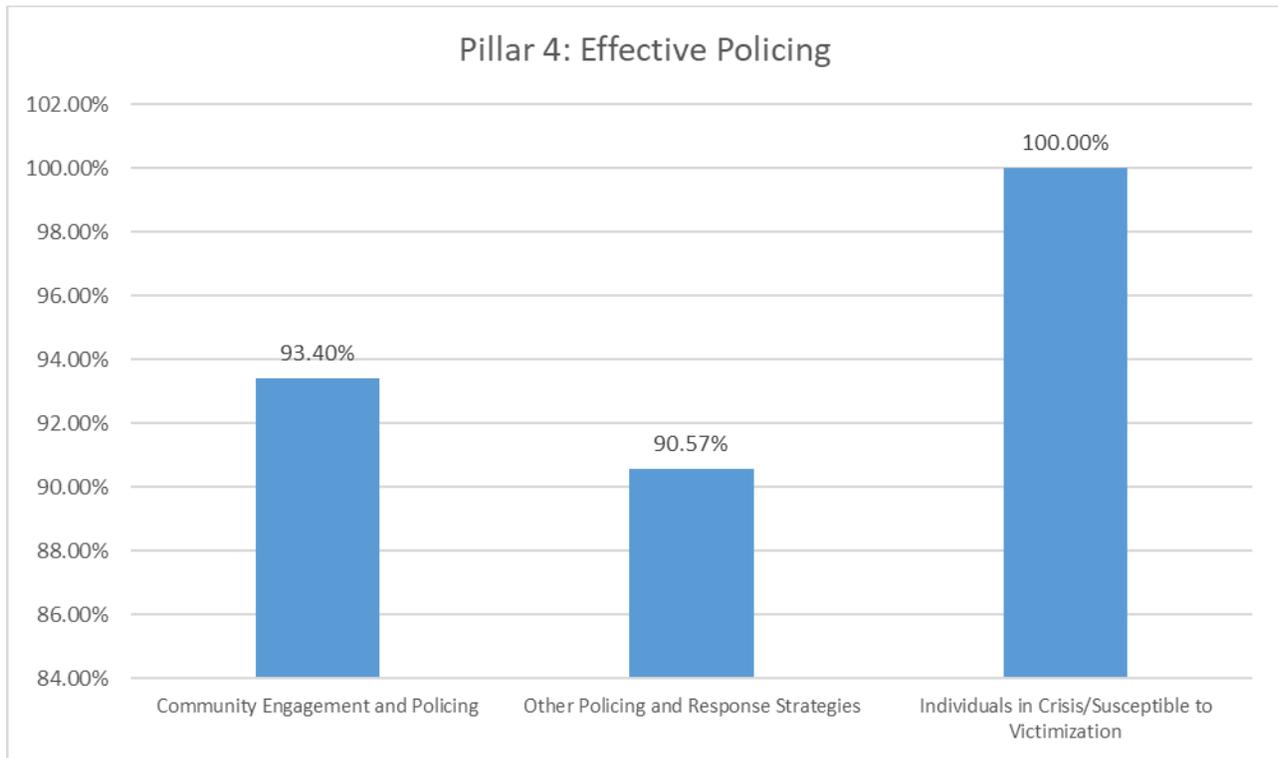
Notably, the department scored 100% in dealing with individuals in crisis/susceptible to victimization. This is an especially important category for LVDPS as much of its jurisdiction includes areas with a high concentration of unhoused residents who face complex and overlapping vulnerabilities. LVDPS should be commended for its efforts in the following areas:

- **Commitment to problem-oriented policing:** The LVDPS is commended for its exemplary commitment to problem-oriented policing. The department effectively provides officers with the dedicated time needed to engage in thoughtful problem-solving efforts, offers clear guidance and training on problem-oriented methods, and maintains strong oversight by tracking both ongoing and completed problem-solving projects. This comprehensive approach demonstrates a proactive and structured strategy for addressing chronic community issues.
- **Broad-based community engagement mechanisms:** LVDPS implements multiple mechanisms for engaging community members, including public meetings, surveys, and outreach events. These forums provide a consistent avenue for dialogue and help ensure that residents' voices inform departmental priorities and strategies.
- **Focused outreach to underrepresented communities:** The department employs targeted strategies to reach marginalized and underserved populations, ensuring that community engagement efforts are inclusive and equitable. One example of this commitment is the department's distribution of the book Making It Better in Las Vegas, with more than 2,000 hard-copy books purchased and donated to third-grade students, including an additional 1,000 copies recently obtained through generous community

donations. These efforts help build early, positive relationships and strengthen trust across diverse segments of the community.

- **Inclusive community participation in decision-making:** Community members play an active role in shaping agency initiatives and agenda setting through public meetings and advisory structures. This collaborative approach is further demonstrated by the involvement of members of the Citizen's Advisory Board in interviewing Deputy Chief candidates, reflecting LVDPS's commitment to shared problem-solving, transparency, and community-driven public safety priorities.

- **Consistent officer assignment to community areas:** Officers are assigned to specific geographic areas for consistent periods, allowing them to build familiarity and sustained relationships with community members. This approach is reinforced through service area commands, with Lieutenants assigned to specific Wards, providing consistent leadership, accountability, and continuity. Together, these practices strengthen rapport, foster mutual trust, and support long-term, place-based problem-solving.

- **Integration of community policing principles into training:** The department includes community policing and engagement content at the academy level and in ongoing professional development. This ensures that officers understand the importance of partnership, communication, and service-oriented policing from the outset of their careers.

- **Accessible and inclusive public meetings:** LVDPS holds meetings in neutral, accessible locations such as City Hall and ensures that agendas and invitations are publicized to affected communities. These efforts reflect thoughtful planning and inclusivity in community engagement.

- **Response to individuals in crisis and other vulnerable populations:** LVDPS demonstrates a strong, multi-layered commitment to serving individuals in crisis and other vulnerable populations, as reflected in its training, partnerships, and community engagement efforts. The department provides extensive academy instruction in mental and behavioral health response, including CIT-focused coursework, scenario-based training, and Advanced Crisis Communication and Tactics (ACCT) training awarded through NPI, supported by a train-the-trainer model that promotes sustainability and consistency. LVDPS also partners with social service teams such as the City's MORE program to support coordinated responses and operates jail-based programming aimed at reducing recidivism. Additionally, the department equips officers with Cultural Awareness and Bias-Based Policing training and proactively engages communities disproportionately susceptible to victimization.

There are also some areas that may be in need of improvement:

- **Officer availability for community engagement:** While officers engage in outreach, there is no formal system ensuring dedicated "off-radio" time for patrol officers to participate in proactive community engagement. Establishing this could improve consistency and balance between enforcement and relationship-building.

- **Social impact and equity assessment:** The department may wish to consider how new enforcement or response strategies affect different populations, particularly regarding disparate impact or unintended social costs. Integrating impact assessments would help align policies with equity and fairness goals.

Summary

LVDPS's overall score on SAJE^{TM} is **78.86%**, which is within range of the NYU Policing Project team's expectation for a well-performing department. The SAJE^{TM} tool surfaces areas where LVDPS excels, as well as areas that may require improvement. The NYU Policing Project team is grateful for LVDPS's willingness to participate in this project, as well as for the BJA Smart Policing Initiative funding that made it possible. SAJE^{TM} is intended to be a roadmap for change and improvement; therefore, we encourage LVDPS to re-administer SAJE^{TM} one year from now to assess developments in each of the pillars.