



GASTONIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031



Gastonia Police Department Strategic Plan: Fiscal Year 2026 through Fiscal Year 2031

VISION

The Gastonia Police Department is committed to providing exceptional professional services that are responsive to our community. We are dedicated to a high standard of excellence and implementing the best innovative policing practices and crime reduction strategies in partnership with the community.

MISSION

Partnering with the community to serve, protect, and unite.

AGENCY PRIORITIES

PEOPLE, CRIME, TRANSPARENCY

VALUES

Sanctity of Human Life

We value human life above all.

Integrity

We hold to the highest standards of honesty, ethical conduct and believe integrity is the foundation of trust.

Professionalism

We strive to achieve the highest standards of personal and organization excellence while holding ourselves accountable to the community and to one another.

Commitment

We are committed to the community as well as our fellow employees and the department.

Empathy

We will treat everyone with whom we interact with respect, care and compassion.

Employees

We believe our employees are our greatest asset and should be developed to their fullest potential.

ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions are the forecasts that form the basis for our strategic plan. Collectively, these serve as the platform upon which the goals and objectives are based. These assumptions are as follows.

Assumption 1: *(These are related to factors impacting police workload.)*

- Violent crime, property crime, and drug related offenses will continue to evolve, requiring adaptable enforcement and prevention strategies.
- Digital evidence, cyber-enabled crimes, and technology-driven investigations will increase in volume and complexity.
- Our service population will increase by 3-5% as of 2031, and this will result in an increase in the number of calls for service.
- Mental health-related calls and interactions involving vulnerable populations will continue to place demands on police resources and require partnerships with service providers.
- The I-85 Corridor Expansion through Gaston County will increase traffic and crime-related calls for service, which will elevate the need for inter-agency coordination and information sharing.

Assumption 2: *(These are demographic factors impacting police workload.)*

- Population growth and residential development within the jurisdiction, especially in the southeastern portion of the city, will continue to increase demand for law enforcement services.
- Community expectations for transparency and accountability will require enhanced data management, reporting capabilities, and public-facing technology solutions.
- Effective public safety outcomes will require continued collaboration with local, state and federal agencies, as well as community organizations.
- Downtown revitalization and development will continue to be a priority for the City of Gastonia, which will result in more crime and requests for police service in the downtown corridor.

Assumption 3: *(These factors are related to the operational philosophy of the department.)*

- The Community Oriented Policing Model will remain a favored sociological response to crime, and Stratified Policing will be the model of choice to affect crime in our city.

Assumption 4: *(These factors are related to departmental changes, capital improvements and equipment needs.)*

- Recruitment and retaining qualified law enforcement personnel will remain a significant challenge due to increased competition and changing career expectations.
- Retirements and employee turnover will create a continued need for succession planning, leadership development, and workforce recruitment initiatives.
- Advances in technology will continue to transform law enforcement operations, requiring ongoing investments in software, equipment, data analytics, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and training.
- Grant funding and alternative revenue opportunities will remain important for supporting specialized programs and technology initiatives.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The five-year strategic goals for the department are summarized below:

- 1) Attract, develop, support, and retain a highly qualified and resilient workforce.
 - Strengthen the department's ability to develop, support, and retain exceptional personnel by investing in employee wellness, professional growth, career mentorship, and organizational culture, while building upon successful recruitment initiatives.
- 2) Mitigate the impact of crime and enhance community safety through innovation, technology and preparedness.
 - Implement advanced public safety technologies, strengthen proactive crime-fighting capabilities, and enhance emergency response readiness to improve community safety, reduce crime, and increase operational effectiveness.
- 3) Strengthen community engagement, partnerships, and transparency.
 - Foster trust, transparency, and meaningful partnerships with the community through proactive engagement, educational outreach, volunteer opportunities, and open access to public safety information.

Detailed descriptions of each goal and its strategies are found on the following pages. Per CALEA 15.1.3e, this strategic plan will be reviewed at least annually. Upon review, it will be determined by the committee whether revisions are needed. A revised by date will be posted on the plan each year.

2026-2027 Priority Focus

During the strategic planning process, the group identified four categories as top priority for the next 12 months. During the next 12 months, the group will collaborate together to make an impactful change in these categories.

- 1) Expand Employee Wellness and Resiliency Program
- 2) Enhance Enforcement Initiatives Through Emerging Technology
- 3) Expand and Enhance the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC)
- 4) Promote Transparency and Community Collaboration

Goal I: Attract, develop, support, and retain a highly qualified and resilient workforce.

Strategy 1.1: Enhance Employee Retention and Workforce Stability

- Action A: Build upon successful recruitment initiatives by implementing targeted retention strategies designed to retain highly qualified personnel.
- Action B: Conduct regular assessments of employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention trends to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Action C: Promote a positive organizational culture that values employee contributions, accountability, and professional excellence.

Strategy 1.2: Expand Employee Wellness and Resiliency Programs (Priority Focus 26-27)

- Action A: Evaluate and implement uniform enhancements that improve comfort, breathability, and functionality in varying operational environments.
- Action B: Invest in modern fitness equipment and wellness resources that encourage healthy lifestyles and improve employee readiness.
- Action C: Enhance Peer Support Team capabilities and establish wellness program tracking to monitor participation, utilization, and effectiveness.
- Action D: Implement a Shift Chaplain Program to provide accessible support and resources for personnel and their families.

Strategy 1.3: Increase Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) Success and Workforce Readiness

- Action A: Implement a structured mentoring program for recruits throughout the BLET process to improve academic performance, preparedness, and graduation rates.
- Action B: Pair recruits with experienced officers who provide guidance, encouragement, and accountability during academy attendance.

- Action C: Establish early intervention and support measures for recruits experiencing academic, physical, or personal challenges.
- Action D: Track BLET performance metrics and outcomes to identify trends and continuously improve recruitment and training processes.

Strategy 1.4: Strengthen Career Mentorship and Development

- Action A: Establish a comprehensive mentoring program that supports employees throughout their careers, from recruitment through leadership development.
- Action B: Implement career and professional development tracking through Essential Personnel to assist employees in identifying and achieving career goals.
- Action C: Expand Leadership development opportunities, succession planning efforts, and specialized training pathways.

Strategy 1.5: Invest in Training and Professional Excellence

- Action A: Provide ongoing training opportunities that enhance operational effectiveness, leadership skills, and professional competency.
- Action B: Encourage participation in advanced certifications, specialized assignments, and professional development programs.
- Action C: Leverage technology to track training accomplishments, certifications, and career progression.
- Action D: Ensure employees have access to the resources, equipment, and support necessary to perform their duties safely and effectively.

Strategy 1.6: Promote a Culture of Engagement, Support, and Organizational Commitment

- Action A: Foster open communication between leadership and employees to strengthen trust and transparency.
- Action B: Encourage employee involvement in organizational initiatives, problem-solving efforts, and strategic planning.
- Action C: Continuously evaluate workforce needs and implement strategies that position the department as an employer of choice.

Goal 2: Mitigate the Impact of Crime and Enhance Community Safety Through Innovation, Technology and Preparedness.

Strategy 2.1: Enhance Enforcement Initiatives Through Emerging Technology (Priority Focus 26-27)

- Action A: Expand the use of technology-driven enforcement tools, crime analysis platforms, and digital evidence management systems.
- Action B: Leverage data-driven policing strategies to identify crime trends and allocate resources effectively.
- Action C: Implement Rapid DNA technology to accelerate investigative processes, identify suspects more efficiently, and support timely case resolution.

Strategy 2.2: Modernize Public Safety Communications and Accountability Technology

- Action A: Upgrade the department's radio communications infrastructure to improve reliability, interoperability, coverage and officer safety.
- Action B: Replace and modernize body-worn camera systems to enhance transparency, evidence collection, accountability, and operational efficiency.
- Action C: Integrate body-worn camera technology with existing evidence management and investigative systems to improve case management and information sharing.
- Action D: Evaluate emerging public safety technologies that improve officer effectiveness, transparency, and service delivery to the community.
- Action E: Pursue grant funding and strategic partnerships to support technology modernization initiatives.

Strategy 2.3: Expand and Enhance the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) (Priority Focus 26-27)

- Action A: Increase the integration of real-time data sources, video analytics, and intelligence-sharing platforms.
- Action B: Enhance situational wareness capabilities to support proactive crime prevention and rapid response.
- Action C: Strengthen partnerships with regional, state, and federal agencies to improve information sharing and investigative effectiveness.
- Action D: Create the first Drone as a First Responder (DFR) program to provide rapid, aerial assessments of incidents before officer arrival to enhance operational decision-making.

Strategy 2.4: Enhance Behavioral Health Response and Crisis Intervention

- Action A: Strengthen partnerships with local mental health providers to improve responses to behavioral health crises and individuals experiencing mental illness.
- Action B: Develop co-responder models that pair mental health professionals with law enforcement personnel for appropriate call types requiring specialized intervention.
- Action C: Expand the integration of mental health professionals within patrol operations to provide immediate assessment, de-escalation, and connection to community resources.
- Action D: Enhance the Crisis Negotiations Team by incorporating mental health expertise into crisis response protocols, training, and critical incident management.
- Action E: Increase Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training opportunities to equip officers with advanced de-escalation and behavioral health response skills.

Strategy 2.5: Strengthen Critical Incident and Disaster Preparedness

- Action A: Enhance departmental readiness through comprehensive emergency management planning, training, and exercises.
- Action B: Conduct regular multi-agency critical incident and disaster response exercises to improve coordination and interoperability.
- Action C: Invest in equipment, communications systems, and response capabilities necessary to effectively manage natural disasters, mass casualty incidents, and other critical events.

Goal 3: Strengthen Community Engagement, Partnerships, and Transparency

Strategy 3.1: Enhance Community Education and Crime Prevention Initiatives

- Action A: Expand educational programs focused on crime prevention, personal safety, fraud awareness, cybercrime prevention, and emergency preparedness.
- Action B: Increase opportunities for community members to learn about law enforcement operations, policies, and public safety resources.

- Action C: Develop workshops and outreach campaigns that empower residents to actively participate in maintaining safe neighborhoods.
- Action D: Utilize multiple communication platforms to provide timely public safety information and educational content.

Strategy 3.2: Strengthen Youth Outreach and School-Based Programs

- Action A: Continue and expand Community in the Schools initiatives, including officers participating in the school lunches, student mentoring, and relationship-building activities.
- Action B: Increase officer involvement in after-school tutoring and educational support programs.
- Action C: Continue supporting and participating in teen court programs that promote accountability, leadership, and positive decision-making among youth.
- Action D: Develop additional youth-focused programs that foster trust, respect, and positive interactions between law enforcement and young people.

Strategy 3.3: Expand Community Engagement and Volunteer Opportunities

- Action A: Develop and promote opportunities for community members to actively support public safety initiatives through volunteer programs.
- Action B: Increase citizen participation in department-sponsored events, community projects, and advisory groups.
- Action C: Create additional opportunities for residents to engage with department personnel in positive, non-enforcement settings.
- Action D: Recognize and celebrate the contributions of community volunteers and partners.

Strategy 3.4: Develop and Implement Specialized Community Safety Programs

- Action A: Establish a Project Lifesaver Program to enhance the department's ability to locate and assist vulnerable individuals who may wander due to cognitive conditions or special needs.
- Action B: Develop a Kids Safe Biking Program that promotes bicycle safety, helmet use, and traffic awareness among children and families.

Action C: Continue supporting and expanding the Safe Kids Car Seat Program through education, inspections, and community outreach.

Action D: Identify additional community safety initiatives that address emerging needs and improve quality of life.

Strategy 3.5: Promote Transparency and Community Collaboration (Priority Focus 26-27)

Action A: Continue encouraging community participation in the city-wide camera registry program to strengthen public-private partnerships in crime prevention and investigations.

Action B: Maintain and regularly update the department's online crime mapping platform to provide accurate and accessible crime information to residents.

Action C: Continue enhancing the Flock Transparency Portal to increase public awareness and accountability regarding the department's use of technology.

Action D: Provide regular updates regarding departmental initiatives, public safety trends, and strategic plan accomplishments.

Strategy 3.6: Build Lasting Community Partnerships

Action A: Strengthen partnerships with schools, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, businesses, and community groups.

Action B: Collaborate with community stakeholders to identify concerns, develop solutions, and improve public safety outcomes.

Action C: Encourage shared responsibility for community safety through collaborative problem-solving initiatives.

Action D: Measure community engagement efforts through participation metrics and public feedback.