

Stage one: Explore and engage

Defining the problem and identifying the innovation.

First published 11 August 2026

Define what needs to change

Defining the problem

Effective implementation begins with a clear understanding of the problem you are addressing and its root cause (or causes).

Establishing why change is needed makes it easier to bring colleagues on board and build momentum for implementation.

One useful tool is a problem statement. This is a concise summary that clarifies:

- the issue
- its significance
- the case for action

When drafting your problem statement, consider:

- how significant the issue is
- how well evidenced it is
- whether it requires immediate action

There are resources available to help you define the problem and make the case for change. One example is the [Policing Problem Book](#), published by the Office of the Police Chief Scientific Adviser (OPSCA).

If your challenge is reflected in the Policing Problem Book, there may already be tested innovations or approaches available to address it. Exploring these can:

- save time
- reduce duplication

- increase the likelihood of successful implementation

Creating a problem statement

- Define the problem – Use the 5W1H technique (who, what, why, where, when and how) to frame the problem statement.
- Describe the impact – Explain the consequences of the problem to emphasise its importance.
- Desired outcome – Consider the desired outcome that solving the problem would achieve.

Data collection

The problem definition should be supported by robust data. Collecting data on the 'as is' situation is called baselining. Baseline data helps you understand your force's starting point before implementing a change. This provides a reference point for tracking the impact of innovation over time.

To do this well, forces should review existing data sources and assess whether additional data or monitoring tools are needed. For example, you might be looking to accelerate the speed it takes your force to put together an MG11 form. If you are unsure how long it takes them to it at the moment, you should start monitoring it now. If you cannot credibly measure impact, you cannot credibly implement an initiative.

Tools like Microsoft Power BI can support efficient data collation and analysis, helping to identify trends in demand, deployment and operational performance.

Establishing alignment and support for change

Before researching and scoping potential solutions, test whether there is sufficient support within the force for investing time and resources in addressing the problem.

Considerations include the following:

- Does the issue align with national policing priorities or the force's local strategic objectives?
- Is the issue already recognised in the force's risk register or force management statement? If not, consider whether it should be.
- Is the problem something that senior leaders have expressed an interest in solving? This is important for securing resources and overcoming barriers.

- How does this work align with ongoing or recent innovation and change programmes? Will it reinforce and connect with them, or does it risk creating parallel, disjointed activity?

Select the right innovation

Once the problem is clearly defined and there's agreement on the need to address it, the next step is to explore suitable solutions. A single platform for policing innovations is in development. In the meantime, several resources can help you explore what is available and assess what might work in your context.

For help:

- contact your regional science and innovation manager (RSIM) via [ChiefsNet](#) (you will need to log in)
- email productivity@college.police.uk

You should aim to adopt a proven, evidence-based practice that has been successfully implemented in a real-world policing context. These contacts should be able to help advise on how to identify and adapt a suitable innovation for testing.

You can also consult the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Innovations Directory. Available via ChiefsNet, this directory is part of the Research and Innovation Network. It includes contacts, coordinators and managers who support innovation across forces.

Innovations that have been found to be effective and scalable include the following:

- Products on a Blue Light Commercial (BLC) procurement framework of tried, tested and safe solutions.
- National programmes to roll out promising, evidence-based innovations to forces, typically led by the NPCC, Home Office or the College of Policing. These include enhanced video response to non-urgent calls, rapid video response to domestic abuse and Operation Soteria. These may provide funding or other support to adopt the innovation and are likely to lessen the need for significant due diligence.
- Entries on the [crime reduction toolkit](#) of more than 80 proven interventions or smarter practice examples of promising practice.

The nationally endorsed innovations may not appear to be suitable. In this case, you may wish to explore emerging approaches that have had some testing and/or appear promising, but have not been evaluated robustly across multiple forces. Sources for these include:

- The [practice bank](#) of more than 400 practice examples across all policing activities that have been implemented but not necessarily evaluated.
- The Centre for Police Productivity's catalogue of more than 1,000 innovations (email productivity@college.police.uk for more information).
- [OPSCA](#) case studies, publications and funding opportunities, including the STAR Awards.
- Police Digital Service (PDS) Solutions Catalogue, a collection of apps and Power Apps developed by forces and partners. PDS also provides regional engagement managers to support innovation.
- [Tilley Awards](#) (2022 onwards), annual awards that recognise problem-solving initiatives across policing and partnerships. Outputs and case studies are available on the Knowledge Hub.
- [Going equipped](#), a magazine that includes ideas shared by officers and staff for their colleagues.
- Emerging technologies in development with suppliers or academic partners.
- Pilots and tests underway in other forces.
- [Knowledge-sharing events](#) that run regularly on all sorts of topics.

Assessing the suitability of an innovation

Even strong innovations can fail if your workplace is not ready, so you need to assess whether your force has the right conditions for them to succeed. The following is a non-exhaustive list of the factors that can help you make that assessment:

- Financial position – Resources are often limited, so understanding budget constraints is important for planning and engagement.
- Data and digital maturity – Assess the force's readiness to adopt digital tools and use data effectively. This includes the quality of data, the strength of digital infrastructure and staff confidence with technology.
- Organisational culture and risk appetite – Understand the values, behaviours and working culture of the force. Engage with departments such as information security and IT to understand the force's approach to risk and the feasibility of implementation.
- Adaptability – Assess whether the innovation can be adapted to meet the specific needs of the force. Identify any modifications that may be required.

Engaging internal stakeholders

Talking to the people who know the work best will help you understand how ready the organisation is, shape your approach and spot risks early.

Start by identifying who needs to be involved, their level of influence and interest and how best to engage them. Through interviews, workshops or surveys, you can explore:

- motivation to address the problem
- general and innovation-specific capabilities (skills, systems, processes)
- barriers to adoption and opportunities for support

This stakeholder mapping directly informs your choice of innovation and the design of your implementation strategy. It also helps you understand how the innovation aligns with authorised professional practice (APP), national guidance and local policy.

Stakeholders are likely to include:

- Practitioners who will use the innovation – This is particularly valuable. Consider forming a working group to support implementation planning and delivery.
- Procurement teams – To ensure compliance with the [Procurement Act 2023](#) and plan for lead times.
- Equality, HR and staff networks – To support [equality impact assessments](#) to meet the public sector equality duty and inclusive implementation.
- Legal and information management teams – To advise on [data protection impact assessments](#), data processing contracts and governance.
- Ethics boards – To ensure alignment with the Code of Ethics and support ethical decision-making.

Engaging external stakeholders

It's just as important to involve people outside your organisation as those inside it.

A good starting point is to ask:

- Who will be affected by the innovation's outcomes?
- Who needs to be assured that it is ethical, legal and aligned with public expectations?

Early engagement is essential if the innovation will be used by or impact partners in the criminal justice system. Partners may include the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), courts or social services. In September 2025, the NPCC and CPS introduced a joint operating procedure (JOP) to provide a standardised framework for using AI responsibly in policing.

The JOP must be considered where AI may have an investigative or evidential impact and/or on criminal justice outcomes. It sets out the engagement timeline and process that should take place with the CPS, and recommended mitigations for the risks associated with AI-based innovation. To find out more about the JOP and how to consult with the CPS, contact PoliceAI@college.police.uk.

It's also important to consider the regulatory regime that may be engaged by the innovation. For example, innovations involving processing personal or sensitive data should prompt engagement with the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) (ICO). This is to ensure compliance with data protection legislation and good practice.

If working from a blueprint, it is likely that this kind of national engagement will have been done. However, you will still need to link in with local partners who could be affected to ensure that they are aware of the change and can adapt their own processes or systems if necessary. Their input can also shape whether the innovation is viable before any investment is made.

Accountability is a critical element of effective implementation. Innovations that affect public trust or raise ethical questions should trigger engagement with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), mayoral office, scrutiny panels or external ethics boards. Examples include predictive policing, AI and automation of public contact.

Depending on the innovation, you may also need to consider consulting the public. This could be either via a formal public consultation or by engaging with representatives of groups most likely to be affected by the change. Forces should not just document that engagement has occurred. Forces should document how external feedback changes implementation and progress – it needs to be meaningful.

Where innovations affect the policing workforce's roles, responsibilities or working conditions, it's important to involve professional bodies. These include the Police Federation, Police Superintendents' Association and relevant unions. Their input can help anticipate workforce

concerns and support smoother implementation.

Finally, linking in with national partners such as the NPCC, the College and PDS can:

- raise the visibility of your work
- avoid duplication
- open up access to resources, guidance and funding
- help with scaling and spreading innovation across the policing system

External stakeholders

The following list is not exhaustive but may help prompt discussion and planning:

- academics and other experts
- Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)
- BLC
- the College
- CPS
- government, including the Home Office
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)
- ICO
- independent advisory groups
- members of the public
- NPCC
- OPSCA
- PDS
- PoliceAI
- police and crime commissioners
- professional bodies, such as the Police Federation, unions and the Police Superintendents' Association external ethics boards
- scrutiny panels
- other bodies connected to policing, such as the National Crime Agency
- other organisations that intersect with our work, such as councils and the NHS

Internal stakeholders

These include:

- chief officers
- crime and investigations
- criminal justice
- data protection departments
- estates
- governance
- ICT
- information security department
- legal department
- line managers
- management board
- management records
- neighbourhoods
- performance teams
- portfolio management office (PMO) or a change team
- procurement
- professional standards department
- response
- staff networks
- wider workforce
- other internal departments, such as HR and communications

For more advice on organisational challenges and enablers of change and understanding organisational readiness for change, you may be interested in:

- [Consolidated framework for implementation research \(CFIR\)](#)
- [Wandersman Center's readiness thinking tool](#)

Costs and funding

All costs should be clearly scoped and presented to senior decision makers as part of the change process. You will need to follow your force's procedures, which may include submitting a business case. If you are implementing an existing initiative with a blueprint or adoption pack, it may include an example business case.

For funding support, the OPCS has produced a guide to help [policing secure funding for research, innovation and evaluation](#).

For further advice or information:

- contact your RSIM via [ChiefsNet](#) (you will need to log in)
- email productivity@college.police.uk

Identify the implementation team

The implementation team plays an important role in driving the innovation process. This internal group leads the work, helping to overcome challenges and remove barriers as they arise.

While it may not always be necessary or practical to set up a dedicated team, doing so can be especially helpful when:

- the innovation marks a significant change from current practice
- several departments are involved
- responsibilities for implementation are unclear

Appointing leads

Consider appointing both strategic and tactical leads. These leads normally chair the working group. The working group should include representatives from the main stakeholders affected. You may need to arrange formal [project management](#).

If forming a dedicated team is not possible, ensure you:

- allocate resources
- assign clear ownership and accountability
- set up action tracking and regular meetings
- define governance arrangements

Team members should:

- understand the innovation in detail – if it is a data-driven or digital innovation, ensure that IT knowledge is well represented in the team and is listened to throughout

- be familiar with the operating environment
- be committed to the work, with experience in implementation where possible

If the innovation is being replicated from another force, it can be valuable to involve external leads who have delivered similar projects. Their experience can help the team avoid common pitfalls and build on proven approaches. The productivity team in the College may have someone seconded to help already, so get in touch.

Strategic support, project management and governance

Strategic support from chief and senior officers is critical to moving an initiative from planning into meaningful delivery. The implementation team or lead resource is usually responsible for preparing the project initiation document (PID) preceding a full business case, and managing day-to-day activity.

Seek early advice from appropriate senior officers and/or the force's change or project management team to ensure that the proposal is:

- proportionate
- feasible
- aligned to organisational priorities

Depending on local arrangements, this may include engaging:

- a portfolio lead
- a departmental head
- PMO or an established change team

For larger or higher-risk initiatives, a senior responsible owner (SRO) should be identified with clear accountability for delivery. They should be supported by a senior sponsor at chief officer level who can provide strategic direction, secure resources and remove barriers. Clear routes to senior advice and escalation from the outset help prevent implementation drift, ensuring that the work remains connected to operational and organisational reality.

Tags

Innovation