

Name of organization: Nova Scotia Department of Justice - Public Safety Division

Summary

The Nova Scotia Department of Justice Public Safety Division is a foundational component of community safety and crime prevention in the province - with its mission claiming to be rooted in principles of collaboration, fairness, and innovation. The division works to reduce crime, enhance public trust in the justice system, and foster safer neighborhoods.

Mandate and Mission

The Public Safety Division has two focal mandates. First, of crime reduction and prevention - focusing on proactive measures to address crime and its societal impacts through evidence-based strategies. And, second, of public confidence building - working to strengthen trust in the justice system by ensuring transparency, accountability, and community engagement.

Its mission emphasized collaboration with government bodies, stakeholders, and diverse communities, guided by mutual respect and continuous improvements.

Organizational Structure

The division is structured into two primary branches, each with specialized roles:

Policing strategy branch

Focuses on strategic oversight and regulatory compliance, operating through:

- Police consulting services - advises municipalities and law enforcement agencies on best practices, resource allocation, and policy development.
- Private security licensing and compliance - regulates private security firms to ensure adherence to provincial standards, enhancing public safety in sectors like event security and asset protection.
- Security intelligence management: coordinates intelligence-sharing with agencies such as the RCMP to address organized crime, terrorism, and cyber threats.

Public safety investigations branch

Enforces targeted legislation and programs, operating through:

- Safer Communities and Neighborhoods (SCAN) Act - addresses illegal activities in residential areas through civil enforcement, empowering communities to report concerns anonymously.
- Rewards for major unsolved crimes program - offers financial incentives for information leading to arrests in cold cases, aiming to foster public involvement in justice.
- Provincial firearms program - manages licensing, safety training, and compliance with federal firearms laws, working closely with the RCMP.

Key initiatives and campaigns

Community Safety Programs

- Crime prevention initiatives - partners with local organizations to address root causes of crime, such as poverty and mental health. An example being the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team in Halifax, which pairs police with mental health professionals.
- Public education campaigns - utilizes social media and community workshops to promote firearm safety, cybercrime awareness, and emergency preparedness.

Emergency response and alerts

- Collaborates with the RCMP to issue Alert Ready notifications for civil emergencies, active shooter incidents, and Amber Alerts to ensure rapid public communication during crises.

Indigenous and rural engagement

- Works on tailored programs for rural and Indigenous communities, including launching culturally sensitive policing strategies and funding for local safety projects.

Collaborations and Partnerships

RCMP

The RCMP provides provincial policing under contract and supports investigations and intelligence-sharing with the Public Safety division.

Municipal governments

Municipal governments across Nova Scotia implement localized safety plans, such as neighborhood patrols and youth outreach programs.

Federal agencies

The Public Safety division participates in federal-provincial committees to address cross-jurisdictional issues like human trafficking and cybercrime.

Accountability and Public Trust

Complaints review mechanisms

The Public Safety division's Police Review Board and Complaints Commissioner investigate public grievances against law enforcement to ensure accountability.

Audits and inspections

The division also coordinates regular evaluations of police services to maintain compliance with provincial standards.

Work done during practicum

Timeline

- **Week one:** got to know the Public Safety division's building and staff and met with Matthew Ritchie (supervisor during practicum) to discuss goals, interests, and expectations.
 - Matthew made himself available for contact virtually, but let us know that due to lack of space in the building he would have me and the other student doing the practicum there do our work online.
 - He established flexible hours and goals for us.
- **Week two:** we were assigned to research and compile a database on Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) and Fire Services in Nova Scotia.
 - We were given January 31st as our deadline (two and a half weeks to work on this).
 - We were each tasked to focus on one section; I was assigned with the Fire Services component specifically.
- **Week three:** no new tasks..
- **Week four:** finishing the databases.
- **Week five:** we were first given the jurisdictional scan assignment.
 - We were each tasked with completing a jurisdictional scan of approximately 3000-5000 words on a given topic.
 - I was asked to write one on any program or initiative offered by any provincial territorial government as well as police and law enforcement to

improve how policing services respond to calls that may be related to mental health.

- **Week six:** we met online with Matthew to discuss how the assignment was going and clarify any questions we might have.
- **Week seven:** We were tasked with writing a briefing note on a topic related to our jurisdictional scan. One of the staff members at the Public Safety division emailed me a project outline, as well as a basic template for general briefing notes. They also expressed that they would be helping me out with this assignment over the next few weeks and help answering any questions I might have.
- **Week eight:** we each met online with a staff member to discuss the briefing note assignment and clarify any questions we might have.
- **Week nine:** we worked on finishing our briefing notes.
- **Week ten:** no new tasks.
- **Week eleven:** we turned in our respective jurisdictional scans.

Fire Services in Nova Scotia research and database

Our first assignment was searching the internet for publicly available contact information regarding Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) and Fire Services in Nova Scotia. This was aimed at helping the Public Safety division learn more about informal and formal contact information presented by these organizations and groups and may help with the development of outreach strategies in relation to programs, such as PSPNET (www.pspnet.ca), that may be helpful for the organizations and their members.

We each prepared an Excel contact list for our assigned groups/organizations in Nova Scotia including the group/organization name(s) such as *Ostrea Lake/Pleasant Point Volunteer Fire Department*, any main contact name, main contact email address(es), any website(s), any main contact phone number(s), and any related Facebook or social media groups.

We were asked to work on this over the next two and a half weeks, with the 7 hours per week for your practicum, with a requested deadline of January 31, 2025. We were also told that, if we found we needed more time based on the information we discovered, this assignment timing could be flexible so long as we communicated that need.

Briefing note

As outlined in our project outline for this assignment, briefing notes play an important role in the efficient transfer of information in the public service. They are often used to provide context and information, but also to help inform recommendations on specific courses of action in decision-making. Briefing notes are typically short documents, written in bullet point format, with the most key information included in condensed form. They are distinct from reports, essays, papers, and other analyses which typically employ a longer format. Furthermore, briefing notes are not written in the traditional narrative and structured format of academic writing, and do not typically require a bibliography. In-text citations can be helpful, but are not necessarily required, and do not need to follow a specific citation format.

The purpose of this assignment was to introduce us to government writing, which is different from academic writing and work. This assignment tasked us with writing our own briefing note to update the Director of Public Safety and Policing on our work and research so far regarding police response to mental health crises. The briefing note was meant only to provide an update and preliminary findings to the Director of Public Safety and Policing, thus, no recommendations on a course of action were required.

Using the briefing note template I was sent, I drafted a briefing note based on the following guidelines:

- The briefing note should be no more than two pages.
- The briefing note should include four core sections:
 - A very brief purpose statement, outlining why this briefing note was drafted and provided to the Director of Public Safety and Policing.
 - A current status section, which will include the current information on your project and findings so far. This may include current stats and initiatives in the province as well as the best practices you have found in other provinces/countries, as well as other recent developments (this section is typically the longest one).
 - A background section, which will include any information that is important to create context for the reader (past work on this topic, relevant contextual information, etc.). This section can also include any relevant legislation that applies to your research.
 - A very brief concluding statement, explaining that the briefing note is being provided only for information.

- The briefing note should not include a bibliography. However, be prepared to provide exact sources of information if requested. You may provide references to sources in text if needed.

The goal was that, by the end of this assignment, I would be able to draft a basic briefing note that is well structured, concise, and easy to read and follow. These skills, they explained, will be important if I ever choose to work in the public service as all levels of government, and most departments, use briefing notes. Additionally, as I was writing this briefing note, I met with a member of the Public Safety and Security Division team to answer any questions I had and help with the writing and formatting of the briefing note.

Jurisdictional Scan

For this assignment, we were asked to complete a jurisdictional scan of any programs or initiatives offered by any provincial/territorial governments as well as police and law enforcement to improve how policing services respond to calls that may be related to mental health publicly available information. The jurisdictional scan was to be between 3000-5000 words and include history and work of the program or initiative, any key partners, confirmed budget or cost information as well as any evaluation or measures of success. The jurisdictional scan could also include formal programs where agencies work with other government departments and/or community-based initiatives and may also include promising practices from international jurisdictions.

Reflection

The practicum was overall a really positive experience. I had always wanted to learn beyond the traditional university classes and this was a great opportunity to do so. It would have been nice to have been able to work in-person and do more tasks for the Public Safety division, but it was also good to have the chance to make my own schedule and work on given assignments at a flexible pace and time. I also want to note that everyone I met and worked with at the Public Safety division was really nice and welcoming, making themselves available to answer any questions whenever necessary.