



**Seattle** Office of  
Inspector General

# Review of SPD Mutual Aid Practices

July 11, 2024

## Introduction

*Mutual aid refers to assistance provided to law enforcement agencies by other departments. Agencies provide personnel, equipment, and other resources to support emergency response and management of large-scale events. Mutual aid contracts vary in scope and formality, ranging from agreements guaranteeing automatic mutual aid by neighboring agencies to comprehensive agreements for coordinated emergency response. Additionally, mutual aid agreements are used to allocate personnel and other resources for participation in federal and regional taskforces.<sup>1</sup>*

This memo outlines the status of mutual aid agreements between the Seattle Police Department (SPD) and local law enforcement agencies and offers recommendations for SPD mutual aid policies moving forward.

## Model Policy

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) provides guidance for law enforcement mutual aid.<sup>2</sup> Generally, IACP recommends agencies preemptively establish comprehensive mutual aid agreements with local departments. Agreements should:

- 1) define scope and objectives,
- 2) establish protocols for requesting and providing aid and implementing a centralized command structure, and
- 3) include requirements for thorough documentation and evaluation.

Specifically, mutual aid agreements should stipulate who can request assistance, under what circumstances aid can be rendered, and the forms of aid to be provided.

The agreement should also outline protocols to determine resource availability, reimbursement for costs incurred during mutual aid operations, liability considerations, and the duration of the agreement. Mutual aid agreements should include procedures for communication and command during activation of mutual aid. Agreements should establish clear and reliable communication channels between agencies to facilitate coordination and decision-making during mutual aid operations. IACP recommends the requesting agency maintains command authority, with each responding department retaining control over its own personnel. To minimize conflicts in policy and training, IACP recommends regular training and joint exercises with neighboring agencies to ensure integration and interoperability.

Lastly, IACP emphasizes the importance of documentation and evaluation of mutual aid operations. Documentation should include records of mutual aid requests, resources deployed, actions taken, and costs incurred. Post-incident evaluations are crucial for agencies to identify areas for improvement and to incorporate solutions into future mutual aid planning.

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1 This review of SPD mutual aid does not include participation in federal or local taskforces or instances of SPD assisting federal agencies.

2 [Mutual Aid\\*](http://theiacp.org) ([theiacp.org](http://theiacp.org))

The criteria are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

Criteria Category	IACP Criteria
Scope	Involved agencies
	Circumstances under which aid can be rendered
	Forms of aid
Protocols	Resource availability
	Cost reimbursement
	Liability
	Agreement duration
	Communication
	Incident command
	Interoperability
Documentation	Requests
	Deployments
	Actions taken
	Costs incurred
	Post-incident evaluation

OIG conducted an informal survey of other department’s mutual aid policies to compare with the IACP example policy. OIG sought out jurisdictions that generally adhered to the guidelines, and included the following five in the review:

- California State’s 2019 Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Plan<sup>3</sup>
- New Orleans, Louisiana Policy Manual<sup>4</sup>
- North Carolina Sheriff’s Association Policy Manual<sup>5</sup>
- Orange County, Florida Policy Manual<sup>6</sup>
- Santa Clara County, California Policy Manual<sup>7</sup>

Mutual aid policies in these jurisdictions generally followed IACP guidelines by including instructions for mutual aid requests, operational command, liability and financial responsibility, and severability clauses. Notably, the California State Mutual Aid Plan is the only policy in this review to include training requirements. The mutual aid policies in Orange County, Florida and New Orleans, Louisiana both specifically require documentation of mutual aid operations for later evaluation; documentation is not included in the mutual aid policies in the other three jurisdictions reviewed.

3 [Blue-Book\\_Law-Enforcement-Mutual-Aid-Plan.pdf \(ca.gov\)](#)

4 [nola.gov/getattachment/NOPD/Policies/Chapter-2-1-Emergency-Special-Event-EFFECTIVE-12-3-17.pdf/](#)

5 [Mutual-Aid-Between-Law-Enforcement-Agencies-Final.pdf \(ncsheriffs.org\)](#)

6 [301422 \(powerdms.com\)](#)

7 [Mutual-Aid-Between-Law-Enforcement-Agencies-Final.pdf \(ncsheriffs.org\)](#)

## Current Laws, Policies, and Agreements

This section outlines state and local mutual aid policies, as well as current SPD mutual aid agreements and records of requests for assistance since 2014.

### SPD Obligations Under State Law and Department Policy

Chapter 10.39 RCW establishes a statewide framework for mutual aid response, delineates the authority and powers of peace officers acting under mutual aid provisions, and addresses liability and operational procedures.<sup>8</sup> The chapter grants peace officers the authority to enforce criminal or traffic laws in any jurisdiction within the state upon written request from the sheriff or chief of police, or in response to an emergency involving immediate threat to human life or property.<sup>9</sup> The chapter also allows for contracting authority of law enforcement agencies per chapter 39.34 RCW.<sup>10</sup> Peace officers are subject to supervisory control imposed by the primary jurisdiction, and any claims of liability arising out of the exercise of peace officer authorities is the responsibility of the primary commissioning agency unless otherwise allocated. Exercise of peace officer authority under this chapter is subject to reasonable reporting procedures and must be reported in a timely manner to the primary jurisdiction.<sup>11</sup>

SPD's mutual aid policy, POL-16.240, was updated in August 2022.<sup>12</sup> The policy defines small-scale mutual aid requests as planned, short-term operations which "do not involve committing a large number of personnel or significant resources." Small-scale mutual aid requests are screened by watch or unit commanders, who may authorize SPD mutual aid resources. Large-scale events are typically pre-planned, longer in duration, or require significant commitment of personnel and resources. Large-scale mutual aid requests are screened by the Seattle Police Operations Center (SPOC). SPD POL-16.240 requires all planned small- and large-scale mutual aid requests to be documented on a Mutual Aid Request Tracking form and sent to SPOC.<sup>13</sup> Requests must include detailed information related to the nature of the event, specific resources and tasks requested, and any limitations the responding agency is asked to observe. POL-16.240 does not include guidelines for routine or emergent mutual aid operations (i.e., assisting with a cross-jurisdiction vehicle pursuit, responding to an unplanned event or natural disaster).

### Current Agreements

SPD is signatory to both a regional interlocal agreement and to formal mutual aid agreements with local agencies.

#### *King County Interlocal Agreement*

The King County Interlocal Agreement was signed in 2005 and authorizes mutual aid and mobilization between the cities in King County, the University of Washington Police Department, and the King County Sheriff's Department. Per chapter 39.34.080 RCW, the agreement allows public agencies to contract to jointly perform government services.<sup>14</sup> The agreement defines mutual aid law enforcement services as the furnishing of at least one officer from the responding jurisdiction and stipulates each responding agency will, at their discretion, render law enforcement services in a timely manner when requested. The terms also include a liability clause, with each party held liable for any act or omission by its own employees. The agreement is effective for one year after signing and automatically renews every year.

Addendum A of the Interlocal Agreement stipulates response protocols. The requesting agency is to specify the number of officers and types of equipment required, as well as to whom such officers are to report and the location to which the equipment should be delivered. The requesting agency is to assume incident command unless otherwise requested by the agency or a where multi-jurisdictional unified command is required. Supervisors from responding agencies are to act as liaison between the Incident Commander and responding departmental personnel.

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8 [Chapter 10.93 RCW: WASHINGTON MUTUAL AID PEACE OFFICERS POWERS ACT](#)

9 [Chapter 10.93.070 RCW](#)

10 [Chapter 10.93.130 RCW](#)

11 [Chapter 10.93.030 RCW](#)

12 [16.240 - Mutual Aid - Seattle Police Department \(WA\) - PowerDMS](#)

13 See Appendix A.

14 [RCW 39.34.080: Contracts to perform governmental activities which each contracting agency is authorized to perform. \(wa.gov\)](#)

The Incident Commander determines arrest policies, as well as press relations and the establishment of a press area. Finally, the Incident Commander is to establish a Planning and Intelligence Section to maintain accurate logs of responding mutual aid agencies, personnel, and equipment. The Planning and Intelligence Section is also charged with completing formal, written Incident Action Plans and Action After Reports.

In accordance with IACP model policies, the Interlocal Agreement includes a definition of mutual aid and specifies a process for assigning liability and determining incident command. It also includes reporting and evaluation requirements. The Interlocal Agreement does not outline the process for requesting and providing aid as recommended by IACP, including identifying under what circumstances aid can be provided, the forms of aid to be provided, and protocols to determine resource availability and cost reimbursement. Also absent from the agreement are terms related to interoperability, such as directives for joint training or deconflicting agency policies. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

Criteria Category	IACP Criteria	King County Interlocal Agreement
Scope	Involved agencies	✓
	Circumstances under which aid can be rendered	
	Forms of aid	✓
Protocols	Resource availability	
	Cost reimbursement	
	Liability	✓
	Agreement duration	✓
	Communication	✓
	Incident command	✓
	Interoperability	
Documentation	Requests	✓
	Deployments	✓
	Actions taken	✓
	Costs incurred	
	Post-incident evaluation	✓

**Notices of Consent**

Notices of Consent, while not formal mutual aid agreements, represent another way for departments to signal inter-agency cooperation. SPD has agreements with 201 agencies in Washington, including city and tribal police departments, sheriff’s offices, and state departments. Each agreement is formalized with a Notice of Consent signed by the Seattle Chief of Police in 2012. The agreements authorize officers from other agencies to operate within the City of Seattle but are not intended as comprehensive mutual aid agreements. As such, they do not include requirements for formal cooperation between SPD and other departments or provide guidance for SPD involvement in federal or local taskforces.

# Mutual Aid Requests, 2014-2023

## Formal Requests

Per SPD POL-16.240, planned mutual aid requests must be documented on a Mutual Aid Request Tracking form and sent to SPOC. During OIG’s review, SPOC provided records of requests for aid by SPD and other agencies between 2014 and 2023. The list is limited to formal requests through SPOC organized in advance of events and does not include reports or other post-event documentation related to uses of force, arrests, or injuries to officers or civilians. Emergent requests for assistance (i.e., responding to patrol calls or protests that were unknown to SPD) are also not included. Table 4 shows SPD and local agency requests between 2014 and 2023.

**Table 3**

Requesting Entity	Requests (2014-2023)
SPD	31
Local Government Agency	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>

## SPD Requests

SPD requested mutual aid 31 times between 2014 and 2023. All requests were for additional personnel to support crowd management activities during protests and other planned events. Agencies solicited include Bellevue Police Department, Redmond Police Department, Port of Seattle Police Department, King County Sheriff’s Office, Washington State Patrol, and the Valley Civil Disturbance Unit (VCDU)<sup>15</sup> and Eastside Civil Disturbance Unit (ECDU). SPD requested these agencies provide bicycle squads, motorcycle units, crowd management and arson bomb squad (ABS) personnel, and King County Sheriff’s Office Guardian One Air Support. SPOC records indicate aid was provided by local agencies 12 times during this period. SPOC records did not indicate whether aid was provided for the other 19 requests.

## Local Agency Requests

Local agencies requested aid from SPD 24 times between 2014 and 2023. Of these, 14 were for assistance with crowd management for protests, four for dignitary visits, two for assistance with local events, three for line of duty deaths, and one for response to a natural disaster. SPOC records indicate SPD honored 12 of these requests, providing various specialized units (including bicycle squads and other crowd management personnel, traffic control, SWAT, ABS, incident management teams, and anti-crime teams) as well as loudspeakers and other equipment. Of the other 12 requests, one was cancelled by the requesting agency and 11 records did not indicate whether SPD provided aid. In response to two requests in 2021, SPD included the provision that SPD resources would be recalled if CS gas was used by the requesting agency. The same provision was not included for later SPD deployments.<sup>16</sup>

15 VCDU is a joint unit with officers from Auburn, Federal Way, Kent, Renton, Tukwila, and Port of Seattle Police Departments.

16 This condition is no longer necessary as state law now requires that law enforcement receive authorization from the highest elected official of the jurisdiction where the CS gas is to be used. See RCW 10.116.030.

## Records Gaps

The information provided by SPOC did not include documentation of informal or emergent requests for aid by SPD, nor did it include post-event documentation of mutual aid operations.

## Informal and Emergency Requests

SPD has historically used both the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and Mark 43 records management system to capture resource sharing between SPD and other agencies. However, neither system contains detailed or accurate records of these engagements, and neither could be used to aggregate data on the frequency, purpose, or details of such informal interactions with other agencies.

## Post-Event Records

SPD does not appear to retain records documenting what occurred during mutual aid operations, including deployed units, officers, and resources, actions taken, injuries to subjects or officers, and any costs incurred.<sup>17</sup> This lack of documentation limits the ability of SPD to review the outcome of planned mutual aid operations, and creates potential issues related to resource management, force reporting, and injury liability.

## Conclusion

OIG used records provided by SPOC to conduct this review. As noted above, the records were limited to formal, preplanned requests for assistance and did not include requests related to emergency or patrol operations. Further, the records were limited in their completeness, detail, and consistency of information included, thus limiting the ability of OIG to review and make recommendations for future agreements or department policy.

OIG issues three recommendations to SPD to improve documentation and records management processes, stronger articulation of mutual aid expectations for SPD officers, and more comprehensive agreements with neighboring agencies. Consideration of these recommendations is especially critical as the city prepares to host an estimated 60,000 tourists for the World Cup in 2026.<sup>18</sup>

**Recommendation 1:** SPD should attempt to work with partner agencies to update both the Interlocal Agreement and the Notices of Consent. The agreements should include terms related to requesting and providing aid, determining incident command, reporting and evaluation requirements, and interoperability as outlined above.

**Recommendation 2:** SPD and SPOC should improve records management for all mutual aid requests and deployments moving forward. SPD and SPOC should require use of the Mutual Aid Tracking form to capture information related to both small- and large-scale mutual aid operations. SPD should also create a post-event documentation form to record deployed units, officers, and resources, uses of force by SPD and other officers, injuries to subjects or officers, and any costs incurred.

**Recommendation 3:** SPD POL-16.240 should be updated to explicitly require SPD officers must follow SPD policy where SPD policies may conflict with those of a requesting agency.

17 IACP documentation guidelines include records of mutual aid requests, resources deployed, actions taken, and costs incurred.

18 [Seattle's Lumen Field chosen as 2026 World Cup venue | king5.com](https://www.king5.com)

# Appendix A SPD Mutual Aid Request Tracking Form



## Mutual Aid Request Tracking

28.9 Rev 0321

Commanders: Use this form to document incoming and outgoing requests for personnel and/or resources per [SPD Manual Section 16.240 – Mutual Aid](#).

Forward completed forms to the Seattle Police Operations Center (SPOC).

SPD Event # (if applicable):	-
Type of Request	
<input type="checkbox"/> Small-scale - already approved (SPOC track and archive only) Name of SPD commander approving:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Large-scale - sent to SPOC for evaluation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Large-scale (urgent) - already approved (SPOC track and archive only) Name of SPD commander approving:	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>OUTGOING:</b> SPD Requesting Aid from Outside Agency Agency: Date Request Sent:                    /           /                    Time:                    hrs Name of SPD employee making request:	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>INCOMING:</b> Outside Agency Requesting Aid from SPD Agency: Date Request Received:            /           /                    Time:                    hrs Name/Title of person making request:	

What is the nature of the event or situation?

What are the specific tasks the responding agency is being asked to perform?

Are there any limitations that the responding agency is being asked to observe?



## Appendix A, continued SPD Mutual Aid Request Tracking Form



### Mutual Aid Request Tracking

28.9 Rev 0321

Other equipment or resources requested?

Estimated duration the personnel and/or resources will be needed?

For Outgoing Requests: Has the responding agency agreed that they will notify SPD of any enforcement activity and uses of force during the event?

SPD Employee Completing Form:

Name:

Serial: