



VULNERABILITY TO RESILIENCE

HOW DATA-DRIVEN STRATEGIES TRANSFORMED CAMPUS SAFETY AT FORSYTH TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



PROFILE

12,000
Students

9
Campuses

14
Sworn Officers

CAMPUS ARRIVAL

When Chief Carolyn McMackin joined Forsyth Technical Community College, she found a safety department that, while dedicated, was operating with a sense of vulnerability. The lack of resources, 24/7 on-campus officer coverage, and essential systems to protect the campus were significant contributors to this situation. "When I arrived, we had six sworn officers who were leaving campus by 10:00 PM, leaving it largely unprotected overnight," McMackin recalls. "We were essentially relying on housekeeping and other staff to lock and secure buildings, which was not a sustainable approach to campus safety."



BUILDING RESILIENCE FROM THE GROUND UP

McMackin recognized that the department needed to transition from a security-focused approach to one that embraced resilience. "It was clear that we were not fully doing our job of ensuring the safety and security of the campus," she notes. However, securing the resources necessary for such a transformation required more than just an understanding of the problem—it required hard data to build a compelling case for change and investment.


CULTIVATING A DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE

Her first step was to implement a robust records management system. By introducing the new software, McMackin began systematically gathering and analyzing data on incidents across the college's various campuses. "At the time, officers were recording incidents using spreadsheets saved to their desktops—and not everything was being recorded," McMackin recalled.

However, introducing new software was just the beginning. McMackin knew that for the system to be effective, it needed to be fully integrated into the daily practices of her team. It required a shift in mindset. She worked closely with her officers to emphasize the importance of thorough documentation, showing them how even minor incidents could be crucial when viewed in the larger context.

"There was some resistance at first, with officers questioning the need to record every little thing," McMackin recalls. "But once they saw how this data was used to secure more resources and improve campus safety, they understood its value." This effort gradually cultivated a culture where data-driven decision-making became central to the department's operations.

Gathering and analyzing data has been crucial for McMackin. "We now have the visibility we need to make informed decisions about where to allocate resources, with a team of people who actively participate in providing the data," McMackin explains. For example, by analyzing crime reports and incident data, McMackin identified the need—and received the funding—to station sworn officers at off-site campuses, where previously only security officers were present. "The data showed us where we were most vulnerable and where we needed to strengthen our presence," she says.



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Carolyn McMackin
Chief of Police
Forsyth Technical Community College

BUILDING A COMMUNITY CULTURE

As part of the transformation from vulnerability to resilience, McMackin knew that fostering a strong, visible presence on campus was essential. She recognized that true resilience would come not just from increased staffing and resources but from building a deep connection with the campus community. To achieve this, she initiated several programs, including a building captain program, where volunteers from different buildings are trained monthly on emergency procedures, Clery Act compliance, and Title IX. "This program has been huge in creating advocates who are knowledgeable about safety protocols and assisting our department across campus," she notes. "It helps people understand that we're not just here to make arrests; we're here to help."

She also established a threat assessment team and a behavioral intervention team, both of which include representatives from various campus departments. "These teams allow us to address potential threats collaboratively and provide the resources individuals might need before situations escalate," McMackin says. "It's about more than just responding to incidents; it's about preventing them – and the incident data we're gathering, analyzing, and reporting plays a big role in early identification."

LOOKING FORWARD

McMackin emphasizes that resilience is an ongoing process. "We continually review our data to adapt to new challenges," she explains. "Resilience isn't something you achieve once—it's a continuous effort to stay ahead of potential threats." This proactive approach has already led to significant outcomes, such as increased officer presence on off-site campuses and enhanced emergency preparedness across the college. These improvements are part of a broader strategy that ensures the department remains prepared to handle emerging issues, keeping the campus safe as new risks arise.

Under Chief McMackin's leadership, Forsyth Technical Community College's safety department has moved from a place of vulnerability to one of resilience. This transformation is reflected in their progress toward becoming the first accredited community college police department in North Carolina, a goal they hope to achieve by the end of the school year. "Our goal is to lead by example," McMackin concludes. "By staying ahead of the curve in terms of technology, professional engagement, and transparency, we can provide a safe and secure environment for everyone at Forsyth Tech."



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