

# **OPEN** Police Complaints

## **The Problem: Underreported Police Misconduct**

The vast majority of police misconduct in the U.S. goes unreported. Thirty-one million adults in 2011 experienced an involuntary police contact. Of those, 2.9 million said the police *did not behave properly*. But only 122 thousand people — or 4.2% of the 2.9 million — filed a complaint. Most of the blame belongs to police agencies, who don't offer usable online tools and information for filing complaints against police. The few, larger municipal departments that reliably collect such data [rarely share it with the public](#). For example, before he killed Laquan McDonald, the Chicago police buried Officer Jason Van Dyke's lengthy history of excessive force complaints. By failing to confront his abusive behavior (and attempting to cover up his killing), the police destroyed trust — especially within the city's black neighborhoods.

## **The Solution: “TurboTax” for Police Complaints**

With pro bono guidance from civil rights attorneys and police oversight professionals, we developed a public web app called Open Police Complaints (OPC). With straightforward, step-by-step guidance, users can build and file professional-quality incident reports. Online filing lets victims of police misconduct avoid paper forms and unhelpful police station staff. The user experience is consistent and covers 18,000 U.S. police agencies. And with 96% of American adults owning a smartphone or cellphone, OPC's accessibility is virtually universal. Unique [among police transparency initiatives](#), OPC doesn't rely on hard-to-extract police agency data. OPC's parent company, [Flex Your Rights \(Flex\)](#), is an NGO — so users trust us because *we are not the police*. Unlike police agencies, we enable users, in some cases, to publish the names of individual officers on our online database. We also protect the safety of at-risk users and our organization's legal liability with a harm-reduction-based privacy architecture.

## **Accomplishments & Growth Plan**

Steven Silverman, OPC's co-founder, has built Flex into the internet's top distributor of know-your-rights content. Leveraging our social media network — with its 45-million-view YouTube channel — we are, at minimal cost, generating a steady stream of eager OPC app testers. One hundred days after our beta launch, our first 142 signups produced 21 unique incident reports. We are scaling using those existing outlets to grow organic traffic. We plan to explore new growth through strategic partnerships, such as working with civil rights organizations to use OPC for case intake related to police misconduct. We will also approach forward-thinking police agencies to use OPC to accept transparent online complaints.

## **Request & Timeline**

The 12-month OPC project cost is \$250,000, and we're currently seeking funding to match a \$60,000 grant arranged by a charitable partner. We will use funds for software engineering (\$60,000), customer service and training (\$60,000), branding and user experience upgrades (\$40,000), partnership development (\$60,000), and marketing and outreach (\$30,000). By September 2020, we can collect 250 new user complaints and partner with five strategic organizations. In five years, we can collect 5,000 complaints per year and become the go-to clearinghouse for transparent and reliable real-time national data on police conduct.