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 contact with police. Of those, 2.9 million said the police *did not behave properly*. But only 4.2% (122,000 people) 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: Open Police Complaints (OPC)

We developed an easy-to-use web app for reporting police behavior. Like "TurboTax" for police oversight, OPC gives users straightforward, step-by-step guidance to 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. Unique among police transparency initiatives, OPC doesn't rely on hard-to-extract police agency data. OPC and our parent company, Flex Your Rights Foundation (Flex), are an NGO — so users trust us because *we are not the police.* Unlike police agencies, we enable users, in specific cases, to post to our database the names of individual officers. And we protect the safety of at-risk users and our organization's legal liability with a harm-reduction-based privacy architecture.

Accomplishments & Growth Plan

One hundred days after OPC's beta launch, our first 142 signups produced 21 unique incident reports. We plan to rapidly scale user growth using our social media network — featuring Flex's 45-million-view YouTube channel — and organic web traffic from user-generated content. As we scale, we will pursue revenue-generating opportunities. For example, we plan to build a targeted lead-generation service for criminal defense attorneys. By matching them with OPC users in need of legal help, we can charge attorneys a flat or per-lead fee. We also plan to offer OPC to civil rights law firms, including ACLU chapters, in need of better tools to manage their legal intake for police misconduct cases. We will provide a similar service to forward-thinking police agencies who can use OPC to accept transparent online complaints.

Request & Timeline

The project cost for the next 12 months is $250,000, and we are currently seeking funding to match a $60,000 grant arranged by a charitable partner. We will use funds for software engineering ($100,000), customer service and training ($60,000), partnership development ($60,000), and marketing and outreach ($30,000). By September 2020, we can collect 500 new user complaints and partner with five strategic organizations. In five years, we can grow to 50,000 complaints per year, self-sustain through paid subscriptions, and become the go-to clearinghouse for transparent and reliable real-time national data on police conduct.