



NACOLE Candidate Election Questionnaire

Name: Tonya McClary

Position Sought: At-Large Member

Geographic Location: Philadelphia, PA

Current Employment: Executive Director of the Citizens Police Oversight Commission (CPOC)

1. How long have you been involved with NACOLE, and how did you initially become involved?

I became involved with NACOLE in 2017, when I joined the Office of the Independent Police Monitor in New Orleans as the first Chief Monitor for use of force. Stepping into that role meant entering a field that was still growing and defining itself, and NACOLE quickly became one of the places where I found grounding. The New Orleans office had always been deeply connected to NACOLE, so from the beginning, the organization shaped my training, my understanding of national standards, and my sense of what strong oversight could look like.

As I continued in the field, NACOLE became part of my professional rhythm. I've attended nearly every annual conference since then, along with several regional gatherings, each one expanding my network and deepening my understanding of oversight across jurisdictions.

In my current role as Executive Director of the Citizens Police Oversight Commission in Philadelphia, that relationship has only grown. CPOC has partnered with NACOLE on several initiatives that support practitioners and strengthen the national oversight community.

In many ways, NACOLE has been a constant companion throughout my oversight career — a place to learn, connect, and contribute to the broader evolution of this work.

2. Which NACOLE Committees have you served on? Have you had other involvement in NACOLE as a volunteer?

I began volunteering with NACOLE not long after joining the Office of the Independent Police Monitor in New Orleans. Over the years, I contributed to the Member Development and Support Committee, which became an important part of my early involvement. That committee's work resonated with me because it focuses on helping practitioners feel supported, connected, and confident in a field that can often feel isolating. One of the most meaningful efforts I participated in was the Peer-to-Peer Support initiative, which paired practitioners — and sometimes entire agencies — to troubleshoot challenges, share strategies, and support the development of new oversight offices. The committee also helped create welcoming spaces for new members at annual conferences, strengthening the network that makes NACOLE so valuable. Although I am not currently on the committee, that work shaped how I think about supporting practitioners and building a strong national community.

In addition to that early committee work, I now participate in the Mediation Working Group. I also served on the planning committee for the 2022 NACOLE Annual Conference in Fort Worth while leading the

Office of Community Police Oversight in Dallas, which gave me the opportunity to work closely with NACOLE staff and oversight leaders across Texas.

In my current role as Executive Director of the Citizens Police Oversight Commission in Philadelphia, I've continued to partner with NACOLE on initiatives that strengthen the field. I collaborated with SIVIL to develop a workshop for the 2024 Directors Forum, and CPOC worked with NACOLE to create and now host the NACOLE Data Forum, which brings together oversight practitioners working with data to share best practices, discuss challenges, and exchange resources. We also hosted a Legal Working Group at the 2025 conference in Minneapolis and will do so again in 2026. In addition, CPOC has supported several NACOLE webinars focused on outreach, sharing the "Philly model" our office uses to engage communities.

These efforts reflect my ongoing commitment to helping build a connected, knowledgeable, and forward-looking oversight community.

3. Please share highlights of your background/experience in law enforcement oversight.

My career in civilian oversight has been shaped by leading reform across some of the country's most complex jurisdictions — Baltimore, New Orleans, Dallas, and now Philadelphia. I have built oversight systems from the ground up, modernized existing ones, and pushed for innovations that expand transparency, strengthen accountability, and elevate community voice. That work is grounded in a national perspective formed through decades of human rights advocacy, criminal defense, and collaboration with organizations at every level of government.

Before entering formal oversight, I worked nationally and internationally to confront police brutality, document human rights abuses, and develop community-policing standards. I partnered with national police organizations and supported communities bringing policing issues before bodies like the United Nations. Those experiences taught me how police culture operates across jurisdictions and how reform must be designed to withstand political pressure while earning community trust.

As a public defender in Baltimore, New Orleans, and Dallas, I saw firsthand how policing practices shape people's lives. While serving as Circuit Court Chief in Baltimore, my office represented many of the protestors following the death of Freddie Gray, Jr. That moment — and the community's demand for accountability — deepened my understanding of the structural reforms needed to ensure independent oversight. I also investigated in-custody deaths, challenged dangerous jail conditions, and helped develop a universal prison bill of rights. These experiences pushed me to think about oversight not just as review, but as a vehicle for systemic change.

In New Orleans, I brought that mindset to the Office of the Independent Police Monitor, where I built the Use of Force Department and created new systems for monitoring critical incidents, improving public reporting, and strengthening policy recommendations. I also worked closely with Families Overcoming Injustice, helping them transform their experiences into a "Family Bill of Rights" — a community-driven reform model that has informed oversight conversations beyond the city.

In 2020, Dallas asked me to become its first Police Monitor and founding Director of the Office of Community Police Oversight. Building an oversight agency during a pandemic required innovation at every step — from community engagement strategies to investigative protocols. Under my leadership, Dallas adopted the landmark 72-hour video release policy for critical incidents, a reform the community had sought for more than 40 years. I wrote significant portions of the policy and made it retroactive, allowing families to finally access footage of their loved ones' deaths. That reform has since been studied by other jurisdictions seeking to modernize their transparency practices.

Today, as the first permanent Executive Director of Philadelphia's Citizens Police Oversight Commission, I am leading the transformation of one of the country's newest oversight bodies. Navigating the influence of the Fraternal Order of Police while building a strong, independent commission requires both national experience and innovative thinking. My focus is strengthening investigative capacity, expanding public reporting, and building a model of oversight that reflects national best practices and can serve as an example for other cities.

Across every role, my work has centered on reform and innovation — creating new oversight structures, modernizing policies, elevating community-driven solutions, and pushing for transparency practices that shift national expectations. I bring a national perspective informed by diverse jurisdictions, complex political environments, and a deep commitment to advancing oversight systems that are independent, effective, and worthy of public trust.

4. Why do you want to serve on NACOLE's Board? What makes NACOLE's mission important to you?

I want to serve on NACOLE's Board because civilian oversight has been the center of my professional life, and NACOLE is the organization that consistently strengthens and connects this work nationwide. Since entering oversight in 2017, NACOLE has been a critical resource — a place where standards are shaped, best practices are shared, and practitioners learn from one another. Whenever cities ask how to build or improve oversight, NACOLE is the first place I direct them.

My commitment to oversight is rooted in a deep belief in accountability, civil rights, and the need for systems that earn public trust. Across multiple jurisdictions, I have seen how independent oversight can transform relationships between communities and police, and I have also seen how fragile those systems can be without strong national guidance and support. Having built and modernized oversight systems in New Orleans, Dallas, and Philadelphia, I understand both the challenges and the opportunities facing agencies today.

NACOLE's mission matters to me because I have spent my career creating and strengthening oversight systems, often as the first person to hold the role. Those experiences have shown me how essential it is for practitioners to have a national community behind them. NACOLE provides that community through shared learning, professional standards, and collective support.

My goal is to help strengthen NACOLE's work by sharing lessons learned across jurisdictions and supporting the continued evolution of civilian oversight nationwide. NACOLE's mission matters because it ensures that no oversight practitioner has to do this work alone — and because it helps build systems that earn public trust, protect civil rights, and advance accountability for future generations.

5. What skills/qualities do you expect to contribute as a Board member?

I bring a combination of national experience, nonprofit governance, and practical oversight skills that I believe would strengthen NACOLE's work. I have served on boards ranging from small community organizations to multi-million-dollar international nonprofits, and that breadth has taught me how to support an organization's mission while helping it grow responsibly.

I offer strong advocacy skills shaped by years of advancing civil rights, community concerns, and accountability in law enforcement. My legal background gives me a solid understanding of the frameworks that guide oversight, which helps inform policy development and strategic decision-making. I also bring deep experience in community engagement and coalition building — skills that help foster

trust, elevate impacted voices, and strengthen relationships between oversight agencies and the communities they serve.

Strategic planning is another core strength. I have led oversight systems through periods of growth and transition, and I understand how to set clear goals, anticipate challenges, and help organizations move forward with purpose. I am also a confident public speaker who can represent NACOLE effectively with stakeholders, practitioners, and community groups.

Finally, I bring strong networking and project-management skills. I have built relationships with oversight leaders, legal partners, community organizations, and national stakeholders, and I know how to move projects from concept to implementation in ways that support NACOLE's mission.

Together, these skills reflect my commitment to strengthening NACOLE's collective work and supporting the continued evolution of civilian oversight nationwide.

6. What goals do you have for your service on the NACOLE Board, what would you most like to accomplish as a Board member?

If I serve on NACOLE's Board, my goal is to strengthen the national oversight community and support the continued evolution of this field. I want to help deepen NACOLE's partnerships, expand working groups that build specialized expertise and peer support, and advance inclusivity by elevating directly impacted voices and community-centered approaches.

I also want to help grow NACOLE's organizational capacity. Expanding staff resources would allow NACOLE to support more practitioners, assist more cities developing oversight systems, and increase its national impact.

Across all of these priorities, my aim is to share lessons learned across jurisdictions and help strengthen NACOLE's collective work as oversight continues to evolve nationwide.