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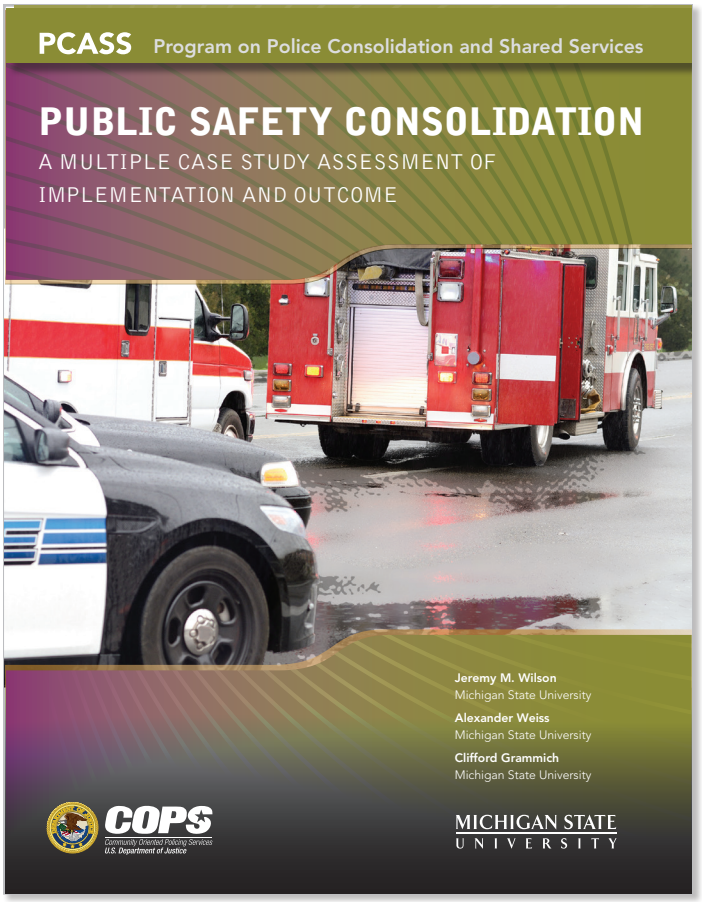
An ongoing executive series providing overviews of critical community policing issues



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Essentials for Leaders

Public Safety Consolidation: A Multiple Case Study Assessment of Implementation and Outcome

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About the Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services

Although consolidating and sharing public safety services has received much attention in recent years, such efforts are not new. Moreover, despite the fact that many communities have in one way or another consolidated or shared these services, the process of doing so has not become any easier. In fact, to say that changing the structural delivery of public safety services is difficult or challenging is an understatement. At the core of contemplating these transitions, regardless of the form, is the need for open, honest, and constructive dialog among all stakeholders. Key to this dialog is evidence derived from independent research, analysis, and evaluation.

To help provide such independent information, the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice, with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), established the **Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services (PCASS)** to help consolidating police agencies and those considering consolidating increase efficiency, enhance quality of service, and bolster community policing. Together they also developed resources such as publications, videos, and the PCASS website to assist communities exploring options for delivering public safety services. These resources do not advocate any particular form of service delivery but rather provide information to help communities determine for themselves what best meets their needs, circumstances, and desires.

The PCASS provides a wealth of information and research on structural alternatives for the delivery of police services, including the nature, options, implementation, efficiency, and effectiveness of all forms of consolidation and shared services. PCASS resources allow local decision makers to review what has been done elsewhere and gauge what model would be best for their community.

For more information on the PCASS and to access its resources, please visit http://policeconsolidation.msu.edu/.

About the Essentials for Leaders Series

This document provides an executive summary of research conducted by the MSU team regarding public safety departments. In this examination, the team gathered and analyzed data and experiences regarding communities that have consolidated and deconsolidated public safety services. Through an assessment of the nature, implementation, and outcome of such efforts, this report provides decision makers considering public safety consolidation with lessons on its context and applicability for their community. For those that have implemented consolidation, it offers lessons on improving its implementation and effectiveness.

This research is more fully documented in *Public Safety Consolidation: A Multiple Case Study Assessment of Implementation and Outcome*. *Public Safety Consolidation* should also be of interest to researchers interested in public safety organization and service delivery.

Origins and Practice of Public Safety Consolidation

While most communities providing police, fire, and emergency medical services do so through separate agencies, some do so through a single consolidated agency. Some consolidated public safety agencies date back more than a century in the United States, with the history of such single agencies for police and fire services even dating to ancient Rome (Matarese et al. 2007; Morley and Hadley 2013).

The reasons communities choose to have single agencies provide police, fire, and emergency medical services may vary by time and place. Communities have historically consolidated these services in a single agency for reasons of efficiency and cost effectiveness (Ayres 1957; Berenbaum 1977); more recently, homeland security needs have also been cited (Mata 2010). Yet over time concerns have persisted as well, particularly among firefighting personnel, regarding whether a single agency really can provide all police and firefighting services for a community (Bernitt 1962; Lynch and Lord 1979; Crank and Alexander 1990; International Association of Fire Fighters n.d.).

More than 100 communities across the United States provide police and fire services in single agencies. While implementation varies considerably, such agencies may have

- *nominal* consolidation, with executive functions consolidated under a single chief executive but no integration of police and fire services;
- *partial* consolidation, with partial integration of police and fire services, cross trained public safety officers working alongside separate functional personnel, and consolidation within administrative ranks;
- *full* consolidation, with full integration of police and fire services, cross trained public safety officers, and consolidated management and command.

Despite the number of consolidated agencies, the long history of public safety consolidation, and the growth in the number of such agencies possibly owing to budget constraints of recent years, there have been few systematic analyses of such departments. What is known is largely anecdotal and based upon scattered and often dated case studies. Many questions remain about the options for and feasibility of public safety consolidation and what may contribute to its success or failure.

Given the lack of systematic analyses of public safety departments, the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice is gathering and analyzing data and experiences regarding communities that have consolidated and deconsolidated public safety services. This document summarizes a report featuring seven case studies of consolidation and six of deconsolidation, as well as certain firefighting issues confronted by agencies in both groups. The full report is also is based on published literature and input from two focus groups of experts on public safety consolidation.

Figure 1 depicts the locations of our consolidation and deconsolidation case studies. While the number of intensive case studies we were able to conduct was limited by resources, we were able to study instances of both consolidation and deconsolidation in the north, south, east, and west.

Figure 1. Location of consolidation and deconsolidation case study communities

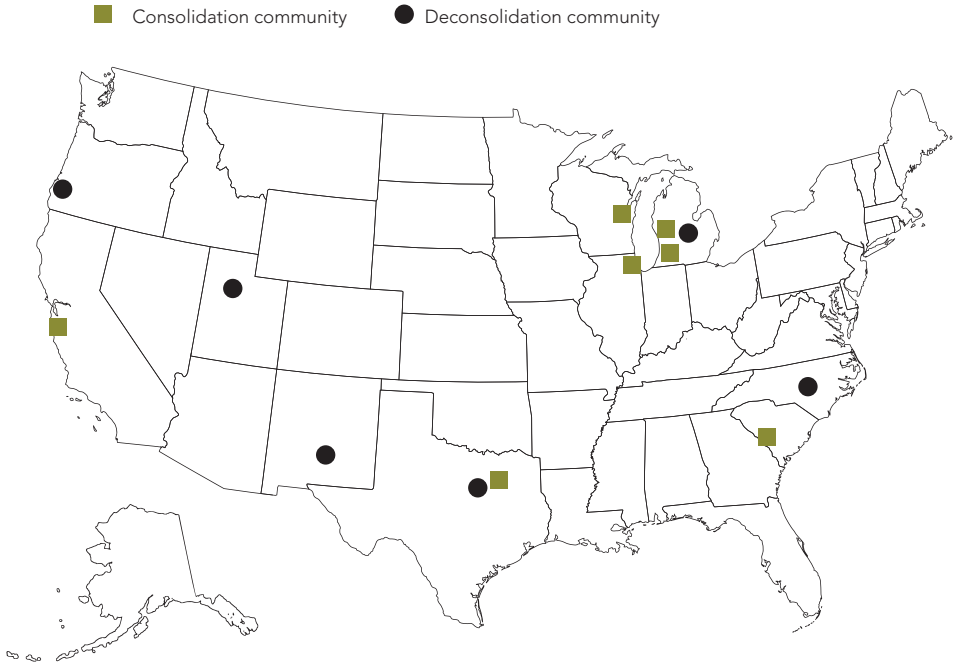


Table 1 summarizes characteristics of our case study communities. Though both sets of communities have a wide variety of characteristics, our consolidation case study communities were generally smaller, less diverse, and more affluent than our deconsolidation communities. Some of these differences influence the lessons drawn from each. We review these for each set of communities in the sections that follow; readers interested in more details for a particular community should consult our full report.

Table 1. Characteristics of case study communities

Community	Total pop., 2010	Land area (sq mi)	Persons / sq mi	% single-race non-Hispanic White	Per capita income (2012 dollars)	UCR Part I crimes / 100K pop., 2012
Consolidation communities						
Aiken, SC	29,524	20.7	1,426	65.5	32,312	5,771
Ashwaubenon, WI	16,963	12.4	1,369	89.1	31,204	4,086
East Grand Rapids, MI	10,694	2.9	3,650	94.3	52,893	648
Glencoe, IL	8,723	3.7	2,224	92.0	99,036	1,073
Highland Park, TX	8,564	2.2	3,823	91.6	122,811	2,829
Kalamazoo, MI	74,262	24.7	3,009	65.6	18,402	5,050
Sunnyvale, CA	140,081	22.0	6,371	34.5	45,636	1,898
Deconsolidation communities*						
Alamogordo, NM	30,403	21.4	1,419	56.8	22,872	2,887
Durham, NC	228,330	107.4	2,127	37.9	27,748	5,090
Eugene, OR	156,185	43.7	3,572	82.0	25,567	5,337
Meridian Twp., MI	39,688	30.5	1,302	77.7	37,204	2,488
West Jordan, UT	103,712	32.5	3,195	74.6	22,236	2,955

*Because of its lack of a residential population, the table excludes Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) International Airport, one of our deconsolidation case study communities, which we include in our summary analysis.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2014); FBI (2013)

Common Themes in Consolidation

In most consolidation communities, consolidation was an idea that evolved over time. Highland Park had the equivalent of public safety departments when it first incorporated before deconsolidating and then reconsolidating again in recent decades. Aiken, East Grand Rapids, and Glencoe all considered consolidation for two decades or longer before implementing it.

Most of the communities to consolidate did so to gain efficiencies and point to lower costs for police and fire services than their neighbors incur. Yet one agency, in Highland Park, pursues the model to provide "full service" more than efficiency. Focus group participants cautioned against pursuing consolidation for efficiency, noting that savings may take time to realize and that efficiencies are often not reflected in lower costs.

The approaches that consolidated agencies take to public service integration vary by their circumstances. In Ashwaubenon and Sunnyvale, public safety consolidation occurred as part of a larger professionalization of police, fire, and other services. Aiken, East Grand Rapids, Glencoe, and Highland Park had more established police and fire departments and took a relatively gradual approach to integrating them. Kalamazoo appears to have taken a more direct approach, largely owing to budget crises it faced in the early 1980s.

Public safety consolidation can take time, especially when it occurs among fairly well-established police and fire agencies. Agencies may face up-front costs and needs such as those for increased training and backfilling of staff (Wilson, Weiss, and Grammich 2012). Agencies may also struggle with issues of branding, uniforms, and proper equipment and vehicles.

Even among these well-integrated agencies, all of which would be considered fully consolidated in any model, some differentiation remains both within and across organizations. Aiken, East Grand Rapids, and Sunnyvale have separate police and fire divisions. Several consolidated agencies also use external supports for their efforts, including paid on-call firefighters in Aiken and Ashwaubenon and private ambulance service in Kalamazoo. Glencoe and Sunnyvale seek to rotate their personnel through different types of duties, but some inadvertent specialization may still arise.

Separate police and fire cultures also pose problems for public safety agencies, both for their own operations and in gaining acceptance from agencies in other communities. At the same time, public safety directors note few problems in handling simultaneous police and fire emergencies in their communities, and that mutual aid agreements cover many such contingencies.

Public Safety and Fire Suppression

One of the key questions raised in our study of consolidated public safety departments is how these agencies organize and deploy for fire suppression, and how their response stacks up against those of traditional standalone fire departments. When assessing fire deployment most communities rely on three nationally recognized standards. These are

- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards 1710 and 1720 (for volunteer departments) (NFPA 1710, for paid professional departments, requires that, for 90 percent of moderate-risk fires, at least four firefighters arrive within six minutes and 20 seconds or 14 firefighters arrive within 10 minutes and 20 seconds);
- Occupational Safety and Health Respiratory Protection Standard [20 CFR 1910.134(g)(4)(i)] and NFPA 1500 Occupational Safety and Health Standard (commonly known as the "two-in/two-out rule," with two firefighters ready to perform rescue for two people within a structure fire);
- ISO Public Protection Classification.

Each of the consolidated departments in our case studies meets these standards. Table 2 on page 7 provides the details of their deployment schemes.

Table 2. Deployment scheme by public safety department

Aiken	On the first alarm, two engine companies and a ladder truck with driver/operators, three maintenance staffers, three cadets, and a sergeant; paged volunteers, of whom three to five typically respond; an on-duty public safety officer (PSO) lieutenant who assesses the fire, with four to five officers typically responding; off-duty PSOs (who have take-home cars) are notified as needed. For a second alarm, the department deploys remaining two engine companies; off-duty volunteer company; on-coming shift to staff reserve engine and ladder/service trucks. For a third alarm, the department deploys reserve engine and ladder to fire staging; all off-duty personnel called in; and mutual aid called as needed.
Ashwaubenon	The department deploys an engine with an officer and three PSOs, and an ambulance with two PSOs. Should the fire be confirmed or if smoke is visible, the department notifies its 25 paid on-call personnel to respond. The department also participates in the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System, Division 112.
East Grand Rapids	Officers work 24-hour shifts. Each shift has one staff sergeant, one sergeant and five PSOs. Four paid on-call firefighters "serve as initial attack and rescue personnel on a working fire" and otherwise supplement the PSOs in firefighting duties. The fire division also provides services through inter-departmental agreements.
Glencoe	Employs an automatic aid system to respond to fires, sharing services with neighboring communities. In any of these communities, the response to a fire call includes a Glencoe engine with three PSOs; three additional Glencoe PSOs on patrol (who do not don bunker gear unless needed); Winnetka ladder truck; Northbrook engine company; and Highland Park ambulance. Should a fire be confirmed, additional responding resources include a Northfield squad, Wilmette engine, and Highwood quint[1].
Highland Park	For each shift, the town has a minimum of 11 PSOs on duty, including four on patrol (one of whom is a supervisor). Among the seven in-station, a minimum of two are on an engine, two on a truck, and two on a mobile intensive-care unit. The department participates in mutual aid agreements with other Dallas County agencies, including those in the cities of Dallas and University Park.
Kalamazoo	Personnel at the stations drive the apparatus to the scene and officers in patrol vehicles are assigned to respond to the scene. The department can send 18 to 24 officers to a fire. Because the officers in cars often arrive on-scene first, they can advise on the nature of the incident and the necessary equipment and manpower for an appropriate response.
Sunnyvale	The department dispatches six apparatus, each with one PSO and a lieutenant, or two PSOs; six additional patrol officers; and one battalion chief (captain).

1. A quint, or quintuple combination pumper, is an apparatus that serves the dual purpose of an engine and a ladder truck.

Insurance Services Office (ISO) classifications of fire protection services in these communities also indicate better performance than in most communities nationwide. ISO rates communities on a one-to-ten scale, with one being the best designation. Some insurance companies use these ratings in calculating fire risk when underwriting policies. ISO ratings consider adequacy of

- fire alarm and communications systems;
- fire department resources and operations;
- water supply;
- community risk reduction.

ISO ratings also consider the distribution of fire companies, with built areas expected to have a fire company within 1.5 road miles and a ladder service company within 2.5 road miles, allowing for a response time of three minutes and 20 seconds for an engine company and four minutes and nine seconds for a ladder service company (ISO Properties, Inc. 2015).

Figure 2 summarizes ISO ratings for the departments we studied and those for communities across the United States, most of which have separate police and fire departments. Four of the public safety departments we studied have attained the classification of 2, which places them in the top 2 percent of the 49,010 communities participating in the ISO rating process. Two more have a class 3 rating, placing them in the top 7 percent. One had a class 5 rating, placing it near the top third of all communities.

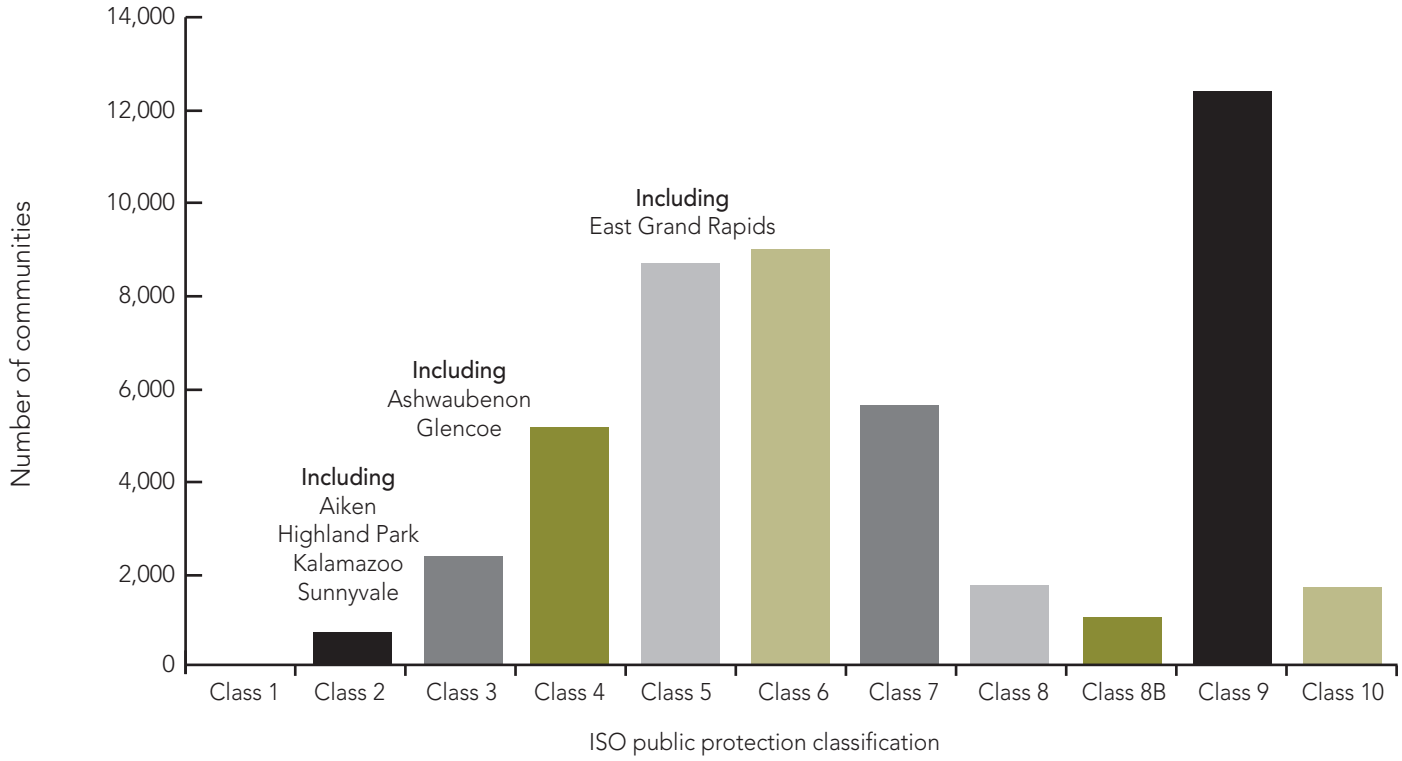
Common Themes in Deconsolidation

While many communities have found public safety consolidation has helped them in multiple ways, others have found difficulties balancing all the demands of the model.

Desire for specialization was particularly evident in all of our deconsolidation case studies. In Alamogordo, the city sought to improve its fire coverage and to provide more specialization and career opportunities for police and fire officers. At the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, the department deconsolidated in order to specialize its police services to fulfill homeland security needs. In Eugene, the city manager's desire to hear from both fire and police leaders about their unique concerns rather than work through a single public safety manager spurred deconsolidation. In Meridian Township, the popularity of the fire department and its advanced services may have meant public safety consolidation would always struggle for acceptance. In West Jordan, rapid growth led city officials to conclude that specialization was needed and that a single public safety agency no longer served the community's needs.

Concerns about large or diverse communities are evident in several cases of deconsolidation. The deconsolidation communities we studied were, as noted, larger and more diverse than the consolidation communities. In Durham,

Figure 2. Distribution of ISO class codes



concerns that the public safety department might not be addressing all the needs of a diverse population contributed to the push for deconsolidation (Coe and Rosch 1987). In Meridian Township, a community with a greater area and a lower population density than any of our consolidation case study communities, a former official questioned whether the public safety department could work.

Management difficulties were evident in some cases. In Alamogordo, some unique problems helped push deconsolidation, as did concerns that the model was inappropriate for a community without the ability to draw on other specializations nearby. Eugene's problems were contentious but still had a manager who ultimately found it better to manage separate fire and police agencies than one combined public safety agency. In Durham, concerns that department leadership did not reflect or adequately address the needs of a diverse community contributed to deconsolidation. For many communities, the International Association of Fire Fighters contends that "planning is inadequate or nonexistent" (IAFF n.d.).

In some cases, failure to demonstrate the continued utility of the model may have led to deconsolidation. Previous analyses of Durham are explicit on this failure, but it may also be evident in concerns a former official expressed about politics in Meridian Township.

Conclusion

In some communities, consolidation has worked well, often leading to efficiencies and savings. Consolidated agencies also met several firefighting standards, earning better insurance ratings than most U.S. communities. The success of consolidation in our case studies may have stemmed from the ability of these communities to implement consolidation over time. Some have been able to grow their public safety departments as their communities have grown. All have sought to foster a "public safety culture" and, even if maintaining separate police and fire divisions, to have public safety officials trained in all aspects of police work and firefighting. Leaders of these agencies have found such a model to be responsive to the needs of their communities.

Yet we also found several communities where the model has not worked, where support was never fully achieved, and where leaders subsequently deconsolidated the departments. In some cases, this was because the communities did not find the model to be responsive and concluded that separate police and fire agencies would better serve their needs. Some agencies also found their growth or evolving needs required a level of specialization that consolidation could not offer but that separate fire and police agencies could. In at least one case, consolidation added a layer of bureaucracy that worked against the goal of streamlining operations. In two other cases, leadership problems led to deconsolidation. The deconsolidation communities we studied were also typically larger and more heterogeneous than our consolidation communities, raising questions as to whether consolidation can serve the needs of large and growing communities.

If there is one overarching lesson in our case studies, it is that consolidation of police and fire agencies is neither a panacea nor a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, communities must very carefully assess for themselves alternative models of delivering police and fire services, which ones may best serve their circumstances, and how best to implement any changes. In many cases, the traditional model of separate police and fire services may prove best. In some cases, however, a consolidated model may be best for a community, allowing it to provide a full range of services with greater efficiency than it might otherwise realize.

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