essentials for

leaders

An ongoing executive series providing overviews of critical community policing issues

Police Consolidation and Shared Services

Identifying, Developing and Sharing Lessons

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Contents

About the Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services 3

About the Essentials for Leaders Series 3

The PCASS Program in Context 3

The PCASS Website: Gathering Perspectives 4

New Research on Evolving Issues 6

- Pathways to consolidation 6
- Civilianization 7
- Consolidation of police and fire agencies 8

Implementing Changes 9

- Collaborating with stakeholders 9
- Engaging the news media 11

Conclusion 13

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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 many communities that 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.

The PCASS Program in Context

The provision of police and fire services is among the largest tasks local governments undertake. In 2013, local governments in the United States spent more than $150 billion on public safety services—more than it spent on any other function but education (2013 Census of Governments, http://www.census.gov/govs/local/index.html). Managing these services is a complex task. Budget pressures, particularly those following the "Great Recession" of 2008 and 2009, have further complicated the efforts of public safety agencies to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. Many police agencies continue to face budget cuts and staff reductions.

As cuts continue, many local governments have found that standard responses have not been enough to balance budgets. While some communities have overcome their traditional reluctance to cut public safety services, instituting measures such as hiring freezes, layoffs, furloughs, or even disbanding of departments, others have experimented with differing modes of service delivery. These have included consolidating services within or across agencies, contracting for service, or having civilians provide more services. Such measures raise questions that communities have not previously needed to address or known how to answer.

To provide a resource for communities addressing new and pressing questions on alternative means for delivering public safety services, the COPS Office supported the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice in establishing the Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services (PCASS). As an evidence-based hub for the creation and sharing of lessons, the PCASS Program does not advocate for any form of consolidation or shared service. Rather, it provides a single-point resource on structural options for delivering police services to help communities assess for themselves the form of service delivery that best meets their needs and circumstances—which may in fact be the one they are currently implementing.

The PCASS Program creates, assembles, and disseminates research and other resources on the nature, options, implementation, efficiency, and effectiveness of consolidation and shared services. Including both costs and benefits, it offers information developed by peer agencies across the country. It provides information on managing transitions effectively, including strategies for structure and staffing, insight on what other communities are doing and how they are performing, and best practices and bottom-line implementation guidelines from expert practitioners and researchers.

These resources are gathered on a program website (http://policeconsolidation.msu.edu/). They comprise collections of previous research, documentation and insights from practitioners, and analysis by PCASS researchers of evolving issues. This document reviews and summarizes the insights of key COPS Office–supported resources developed by PCASS researchers.

The PCASS Website: Gathering Perspectives

As financial constraints tightened, policymakers, police chiefs, and planners considering consolidating or sharing services had limited information and few empirical lessons readily available to guide their decisions. One of the first steps the PCASS Program took to fill this need was to search, annotate, code, and make available through a web portal all forms of open-source information and literature on police consolidation.

Altogether, we have made roughly 400 different resources on police mergers, regionalization, public safety consolidation, and contracting available to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. For each, we provide standard bibliographic information (author, date and place of publication, and abstract), and, where available, web locations. We also classify these resources by subject (contracting, police merger, policies/contracts/agreements, public safety consolidation of police and fire services, regionalization, and shared services / functional consolidation), purpose (academic research, evaluation study, feasibility study, lessons learned, reasoning/advocacy, templates), and form (book/monograph, brief/commentary/newsletter, journal article, policies/contracts/agreements, presentation/webinar/website, report), and allow keyword searches by title, abstract, or author. This enables those seeking research for a specific topic to do so, or to identify templates that may be adapted to a particular sharing of services.

There are, however, unavoidable limitations to this collection—limitations that could be corrected only by more updated work. First, most of the resources we found were at least 35 years old—and only about 100 were published in the past two decades. A great deal has changed in U.S. police agencies and the communities they serve since the bulk of this research was published. Second, much of this research was done by consultants seeking to help specific communities with specific problems. There was little rigorous analysis assessing the evidence. Third, nearly all this work, regardless of who executed it, did not systematically compare different communities using the same or different approaches. Practitioners perusing it must make their own assessments for how well this research translates to other settings.

In short, research on police consolidation was scant and outdated. Whether the motivation to consolidate was to improve operational efficiency or the overall quality of service provision, local governments considering or implementing consolidation lacked contemporary lessons from other communities. Consequently, the increasing number of police executives and planners looking at such options lacked a road map outlining the realities, successes, and challenges of implementation, as well as the potential costs and effectiveness of different approaches.

To overcome the limitations of previous research, the PCASS Program invited sheriffs, deputy sheriffs, chiefs, public safety directors, and police scholars with extensive experience in public safety consolidation and contracting to share their knowledge and experience in a series of videos. The videos, made available on the PCASS website, showcase practitioners and academics speaking about various topics related to public safety consolidation and contracting, including definitions, approaches to consolidation and contracting, delivering police services in an innovative or unconventional way, lessons learned, public misperceptions, and community reactions to consolidation and shared services.

Videos were made on the following topics:

- **An Introduction to Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting**. In this video, the director of the PCASS Program provides viewers with an introduction to the topic and how our program addresses it.
- **What Is Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts define public safety consolidation and contracting. Practitioners also describe and provide examples of how their communities have consolidated or contracted public safety functions. Discussants note how consolidation may reduce administrative or staffing needs, the reasons for approaches to consolidation, and the need for close working relationships in pursuing consolidation.
- **Why Do Communities Undertake Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts explain what drives communities to explore public safety consolidation or contracting options. These may include small isolated communities discovering they need to provide more services; large established communities seeing a need to do more with less; and other desires to improve the efficiency, quantity, or quality of public safety services.
- **How Does Public Safety Consolidation and Consolidation Work?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts explain the different models of consolidation and contracting that have been implemented, why a community might decide to consolidate or contract, and what their first steps might be. Discussants note, for example, how to calculate all base costs and divide them fairly among communities.
- **What Are Some of the Lessons Learned about Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts share the lessons learned from various communities deciding to consolidate or contract services and the implementation of these strategies. Discussants note initial difficulties of consolidation and the needs to identify ultimate goals and educate stakeholders, accurately estimate savings (which are more likely to be long-term than short-term), and tailor solutions for individual communities.
- **What Are the Challenges to Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners share the challenges they experienced while consolidating or contracting as well as how they overcame these challenges. Challenges discussed include those posed by collective bargaining and lack of consensus, while solutions include blending approaches, developing political support, and learning from others.
- **What Are the Common Misconceptions about Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts share the misconceptions that many communities and public safety officials have regarding consolidation and contracting. These include misperceptions about both the intent of consolidation, such as that consolidation will necessarily lead to reduced services, and about its outcomes, such as the fear that communities will inevitably experience declining control, jobs, and identity. They also note how research can reduce many of these misperceptions.
- **How Do Communities React to Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts share reactions of communities that have consolidated or contracted services. They note examples of communities that have seen improvements of services through consolidation and contracting, including reductions in complaints, as well as the importance of open, frequent, and constructive communication.
- **What Is the Future of Public Safety Consolidation and Contracting?** In this video, field practitioners and academic experts share their views on what the future holds for consolidation and contracting. Discussants note continuing pressures on agencies to do more with less, the ways this can lead to further consolidation and contracting, and the lessons that will become increasingly available as more communities share their experiences.

New Research on Evolving Issues

To supplement these resources, PCASS staff also conducted more in-depth research, including focus groups, case studies, and comprehensive analysis of evolving options available to communities. One of our efforts conducted focus group analysis and case studies of different pathways communities took to consolidate police services, such as merging departments to reduce staff, sharing services regionally, contracting for services, or consolidating police and fire services in a single agency. A second study explored in greater depth approaches to civilianization of police duties—that is, having civilians perform duties traditionally reserved for sworn officers. A third study focused on approaches to consolidation of police and fire agencies, and why agencies may persist with or abandon this model. We review each of these below.

Pathways to consolidation[1]

Merging police organizations is a complex process. Each organization has its own traditions, history, style, policy, procedures, structure, pension and benefits system, and culture. Failure to recognize these characteristics can make consolidation even more challenging.

To help practitioners better understand the implementation of various forms of consolidation, particularly the transition process, PCASS researchers undertook a two-pronged approach.

First, they convened a focus group of more than 60 practitioners, including representatives of state and local police and sheriff departments, public safety departments, dispatch services, and university agencies. To structure the discussion, PCASS researchers guided attendees through a series of consolidation scenarios and asked them to discuss key considerations concerning each. Specifically, they asked about issues agencies would confront should they (1) merge into a regional organization that reduced combined staffing, (2) participate in regionally shared services, (3) determine what services to provide and how much to charge for them when contracting, and (4) adopt a public safety model integrating police, fire, and emergency medical services.

A common theme participants mentioned in these four scenarios was implicit trust or understanding among agencies. Communities merging police agencies need to have a similar policing philosophy. Those sharing services regionally use pre-established friendly relationships to help pave the way for more formal agreements. Similarly, a community contracting for services will avoid damaging its relationship with the agency holding such contracts, such as the county sheriff. Those in public safety agencies emphasized the need to build trust among firefighters who might be merging with them.

Many focus group participants also recognized the need for other resources than trust, including guidance from top city management or political leaders and sufficient means to provide equitable services to all communities.

The second prong of our research comprised four case studies of departments that had undergone merger, regionalization, public safety consolidation, or contracting:

- Fraser/Winter Park (Colorado) Police Department, a department of eight full-time officers serving two communities, which merged in 2005
- Buffalo Valley (Pennsylvania) Regional Police Department, formed as the result of a 2012 merger between Lewisburg Borough police and East Buffalo Township police
- Rockford (Michigan) Department of Public Safety, which combined police and fire departments in 2012
- San Mateo County (California) Sheriff's Office, which provides contract law enforcement services to more than a half-dozen jurisdictions

While these agencies differed in location, size, and form, they exhibited several commonalities. Each community encountered challenges in adopting new policies, whether from ill will generated by previous arrangements, concerns about how new arrangements might affect participants, or employees' concern about how the changes would affect them. And just as trust was the common theme of the focus group responses, so understandings of culture recurred prominently in the case study research.

1 This discussion is based on Jeremy M. Wilson, Alexander Weiss, and Clifford Grammich, 2015, *Pathways to Consolidation: Taking Stock of Transitions to Alternative Models of Police Service*, Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, available at http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p319-pub.pdf.

We took several common lessons from the focus groups and case studies. First, agency leaders must emphasize how a proposed change will affect service delivery and demonstrate that it will not reduce quality of service. Second, any plan to share services must treat employees equitably and take their concerns into account. Agencies must ensure all employees know precisely how they would be affected by the change. Third, details are important. Agency leaders must anticipate problems with their plans and have solutions for them—and must ensure they can answer questions about them, particularly from critics. Fourth, leadership is fundamental. In some cases, leaders will have to expend political capital to ensure successful implementation of a new organization scheme. Finally, cost savings may be elusive. While the large portion of local government budgets that go to public safety may seem a logical target for savings, savings may be elusive if years of budget cuts preceded the merger. Communities may also be sensitive to perceptions they are subsidizing others in any arrangement.

Civilianization[2]

Not all police work requires coercive force. Civilian police employees have a long tradition in the United States, with the number and proportion of civilian employees increasing from the 1930s through the 1980s. Police agencies today vary widely in their proportions of civilian employees, but they all might fruitfully consider which of their new or continuing duties can be performed more economically by civilians.

PCASS researchers assessed the use of and prospects for civilians in seven task areas: routine administrative and operational tasks; uniformed first responders to nonviolent calls for service; crime scene processors and forensic crime lab employees; crime victim service providers in the field; analysts, researchers, and planners; community liaisons and public information officers; and command staff and strategic leaders. Some of these tasks have been performed by civilians for decades while others are more novel.

Civilian employees can offer police agencies a number of benefits. They are less expensive than sworn officers in salary, retirement, and benefits. They enable sworn officers to concentrate on a narrower range of functions. They can bring specialized skills or formal training, such as engineering, legal, or scientific training, that regular sworn officers might not have. They can help improve community relations, a benefit especially important for community policing. And they often provide managers with greater flexibility in personnel assignments—the civilian hiring process is usually measured in weeks, while hiring and training a new recruit class of sworn officers takes months. Empirical research generally finds that more affluent agencies employ a greater proportion of civilians. Agencies facing budget cuts sometimes lay off civilians rather than sworn officers—providing further evidence of the greater flexibility civilian employees offer to agencies.

Civilian employees can also pose costs to agencies. Sworn officers or their unions may resist civilian hiring for a number of reasons. They may see civilians as depriving officers of desirable assignments, especially in positions that would otherwise go to officers relieved of street duty or injured. They may hold stereotypes of appropriate civilian assignments and resist civilian hiring outside those areas. Sworn officers may fear civilians will compromise sensitive information, interfere in officers' exercise of discretion, or disrupt operations.

While each agency must assess for itself the positive and negative implications of using civilians, PCASS researchers identify six promising practices that agencies seeking civilianization can adopt. First, agencies should assess the novelty of the assignment for civilians. For example, they may find it easier to expand civilian hiring into areas that are similar to other civilianized tasks than into new functions such as leadership. Second, agencies should determine the true costs and benefits for the agency. Civilians are often less expensive in terms of salary and benefits, but may incur costs such as those for special equipment or making provisions for access to secure facilities. Third, police leadership seeking civilianization should build support among key constituents. Agencies should be clear with line officers, management, and unions on why they plan to civilianize positions—and should note, where applicable, that civilians may free officers from more

2 This discussion is based on William R. King and Jeremy M. Wilson, 2014, *Integrating Civilian Staff into Police Agencies*, Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, available at http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p290-pub.pdf.

mundane tasks or help the agency provide services it does not currently deliver. Fourth, agencies should develop a plan to train civilian employees. Civilians do not receive the benefit of academy and field training, so agencies must provide an appropriate level of training and orientation as well as a career ladder. Fifth, agencies should establish performance assessment criteria for civilian employees. Crafting useful performance criteria is especially important when the position is new for the agency. Sixth, agencies should determine the procedures for demoting, firing, and handling grievances about or from civilian employees. As with any employee classification, agencies should ensure that proper personnel policies and procedures are in place to account for adverse consequences associated with civilian employees.

Consolidation of police and fire agencies[3]

While most U.S. communities providing police and fire 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 elsewhere dating to ancient times. Communities operating a single consolidated public safety agency for fire and police services often cite efficiency or cost-effectiveness as reasons for doing so—reasons that may be increasingly important as municipalities face greater fiscal constraints.

More than 100 communities across the United States provide police and fire services in a single agency, with more than one in four such agencies originating in the past decade. While implementation varies considerably, such agencies generally fall into one of three types:

- 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, including cross-trained public safety officers working alongside separate functional personnel as well as administrative consolidation
- Full consolidation, with full integration of public and fire services, including cross-trained officers and consolidated management and command.

To provide better understanding of consolidated public safety agencies and the advantages and challenges that communities may find in them, PCASS researchers undertook two projects. First, they conducted a census of all such agencies in the United States, identifying ways they compare with each other and the common characteristics they share. Second, they conducted in-depth case studies of public safety agencies that have consolidated and deconsolidated, exploring how agencies consolidate police and fire services, how they respond to calls, advantages and disadvantages of the model, and issues that may lead agencies to deconsolidate.

Of the 131 public safety agencies in the United States, nearly half (61, or 47 percent) are in Michigan. The median size of communities with a consolidated public safety agency is about 10,000 residents. Crime rates in these communities, at 3,437 per 100,000 residents, were slightly above the national rate of 3,099 in 2013, perhaps not surprising given most public safety jurisdictions are in metropolitan areas. Most of these communities are at least 85 percent non-Hispanic white, compared to 64 percent for the nation, although one in seven are "majority-minority."

Agencies typically study public safety consolidation one to two years before implementing it. Many also conduct a formal study before doing so. As noted, agencies may vary in their level of consolidation, with the extent of cross-training varying as well. Public safety agencies respond to a wide variety and number of calls. Some report responding to fewer than 1,000 calls per year, while some respond to tens of thousands. Public safety agencies have relatively flat organizational structures, perhaps due to their relatively small size.

To better understand the reasons agencies consolidate and deconsolidate, PCASS researchers conducted focus groups among agency leaders in communities that had consolidated and deconsolidated, as well as case studies of several consolidation and deconsolidation communities in all sections of the country. Consolidation communities they considered were Aiken, South Carolina; Ashwaubenon, Wisconsin; East Grand Rapids, Michigan; Glencoe, Illinois; Highland Park, Texas;

3 This discussion is based on Jeremy M. Wilson, Meghan Hollis, and Clifford Grammich, *A Census and Administrative Examination of Consolidated Public Safety Departments in the United States* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016), and Jeremy M. Wilson, Alexander Weiss, and Clifford Grammich, *Public Safety Consolidation: A Multiple Case Study Assessment of Implementation and Outcome* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Service, 2016).

Kalamazoo, Michigan; and Sunnyvale, California. Deconsolidation communities they considered were Alamogordo, New Mexico; Durham, North Carolina; Eugene, Oregon; Meridian Charter Township, Michigan; and West Jordan, Utah.

In most of the consolidation case study communities, consolidation was an idea that evolved over time. Most of these communities pursued consolidation to gain efficiencies, and point to lower costs than their neighbors incur for police and fire services. The approaches that consolidated agencies take to public service integration vary by their circumstances. While all the consolidation case study communities had fully integrated their police and fire services, some differentiation remains both within and across their organizations, with some, for example, having separate police and fire divisions within the agency. Separate police and fire cultures have posed problems for these agencies, both in their own operations and in gaining acceptance from agencies in other communities. Public safety directors, however, note few problems in handling simultaneous police and fire emergencies as they arise.

Desire for specialization was a common theme in many of the deconsolidation communities. Among reasons these communities noted for specialization were growth and homeland security needs (which had been noted in other research as a reason for consolidation). Concerns about large or diverse communities are also evident in several cases of deconsolidation. Management difficulties were evident in some communities, as was failure to demonstrate the continued utility of the model.

Altogether, public safety consolidation has worked well in some communities, often leading to efficiencies and savings; other benefits include enabling communities able to grow their public safety departments as their communities have grown and fostering a public safety "culture." Yet several other communities did not find the model to be responsive, and concluded that separate police and fire agencies would better serve their needs.

If there is one overarching lesson in communities that have consolidated or deconsolidated their police and fire agencies, it is that consolidation is not 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.

Implementing Changes

Regardless of alternatives that communities may choose for delivery of police services, change will likely bring communities to uncharted territories for them. The quality of solutions and the success of their implementation will depend on the ability of leaders and citizens to gather and in good faith analyze relevant information, carry on careful and rational discussions of tough issues, and craft workable plans in a timely fashion with minimum conflict. Not all communities have the essential resources and tools for such deliberation and decision making. PCASS researchers therefore compiled guides on collaborating with stakeholders in consolidation and sharing of services, with special attention to working with the media on such issues.

Collaborating with stakeholders[4]

PCASS researchers suggest a process adapted on interest-based bargaining or interest-based problem solving for collaborating with stakeholders in consolidation or sharing of police services. These processes are particularly useful for projects involving a group of stakeholders. If followed correctly, these processes can be inclusive and transparent, reducing resistance to change and building support for solutions reached by stakeholders involved. They will not eliminate conflict or reduce passion about the issues, but they will provide a means to channel passion and energy to produce wise decisions. Not all communities may benefit from this approach, despite the best efforts or intentions of those overseeing the process. In such cases, change may occur without stakeholder input. Nevertheless, the process PCASS researchers outline can help communities wishing to engage stakeholders in a good faith effort to craft solutions that receive the greatest acceptance.

The first stage of the process is building a foundation. Typically, the need for change will not be surprising, as stakeholders may already be aware of a reduction

4 This discussion is based on Michael J. Polzin and Jeremy M. Wilson, *Police Consolidation: Collaborating with Stakeholders* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), available at http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p291-pub.pdf.

in funds to support current efforts, positions not being filled, or services cut. Ideally, stakeholders would agree to engage in deliberative dialogue to build a shared understanding of the problem. This stage has seven steps:

1. Articulate the problem or goal and the role stakeholders can play. Sponsors (e.g., the unit of government responsible for public safety) should be clear and specific about what it is seeking and the roles stakeholders can play, including their ability to offer alternative suggestions.
2. Obtain agreement from all stakeholders to participate in a deliberative process. This requires stakeholders to engage in all tasks in good faith, to listen to understand and speak to be understood, and to support the interest-based process by stating what they and their constituents need from a solution, articulating their support when they can provide it and offering other options when they cannot.
3. Identify who will be part of the planning team. Ideally this group will include those with the knowledge and experience necessary to build a thorough understanding of the issue; it will be diverse and large enough to form subgroups to perform assigned tasks but small enough to keep discussions manageable.
4. Build a shared understanding of the circumstances facing the units of government and departments involved. Each stakeholder should have the same information so that none is at a disadvantage and all can contribute to a solution.
5. Lay the groundwork for working together. This includes identifying stakeholder interests (separating what is wanted from what is needed), creating and agreeing on a set of principles to guide deliberations, and identifying constraints.
6. Strengthen the team through an environmental scan. The environmental scan is a collaborative process in which group members identify what they perceive to be the internal strengths and weaknesses that reside within their environment, the external opportunities presented by challenges affecting the environment, and the threats that challenge it.
7. Develop a plan for communicating with stakeholders. The planning team should follow a consistent plan for managing communication with constituents, deciding what to report, how much to report, how frequently to report, and who will do the reporting.

The second stage of the process is exploring the possibilities. In addition to ensuring stakeholders have access to the same information, the sponsor of the process should gather and share information about regionalization, consolidation, and shared services to build understanding and stimulate discussion of these concepts. Once this has been done, this stage has five steps:

1. Review the evidence base and collect, share, and review information about regionalization, consolidation, and shared services. Before staking out a position on whether or how to develop a plan for regionalizing, consolidating, or sharing services, it is best to review existing evidence.
2. Analyze the evidence. Most likely, a community cannot replicate the exact plan implemented elsewhere, but it can learn from the experience of others that previously have sought to share services.
3. Compare the evidence with the community's situation or needs. Stakeholders should consider if they can draw lessons from the experiences of others that suggest options or variations on options to consider.
4. Identify desirable attributes. Listing attributes does not mean they will be embedded in whatever solution is reached, but it does begin a process of articulating how various stakeholder interests might be addressed.
5. Identify what issues, problems, and concerns to address. It may not be necessary to create a segment within a stakeholders' meeting to raise questions, issues, or concerns; rather, these may arise and be answered throughout the entire process.

The third stage of the process is designing a plan. A planning team will be ready to proceed when it has collected and reviewed the evidence gathered, discussed what the group learned, and identified desirable attributes as well as questions, issues, or concerns to address. Once the team has done this, this stage has seven steps:

1. Generate options and ideas. Two methods for doing so are creating a draft plan and generating and evaluating options as a large group.
2. Address questions for clarification. Participants should hold off discussion of the merits of the draft plan or options generated until there is a shared understanding of what has been proposed.
3. Discuss and critique the draft plan or options. Such discussion might overlay stakeholder interests with various options or plan elements.

4. Craft a solution or plan. Participants may use the results from the third step to focus their attention on options or elements that have a high degree of acceptability, meeting more stakeholder interests than other options.
5. Reach agreement. If reaching agreement proves difficult, organizers may ask those who disagree their reasons for doing so and to offer an alternative, to identify key interests that have not been addressed, or to allow more time for reflection.
6. Obtain feedback on the plan. During discussion about rules of engagement, stakeholders should also devise a process for obtaining feedback from constituents.
7. Make adjustments to the plan and finalize. Stakeholders should be asked individually if they are willing to support the decision, with any failures in consensus handled as the group's rules of engagement specify.

The fourth stage of the process is implementing the plan. Implementation plans may create a timeline with pilot or testing periods, establish measurement criteria, create monitoring plans, identify and resolve collective bargaining issues, educate constituent groups, and create a process for continuous improvement.

Making decisions that transform the organization and delivery of public safety services is not easy. Nevertheless, a structured and inclusive process can help build understanding of the need for change and of its implementation.

Engaging the news media[5]

Local media may prove to be both an observer and an ally in processes to consolidate or share police services. Managing media relationships is a critical and vital challenge to receiving community support. Yet, like so much else relating to consolidation and shared services, guidance here has been lacking. In fact, no prior study specifically examined how news media presented the consolidation of law enforcement agencies.

To address this lack of information, PCASS researchers explored how the news media presents consolidation, specifically in terms of community interests, budgetary concerns, and other potential considerations and outcomes. They also explored what sources news reporters use to construct consolidation stories and how reporters use these sources to convey messages.

News articles the researchers identified on consolidation from 2002 to 2012 largely focused on initial considerations of consolidation. Most of these articles dealt with consolidating neighboring law enforcement agencies. Relatively few dealt with consolidating units within an agency. Fewer still were on consolidating specific services, such as communications or police and fire services.

Nearly all stories on consolidation mentioned a local or state government agency. Typically, these stories included a mayor or other high-ranking political official. They were less likely to include finance or other officials with less of a stake in the presentation of consolidation in the news. Community organizations and police labor unions appeared in less than half the stories about consolidation or sharing of services.

Economic concerns were the dominant issue in stories about consolidation or sharing of services. In 84 percent of stories, cost savings were the primary reason cited for consolidation, though several stories on implementation mentioned efficiency concerns as well. Nine in ten stories mentioned the economy in general. Stories before the "Great Recession" were as likely to mention the economy as those afterward, indicating that the potential or perceived economic benefits are critical to public discussions, regardless of broader economic conditions.

Reporters used a wide variety of specific sources of information for their news stories on consolidation or sharing of services. News stories on these topics are not routine, hence reporters will have more time to produce them and to reach out to diverse stakeholders. Governors, mayors, city council members, and other state and local politicians account for 44 percent of all sources cited in these stories and 65 percent of first sources cited. Governmental sources were also most likely to provide positive evaluative information about consolidation or sharing of services in these stories, while public safety sources were more neutral.

Several agencies covered in the stories that PCASS researchers reviewed appeared to be managing news coverage extraordinarily well. PCASS researchers interviewed representatives from these agencies for their perspectives on best practices for communicating about

5 This discussion is based on Steven Chermak, Charlie Scheer, and Jeremy M. Wilson, *Police Consolidation: Engaging the News Media* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), available at http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p292-pub.pdf.

consolidation or sharing of services. All interviewees, regardless of whether their consolidation effort succeeded, highlighted similar concerns and stressed five similar practices for media communication.

First, they stressed effectively managing the relationship with the media, including the need to have a foundation for positive relationships with community media organizations. All said they were open to media scrutiny and emphasized the importance of communicating to reporters. They noted they constantly work on developing relationships because of the high turnover at news organizations and the frequent occurrence of issues that strain the relationship.

Second, they communicate with key stakeholders to agree on talking points. Consolidation can be contentious for several reasons. Executives stressed the need to hear and respond to concerns, to discuss as best they can the reasons for choosing (or not choosing) to consolidate, and to present the results of their efforts in a uniform manner.

Third, executives should share data with the media. All interviewees stressed that data were critical to their decision making and highlighted the expectations for supporting data and analysis. Several discussed extraordinary efforts to calculate savings and produce staffing models and projections about needs and costs, which they provided to news media.

Fourth, executives should pursue all communication channels. Those interviewed acknowledged consolidation was not a high news priority and that coverage is limited and may not be read by most key constituents. Community meetings, social media, and blogs can provide alternative means of communication.

Fifth, executives should rebrand the new agency. Those interviewed noted agencies can use news and social media to rebrand themselves, but should also take other steps to communicate the change, including having new business cards and letterhead, annual reports for the new agency, and press releases about the agency.

Altogether, research on media coverage of consolidation and sharing of services highlights three important policy considerations. First, law enforcement agencies should consider developing broad and nuanced publicity campaigns for consolidation. In contrast to most crime and criminal justice policy stories that emphasize the opinions of police sources, stories on consolidation include a larger number of community stakeholders with great interest in the issue. One strategy to engage the public in a discussion of a wider range of issues about police consolidation is to devise a broader organizational strategy for communicating to the public consolidation information and the issues surrounding it. Taking full advantage of various communication sources can help disseminate as much information as possible to the public.

Second, an agency must discern when to access and approach the media. News reporters have time and space constraints, but law enforcement executives can still provide the types of information and guidance that would allow reporters to write more nuanced stories. This can be particularly important given how rare it is for reporters to have relevant research or reports about consolidation.

Finally, an agency may encourage the media to provide more than single or short-term coverage of consolidation. Consolidations typically receive no more than two or three articles in a community considering it. Criminal investigations and arrests by police receive frequent coverage, but policing programs and policies do not. Law enforcement agencies and surrounding communities would benefit from additional follow-up stories as consolidation moves forward, is implemented, and leads to specific changes. Such coverage would provide a broader understanding of this issue as well as opportunity for the community to understand the mission of the consolidated agency.

Conclusion

Recent years have seen police agencies confront new, tighter constraints on resources—constraints that they have not always been able to address with standard responses. Some non-standard measures that communities might take to overcome such constraints, such as consolidation or sharing of services, have been around for decades but were often not known or fully understood. The PCASS Program has sought to develop a publicly accessible baseline of knowledge on these alternatives and to update and expand knowledge on them.

The program highlights the importance of collaboration between practitioners and researchers—a collaboration that has included pioneering research. The program has worked with agencies to identify both lessons learned and those yet to be learned through new research. The program has also succeeded by drawing on interdisciplinary, seasoned experts with academic and practical experience to develop and disseminate decision-support resources regarding all forms of consolidation and shared services.

The lessons to be drawn from these efforts will increase as the efforts do. As more communities explore consolidation or sharing of services, they will offer more insights in more settings applicable or adaptable to more communities. Similarly, as police agencies explore new roles for their employees, such as civilianization of roles previously reserved to sworn officers, they will offer insights on what roles may, or may not, be adapted or modified to meet changing circumstances.

Efforts to consolidate or share services are not irreversible. As the analysis of deconsolidation of public safety agencies shows, communities can and do reverse their decisions to consolidate services. In some cases, they may even do so for reasons thought to favor consolidation. Gathering lessons not just on implementation of consolidation or sharing of services but on reversals of such implementations can help communities determine if a model is best for them and what challenges they may find in it.

Many communities considering or implementing these initiatives will be entering uncharted territories for them. Nevertheless, if engaging in transparent interest-based bargaining or problem solving, they can ensure proper consideration of the issues surrounding consolidation or sharing of services. Structured and inclusive processes, such as that outlined by PCASS researchers, and consideration of resources such as those identified and developed by the program, can help build better understanding of the need and processes for change. As PCASS researchers also highlight, several communities offer insights on best practices for communicating the need for change and its implementation.

Communities are not likely to find one ideal solution in consolidation or sharing of services. They may find themselves carefully assessing and experimenting with a variety of alternatives to determine what best suits their needs. Research cannot recommend whether all communities ought to adopt a particular reform; rather, communities need to consider what best suits their circumstances, needs, and resources. PCASS resources and research can, however, outline the range of alternatives a community may consider, and provide several insights into what may be applicable, and how it may best be adopted.

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