PATHWAYS TO CONSOLIDATION

TAKING STOCK OF TRANSITIONS TO ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF POLICE SERVICE

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Contents

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/.
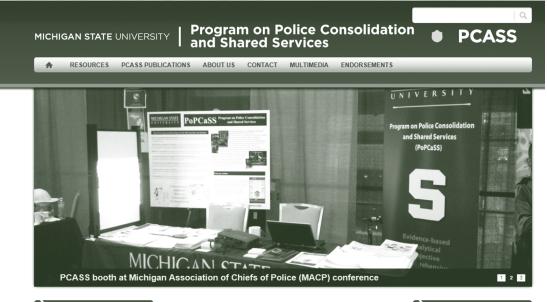
Introduction

The economic recession of 2008–09 and its aftermath had a devastating impact on local policing. Adding to nearly 28,000 furloughed officers, at least 40,000 law enforcement positions were lost in 2011 through either layoffs or defunding of vacated positions (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services 2011). In 2013, most police agencies reported having experienced budget cuts in the prior year, and 40 percent anticipated cuts in the coming one (Police Executive Research Forum 2013). More generally, five years after the downturn, most municipal governments had not returned to their prior revenue and employment levels (House 2013). Such losses of capacity have produced enormous changes in the nature of police service delivery.

The projected nature of these changes include greater use of technology as a force multiplier, greater use of civilians (both as employees and volunteers), alternative responses to nonemergency radio calls, and consolidation of both services and entire agencies (Cohen and Spence 2012; Wilson and Weiss 2012). It is within this last category that consideration of alternative service-delivery models occurs.

Public-safety costs consume significant portions of the general-fund budget for local governments. Managing these costs is an ongoing challenge for local administrators. To this end, some administrators have introduced or even embraced the concept of service consolidation. There are several forms that these mergers can take, but all typically involve integrating distinct organizations into a single entity.

Merging police organizations, in particular, is a complex process. Organizations have their own traditions, history, style, policy, procedures, structure, pension and benefits systems, culture, and so on. Failure to recognize these characteristics can make the consolidation even more challenging. Even when a proposed consolidation makes infinitely good sense from an efficiency or operational perspective, its ultimate success may lie with the skill that is exhibited when the organizations and people are united.

This report seeks to shed light on the implementation of various forms of consolidation, particularly emphasizing the transition process. The goal is to provide police administrators, local decision makers, and

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PCASS Publications

Police Staffing Allocation and Managing Workload Demand: A Critical Assessment of Existing Practices

Welcome to the Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services

PCASS News Highlights

PCASS articles released "Strategies for Police Recruitment: A Review of

other stakeholders an overview that will help inform discussions about consolidation in their communities. For some, this report may provide a foundation for debate concerning whether a particular form of consolidation is "right" or "wrong" for a community. For those who have already adopted an alternative delivery model, this report may provide insights on how to overcome challenges and facilitate implementation. Forms of consolidation for police agencies remain a relatively understudied topic. Nevertheless, where possible, we add parenthetical references for readers desiring more than a basic overview of these issues.

Our approach to developing practical, field-based lessons about the consolidation process was twofold. First, on February 6, 2013, we convened a focus group at the annual meeting of the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police (Michigan has an extensive history of police consolidation). Held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and broadly marketed through an announcement on the association listserv, direct invitations to individuals known to have consolidation experience, and the conference materials, we sought to gather insight from attendees with experience in merging organizations. More than 60 persons attended, including representatives of state police, police and sheriff departments, public safety departments, dispatch services, and university agencies. To structure the discussion, we guided the attendees through a series of consolidation scenarios and asked them to discuss the key considerations concerning each. Specifically, we inquired about issues their agencies confronted (or would confront) should they (1) merge into a regional organization and reduced its 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. The scenarios posed at the focus group sought to elicit opinion on a variety of issues that jurisdictions undertaking one of these courses might encounter and, hence, as "stylized" cases, could be broader or even more constricted than actual cases agencies have faced.

Second, to gather insights from actual cases, we conducted four case studies to gather rich detail about real experiences with various forms of consolidation. We documented the process and circumstances in four communities that have implemented merged, regional, public safety, or contracting approaches. For each case study, we gathered a combination of primary and secondary information. This generally included interviews of line staff (across organizational functions), public safety executives, and local officials. We supplemented these original observations with available data, reports, and other supporting materials provided by local officials. Though the issues encountered in the case studies often did not match those we discussed in the focus groups, they did provide insight on the issues agencies faced and the varying importance of them.

Below, we highlight the lessons we gathered from practitioners concerning scenarios and then turn to the case studies. (For additional perspectives on some select issues, we also note previous research that readers may wish to consult.) We conclude with a summary of observations regarding themes in both the scenarios and case studies.

Focus Group of Police Executives

Merging organizations is a complex process that requires great care because efforts to consolidate services may have profound effects—both good and bad—on the personnel and the ultimate efficiency and quality of service delivery. The objective of our focus group was to examine the processes that police executives use when faced with changing the ways communities deliver law enforcement services through merging, consolidation, sharing services, or contracting. Our strategy was to focus on increasingly common, if stylized to include multiple constraints, scenarios with which police executives are dealing. In this section we provide the scenarios we offered to structure the discussion and summarize the themes in participants' responses.

Scenario One: Merging departments in an effort to reduce staff

Two communities (East Lake and West Lake) have merged their police departments by creating a regional department (Lake Cities). All of the employees now work for the new department but the goal is to reduce staffing by 10 percent over three years. You have been serving as chief at East Lake and you are now the chief of Lake Cities. The chief at West Lake is your new deputy chief. You have six months to organize the transition.

- What would be your first priorities?
- Which policies would you expect to be the most difficult to reconcile? Why?
- How would you address developing new policies and procedures?

- How would you engage the unions?
- There are many costs with consolidation, including IT, communications, equipment standardization, facilities, branding, and standardization of vehicles. How would you approach these issues?
- What are some of the potential land mines in this type of transformation? What is the best way to overcome them?

Participants emphasized the need for compatibility between departments before they attempted a merger. One participant, from an agency located near a small city, noted the merging departments "need to have the same philosophy, and the administrations need to understand what the policing philosophy is going to be. They need to take care of the characters of individual communities." This same participant noted a Michigan case where the merging departments "had the same command structure, but the policing philosophy wasn't the same. On paper, everything looked great, but it didn't work in practice." Another participant noted, "When you combine two communities, you have to ask how many ordinances have to change. What are the legal issues, the liability issues?"

Several participants noted the need to ensure political leadership of both communities fully supported the change. They emphasized that political leaders must understand what costs would decrease or increase, as well as how resources would flow between communities. One participant noted the need to clarify "who's going to pay for what. One community won't want resources passed on to

another community. You need to have a bigger plan on how money is going to be distributed. Communities may have special assessment districts or millages to pay for the services. But if the communities aren't going to buy it, then it's not going anywhere." (For more discussion on balancing approaches to sustaining operations through regionalization with maintaining local control, see Kocher, Raquet, and Stocker 2012.)

One participant, discussing a successful merger in his community of about 10,000 residents, said, "The difference for us was, politically, it was driven by the city manager. It was driven from the top. There was a common front from public leadership." At the same time, participants stressed the need for gaining public acceptance before merger attempts. As one said, "It's better to have a lot of public hearings and put everything on the table. Nobody likes surprises." (For more on gauging opinion on a merger before the process, as well as discerning all sides of merger issues, see Scullin 2009.)

One participant identified the problem of unsuccessful efforts as having a common authority established to manage the merged departments. These entities, both small jurisdictions in suburban Detroit, "created an authority and authority board, with members from both [entities]. But the problem was anything we tried to do went to the authority then to the individual boards [of both jurisdictions] then back to the authority. Another community also tried but it also failed

because of too much politics between" the entities, jurisdictions of about 5,000 residents in a smaller metropolitan area. The latter failure, this participant added, resulted in both jurisdictions paying more for fewer services.

Establishing leadership within the newly merged department can also pose challenges. Making the chief of one agency the deputy chief of a merged agency, of course, can be a "terribly awkward way to begin a relationship," a participant noted, but others identified more general reporting issues. One participant asked, "If you combine two different units, a city and a township, with two different governments, as the chief, who do I report to? Does coverage get spread out evenly? Is that part of the goal? How do we allocate? That would be part of what determines whether you combine in the first place." (For more on issues communities may face when deciding whether to merge agencies or alternatives to doing so, see Fantino 2011.)

Another stressed that the first task for a new agency "is to pick a leader. You have to have a clearly defined leader who has to lay the groundwork" for further integration. This participant added, "Whoever is in charge has to work with everybody involved. It's going to take time. [The leader] has to understand that it's going to take time to create a new culture and involve everybody, otherwise it's not going to happen."

Some participants said incremental steps could ultimately lead to success. One said, "We did it in small steps. We first started contracting with the sheriff's office, for the local jail, for lock up service, for records. It has to come up in steps and be something you can swallow. If you take small steps, there's a higher probability it will work."

Creating a new culture for a merged department will "also take time," one participant said, and "must involve everybody otherwise it's not going to happen." Another estimated that such culture change could take "about 20 years" or "until the last person has left from each organization."

Several cautioned against looking to mergers to save money. One noted a need to "dispel the myth that you're going to save money." Another added, "there are very little savings you're going to realize, especially now. Everybody has been cut. Nobody is flush. You're merging bone to bone, so real savings is going to be marginal." A third from a city of about 10,000 residents added, "There may be cost savings down the line, but they're not at the front end, especially for public safety. The front end can have tremendous start-up costs."

Scenario Two: Sharing services regionally

Your agency is seeking ways to reduce the costs of specialization. In order to accomplish this, your agency has decided to participate in several regionally-shared services. Among these is a regional SWAT team, a regional major case squad that handles murders in the participating communities, and a regional major accident team that handles fatal crashes.

The advantages to this approach include reduced costs for training, fewer specialist assignments, and the ability to have a highly skilled group handle rare events in your community.

- What are the problems associated with this approach?

- Do you think the benefits outweigh the costs?

- What happens if an incident in your community goes badly?

Participants said previous informal cooperation could help more formal collaborations succeed. One said, "You have to have pre-established relationships. If we were forced into a relationship, we probably wouldn't have been as successful."

Many participants noted leadership on such units usually goes to those with the most experience. One said, "You have to consider what level of expertise do they have? What are the capabilities of the personnel? If you do something like that, then you have to consider not who is chief but who is best qualified to run it?"

Others noted more informal approaches. One said, discussing a city-township crash-investigation team in suburban Detroit, "We don't struggle with who leads.

[A city] lieutenant led one year, then [a township officer] another. It's been a cost-saving effort that has worked well. Another success has been a major-case investigation unit. Whoever doesn't show up gets appointed to lead."

Funding issues have varied by perspective. Representatives of larger departments noted having to often underwrite the expenses in shared services for smaller ones.

One from the largest agency in a metropolitan area said, "We have a larger department, while the smaller agencies don't have equipment or manpower. So we don't see savings, while those who participate with us get more than they contribute." Another suburban official from one of the largest metropolitan areas in the state noted that funding inequities are often expected, saying, "The chiefs know there are some inequities, but we don't want to get into charging each other. The chiefs have played off elected officials wanting to charge for services." Still another suburban official from this large metropolitan area added, "We're very successful with these types of teams [in our county]. We had one that didn't work, but the chiefs know there are some inequalities." (For more on efficiencies that may result from regionalization of police services, see Lithopoulos and Rigakos 2005; Kushner and Siegel 2005.)

Yet another noted that memories of an extraordinary case can quell funding concerns, saying, "We had a girl disappear in 1997, and we couldn't bear the costs of that case. Others helped. Recently, we helped another community with a similar case. Our elected officials remember our 1997 case, so we don't have funding concerns once we bring that case up."

Without a permanent or stable source of funding, however, such cooperative efforts can wither when funding dries up. One participant said, "We had a fatal-alcohol crash unit that worked phenomenally for 30 departments in our county. But we lost the grant funding, and it stopped." Although a three-jurisdiction team did continue the task force, this participant noted that the "quality of investigation went down. We now have our own team, but provide less service. We had 10 people who might respond to a fatal accident. Now we have one or two and some patrol guys I could throw at them."

Operational leadership for such teams may vary by jurisdiction or team. One participant noted, "Authority is jurisdictional. We wouldn't allow another jurisdiction to make tough decisions within ours." Another noted that SWAT teams can be a particularly difficult subject. (For other perspectives on police services and sensitivity to local control for regionalization, see Dale 2011; Wood 2007; and Shernock 2004.)

Yet others said they would defer to the special-services team. One said, "We give control to a team that practices together, and the team leader is the leader. The chief prior to me wanted to run everything and it screwed up everything. We're a county of small communities, so we do everything together."

Another said, "When we call the emergency-services team and they come in, I'm not going to try to oversee them. Once they take over, they're in charge of that scene." Another added, "Once I make the decision to turn the scene over to a team, they have authority. It's worked seamlessly for us."

Scenario Three: Extending and charging for services

You are the chief of a medium-sized community and your city council has been asked to provide policing to an adjoining township that had previously received a very modest level of service from the county sheriff. They have asked you to tell them what the township needs and what you should charge for these services.

- What process will you use to gather this information?

- What do you see as the critical issues?

- What do you see as advantages and disadvantages of this from your community and agency?

- Might you suggest that they not pursue this? Why or why not?

- The city and the township agreed to the contracting agreement but the township only agreed to pay for about two-thirds of the officers you recommended.

- What would you do?

- What is the process to begin service delivery?

- How important is local control and branding for the township?

Participants said they would want to know above all the motivation of the smaller community in seeking a contract with them.

"Politically, it's a touchy subject to deal with the sheriff already [providing services]," one said, "unless the sheriff doesn't want" to provide the services any longer. Another noted, "It's also tough if a city is doing it to bust a union. What drives it: money or service? We won't engage if it's just a tactic. We also won't engage if our city would suffer" as a result of the contract. A third added, "I wouldn't do anything if it interfered with the sheriff. If it's a service issue, that's different."

Participants stressed they would wish to provide service on their own terms, or, otherwise, they prefer to avoid providing contract service. The contract providing a staffing allocation level that meets workload demand is particularly important, as is understanding the needs of a community before providing service to it. (On characteristics of successful contractual relationships between local governments, see Fernandez 2007.) One said, "There might be some unknown problems. They might have been underpoliced. If you go into a community and you're underrepresented, you could fail, and your agency fail . . . Your head is going to be on the chopping block. If you say [you need] 20 [officers], and your analysis says 20, but you only get 15, that's a risk you take. You'll get beat up by the unions and by the community . . . [and] put officers in harm's way. [Under-staffing] would be a deal breaker."

Others emphasized needing control for branding and operational issues. One noted taking an approach "similar to what they did in Jacksonville, [Florida,]"

with the uniform being that of the city police but the badge being the sheriff's. Everything is possible, but you need to work it together. I would oppose separate uniforms. If you're going to make a service work, you have to make it work together." (For more on the Jacksonville case, including the operational issues that led to the merger, see Koepsell, Streeter, and Terpstra 1973.)

Another would resist changing too much to accommodate the contracting community, saying, "If you come to me and say you want my department, then that's what you're going to get—my department. If you don't like it, you can go elsewhere. I would provide one department and service to everybody in the same way. If you want local control, you have to pay for it." Yet another said allowing separate branding would be "like running two police departments. If you can't consolidate these things, then you're running two police departments, each with its own identity."

Still, others said branding has not been a contentious issue. As one whose agency contracts with a growing neighbor said, the "residents just assume I'm with the public-safety agency. The branding issue wasn't great for them. But we have been open to discussion because of their growing population and our sagging population." Another said branding "depends on what the client wants, what the customer wants. It goes back to cultures and policies. You're always going to be struggling with that issue."(On issues regarding contracting in areas in which residents have heterogeneous preferences, see Nelson 1997.)

Scenario Four: Adopting a public safety model

Your community is considering adopting the public safety model in which there is at least some degree of integration of police, fire, and emergency medical service (EMS).

When the fire chief unexpectedly retires you are appointed as director of Public Safety with control of both police and fire departments, but at least initially, the plan is to keep the departments separate.

- What do you see as the major issues during the transition?
- How would you go about establishing credibility with the fire department?
- What would be the most difficult aspects of implementation? Why?
- How would you go about addressing them?
- How would you engage the unions?
- Does this kind of set-up make sense?

Many stressed the need to "respect" each department. A public-safety agency chief said, "I had worked with guys on the fire side for 15 years, but I was still a cop coming in. They were shocked that I'd be in firefighter classes, but the validity that gives you with firefighters is very important. I don't take over the fire scenes. When they see things like that, you start getting trust. It's easier now than it was when I took over. Older guys want to get back to the fire side, but the younger guys love their job, they're happy with it. It's just building a new culture

from there. If you go on like you're the expert, you're done. I ask the guys who are there, who are the experts. That makes it easier later to play the trump card of being boss." (For a broader discussion of issues in merging working styles of police officers and firefighters, see Stinchcomb and Ordaz 2007.)

Some cautioned that the public safety model might not work well if the fire agency has a high number of calls. One said, "If the fire complaints are too high, then you won't be reaching a benefit. If the police complaints outnumber the fire complaints, it will work. If they're even, or if there is a disproportionate number of fire complaints, then it won't work." Another noted providing mutual aid to a neighboring city that had to respond to more fire calls, including one "situation where we had a homicide and house fire going on at the same time." (For a perspective on how police and fire mergers may help augment other services, see Matarese et al. 2004.)

A suburban Detroit official noted problems stemming from the lack of change in the former fire department, saying, "We had a fire department that hadn't made any changes in forever. The firefighters were in revolt against the chief. I had been there 16 years, but we met with every single person and talked about their concerns before we started down this road. I said I wouldn't do it without deputy directors of fire and police. . . . There are no intentions to fully merge . . . because while the police can cross[-train], the firefighters can't." Nevertheless, this participant noted, even a partial merger has realized some savings: "In the first 10 months, we saved a half-million dollars and we didn't try that hard."

Yet another noted the merger was "culture shock for us. The fire department hadn't updated their plans, but we engaged the fire department in a strategic plan. For the most part, we've improved conditions, enhanced response times and communication, and respect for their discipline."

The perceived lag of fire departments behind police departments led some police chiefs to question whether fire chiefs could lead public-safety agencies. One noted, "I've only heard of one situation like that. It won't work because they're 15 to 20 years behind in training. They've brought it on themselves, a lack of willingness to change, to adapt to new business efficiencies, new business models." Still, others in the group said if the fire chief had qualifications to lead a public-safety agency, such leadership could work. As one public-safety director from a suburban agency in one of the state's largest metropolitan areas said, "I know of one situation where the fire chief was considered the best manager, so the police officers wanted him, and he went through police training."(For more on the management issues confronting public-safety directors of newly consolidated agencies, see Crank and Alexander 1990.)

Still, police leaders perceive fire agencies do not desire public-safety consolidation. A participant from a partially consolidated agency serving a small city in suburban Detroit, in noting the need for political leadership to achieve full consolidation, said, "The fire department doesn't want to do it. We're not cross-training; that isn't going to happen. We're doing partial consolidation, with some police who are cross-trained as public-safety officers. For politicians to come out and say that's the direction we're going to go, that's the direction we need to go—that is what's needed to take it to the next level." (For more

on police and fire officer perceptions of public-safety consolidation in Michigan, see Hollis and Wilson 2014.)

Conclusion

Not surprisingly, one common theme in these four scenarios is implicit trust or understanding among those involved. Discussion of the merger issue noted the need for communities merging police agencies to have a similar policing philosophy, while those discussing the sharing of services regionally noted how pre-established relationships helped pave the way for more formal ones. Similarly, those who would contract with another community would avoid doing anything that might damage their relationship with the county sheriff holding such contracts or even with the unions a municipality may be seeking to undermine through a new contract. And those in public-safety agencies emphasized the need to build trust among firefighters who might be merging with them.

At the same time, participants also recognized the need for more tangible resources than trust in these scenarios. Participants in merging communities would desire strong guidance from top city management or political leaders to accomplish the merger. Those in regional service agreements recognized some inequities might result that could not be overcome without external support. Those in contractual agreements would resist providing fewer services than they believed were needed—and forsake the contract if necessary. Those in public-safety models were not always convinced fire agencies were as modern as police agencies in management, a perception that appears to shape the management structures police leaders would accept.

Case Studies of Police Service Transition

To provide additional perspective on these scenarios, we conducted four case studies of departments that had undergone merger, regionalization, public-safety consolidation, or contracting. These were

The Fraser/Winter Park (Colorado) Police Department, a merged department of eight full-time officers that, since May 2005, has provided law enforcement services to the towns of Fraser and Winter (State of Colorado 2015).

The Buffalo Valley (Pennsylvania) Regional Police Department, formed as the result of a merger between the Lewisburg Borough police and the East Buffalo Township police in 2012 (Burke 2012).

The Rockford (Michigan) Department of Public Safety, which combined police and fire departments in January 2012 into one department with Enforcement, Fire, and Public Services divisions (City of Rockford 2015).

The San Mateo County (California) Sheriff's Office, which provides contract law enforcement services to more than a half-dozen jurisdictions (San Mateo County Sheriff's Office 2015).

With the exception of San Mateo County, a jurisdiction of more than 700,000 in the San Francisco Bay area, our case studies focus on smaller agencies for two reasons. First, most law enforcement agencies in the United States are small, with nearly three in four having fewer than 25 officers (Reaves 2011), as three in four of our case-study agencies do. Second, smaller law enforcement agencies are, we believe, more likely to consider needs to merge or share services than larger agencies that may be more self-sufficient.

The Fraser/Winter Park (CO) Police Department

Fraser, Colorado, was established in 1905 in the anticipation of the arrival of the Moffat Tunnel, which provided Denver with its first link west through the Continental Divide (Grand County Colorado Tourism Board 2015). It was incorporated in 1953 and today has a population of about 1,200 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014a).

Winter Park was first settled as a construction camp for the Moffat Tunnel (Grand County Colorado Tourism Board 2015). A flood of winter sports enthusiasts to the area in the late 1930s led to its development as a winter-sports center, with a ski area opening in 1940. The town was incorporated in 1978 and today has a population of about 1,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014a).

Prior to 2004, the Grand County Sheriff provided law enforcement services in Winter Park and Fraser. In Colorado, county sheriffs are obligated to provide law enforcement services to towns in their counties, but the level of service is usually quite modest. In order to enhance service both Fraser and Winter Park contracted with the sheriff for additional services. Even though contract deputies were assigned to the two communities, these officers had other assignments and the communities thought that they were not receiving coverage commensurate with their contract fees. As a result both communities asked the sheriff to dedicate resources more specifically to Winter Park and Fraser. The towns and the sheriff failed to reconcile these differences and as a result the sheriff announced his attention to end the contract in 90 days.

In response, the towns formed the Fraser/Winter Park Police Department (FWPPD) in early 2005. The agency was formed in about four months. The department plan called for all members to be employees of the Town of Winter Park, but the chief would report to both town managers.

All of the new employees from the department came from the Grand County Sheriff, including the chief who had been undersheriff and who had previously served on a suburban Denver police department. The initial staffing was six officers including the chief. The department purchased police vehicles from the sheriff.

This strategy of hiring former sheriff's employees eased implementation in several ways. The members of the new department knew one another and were familiar with both communities. The department also adopted policy and procedure used in the sheriff's office and by other county agencies.

While such a transition might appear relatively seamless, in fact the new department had several issues to resolve. One of the biggest problems the new chief faced was that, even though the officers had worked in the towns, the residents did not know them well. There was also concern that some of the ill will directed towards the sheriff would be transferred to the new department and its members who were former sheriff's employees. To build good will, the chief reached out to elected officials and community leaders in both communities. He also sought to strengthen the relationship between the officers and the citizens.

As noted, the chief reports to both town managers. Although the towns are similar in size and character, and both communities use the same district court for misdemeanor and felony crimes they do have some differing ordinances and priorities for law enforcement. For example, Fraser places a stronger emphasis on parking enforcement. The chief works to keep open lines of communication with both town managers and ensures that officers are sensitive to the unique issues in each town.

Though reporting to two managers of towns with differing priorities might appear to pose a dilemma for the chief, he indicates that it does not. He suggests that is not unlike working in a larger community with differing area or neighborhood issues. Similarly, the officers hired by the department understand that they are serving two communities, and this appears to pose no problems for them.

The department operates under an intergovernmental agreement in which Fraser pays Winter Park an annual fee based on the proportion of calls in each community. Currently, Fraser contributes 35 percent to Winter Park's $1,200,000 public-safety budget.

There is a high degree of cooperation between law enforcement agencies in Grand County. In addition to the sheriff, there is an office for the Colorado State Patrol. The FWPPD participates in a regional tactical team.

Fraser and Winter Park are considering further consolidation of services. They now share public-works staff and equipment. Some have suggested the communities merge their governments altogether (Miller 2014).

Buffalo Valley (PA) Regional Police Department

Local government in Pennsylvania is more complex than in most states. There are five types of local governments listed in the Pennsylvania Constitution: county, township, borough, city, and school district. All of Pennsylvania is included in one of the state's 67 counties and each county is then divided into one of the state's 2,561 municipalities. As a result, there are no independent cities or unincorporated territory within Pennsylvania.

Local municipalities are either governed by statutes enacted by the Pennsylvania Legislature and administered through the Pennsylvania Code, by a home-rule charter, by forming a home-rule municipality, or by an optional form of government adopted by the municipality with consent of the legislature. Among Pennsylvania's nearly 2,600 municipalities, 1,124 have police departments. Most of these departments serve municipalities with less than 10,000 population (Center for Rural Pennsylvania 2006). Many towns in Pennsylvania have given up managing their own local law enforcement force, turning instead to the state police for protection.

The Pennsylvania State Police handles full-time protection for 1,314 of the state's municipalities, and fills in part-time at another 402. Some of these communities are so small that they have never had a local police force. Others maintained a police force at one time but decided to discontinue service.

Since 2002, 65 Pennsylvania municipalities have dissolved their law enforcement agencies. As more local governments follow suit, lawmakers and others have grown worried that the state police could face a manpower shortage. For several years, the legislature has considered requiring municipalities without local police to pay a fee for state protection. Currently, no extra money is required for local patrols by state police (Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics no date).

One approach to managing the costs of local policing has been the formation of regional police departments. Pennsylvania has 34 regional police departments. The first took shape in 1972, when five municipalities in York County formed the Northern York County Regional Police Department. (For more discussion of this department and its effectiveness, see Krimmel 1997.)

In most cases, these regional agencies focused on two issues: cutting costs and maintaining or improving services. As one Pennsylvania official noted, "Municipalities are struggling with budgets. They want to move forward with the same level of service, and they just don't know how to do that with the budgets today. It generates a lot of discussion on possible police consolidation" (Florer 2013).

Municipalities interested in consolidation can get assistance from state government. Many communities have found this service to be very valuable. Indeed, as one regional police department chief said, "The most important thing for municipalities wanting to go into regional policing is to have a study conducted by somebody who knows regional policing. The very first thing I would do would be to contact the Department of Community and Economic Development (Ibid.)."

The authority for creating regional police departments comes from the Constitution of the Commonwealth, with Act 180 of the General Assembly, signed into law in 1972, serving as the enabling legislation, listing provisions for initiating the cooperation and identification of the necessary contents of the agreement.

The Buffalo Valley Regional Police Department, serving Lewisburg Borough and East Buffalo Township in Union County, is one of the most recently established regional departments in Pennsylvania. The communities have similar population sizes, with Lewisburg at about 5,700 and East Buffalo Township at about 5,400 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014a). Major employers in the area include Bucknell University, which lies in both communities and has an enrollment of nearly 4,000; Evangelical Community Hospital, with nearly

150 beds as well as nearly 200 physicians and nearly 900 clinical employees on staff; and a federal prison and camp with more than 1,600 inmates (Lewisburg Downtown Partnership 2010).

The road to creating the department was long and arduous. In the early 1990s, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services (1993) conducted a feasibility study for a regional police department to serve seven Buffalo Valley communities on the north branch of the Susquehanna River. Reportedly, a similar study by the state in 1999 examined the possibilities of police consolidation in Union County, but neither study resulted in any steps towards consolidation.

In April 2006, the Central Keystone Council of Governments approached several municipalities, including East Buffalo Township and Lewisburg Borough about their interest in a regional police study. The resulting study, also conducted by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, examined community demographics, fiscal data, crime statistics, patrol-staffing requirements, potential organizational forms, and potential cost distribution. It concluded that the proposed merger would improve enforcement, coordination, deployment of personnel, training, and career opportunities for officers, and also yield economies of scale.

Nevertheless, as the study progressed, all but two municipalities withdrew their interest in a regional department. This was largely because while many communities sought to augment service they receive from Pennsylvania State Police, the state police will only provide service to communities without any other available services. That is, once a municipality enters into an agreement to obtain services through another agency, the state police will withdraw.

By early 2009, East Buffalo and Lewisburg had agreed in principle to participate in the regional agency, and by May 2009 they had developed a draft intergovernmental agreement and cost allocation scheme. Over the next few months, the study committee dealt with critical issues including the name of the new agency, how to handle the merger of the two organizations (including their facilities and equipment), and how to reconcile different salary and benefit structures for employees, which they resolved by applying the best compensation and benefits of either group to both groups.

The first public meeting of the study committee was held in November 2009. During 2010, it focused its efforts on the pension fund and on review of the intergovernmental agreement.

In March 2011, the agreement was signed and the Buffalo Valley Regional Police Department and the Police Commission (oversight authority) were formed. The commission includes two representatives of each community as well as one at-large representative, with the participating municipalities appointing all members. In June 2011, after a competitive process, the Commission hired the Lewisburg chief as the new regional chief, with the chief in East Buffalo becoming the deputy chief of the regional department.

The commission resembles a unit of local government with responsibility for police policy and accountability, personnel, procurement, pensions, and related matters. The main difference between it and a municipality is that the commission is not a taxing body.

Funding for the department comes from the municipalities under a negotiated fee structure based on the concept of a Police Protection Unit (PPU). Under this scheme, each PPU represents 520 hours of service per year, with one PPU representing 10 hours of service per week. Thus, one officer can provide 3.23 PPU per year (accounting for time off, training, and other demands on a full-time work-week). Each municipality is assessed based upon the cost of PPUs and the number it requests. For 2011, the department had a budget of nearly $2,070,000, for which Lewisburg was assessed $993,584 and East Buffalo $1,076,383. This costing structure allows the department to add additional municipalities if desired.

One of the key challenges the new regional department faced was blending the disparate policing styles and expectations of the two communities. The chief and deputy chief spent a great deal of time meeting with officers and community members to ensure a smooth transition. In order to demonstrate that the new agency represented both communities, they emphasized such visual symbols as new uniforms, badges, insignias, and vehicle markings, and built a new facility as well.

Another challenge the regional department faced, at least initially, was significantly increased duties for its administrative staff. This resulted, in part, because the administrative support functions (e.g., personnel, budgeting, procurement) that police departments may receive from municipalities are not available to the independent commission. Because the commission has limited staff support, the regional police department must perform many of these tasks.

Nevertheless, the Buffalo Valley Regional Police Department has been recognized as one of the more successful mergers in Pennsylvania (Jordan 2012). "The transition to a regional police force made

Funding for the department comes from the municipalities under a negotiated fee structure based on the concept of a Police Protection Unit

sense from the standpoint of not needing two police departments in two adjacent areas," a police commission member noted (Socha 2013). "Operationally, everything has gone better than anticipated." To ensure continued progress, the commission sought to work with a facilitator for long-range planning.

Regionalization continues in Pennsylvania policing. New departments include

- Northern Lancaster County Regional Police, established on January 1, 2012. It serves 34,000 residents in Clay, Penn, and Warwick townships with 24 full-time officers;

- Charleroi Regional Police Department in Washington County, which opened April 1, 2013. Seven full-time officers and 12 part-time officers serve 8,000 residents in Charleroi, North Charleroi, and Speers boroughs. The department also provides contract services to Twilight borough.

Rockford (MI) Department of Public Safety

The City of Rockford, Michigan, is a suburban community in Kent County, about 10 miles from Grand Rapids. Today the city has a population of nearly 6,000, with education and income levels above those of the state (U.S. Census Bureau 2014b).

The Rockford Department of Public Safety comprises three divisions: enforcement, fire, and public services. The Enforcement Division is responsible for traditional police functions and has 10 full-time public-safety officers and three part-time police officers. The Fire Division has one full-time equipment operator, a fire marshall, and paid on-call fire fighters. The Public Services Division includes 11 public services employees cross-trained as fire fighters. Across the three divisions there are 30 certified firefighters and 10 police officers.

The road to establishing a public safety model in Rockford began about 10 years ago after the city analyzed the fire department workload. At that time, the fire department consisted of a fire chief and three full-time career firefighters. It also had 20 paid-on call firefighters, 10 of whom were employed by the city in the department of public works and who received additional compensation for their firefighting work.

The workload analysis revealed that the fire department responded to about 440 calls per year, of which 350 were EMS calls. Moreover the vast majority of these calls occurred during the day and early evening, with very few in the overnight period.

The city also found a significant amount of staffing duplication. For example, on a medical call, both fire and police would respond in addition to medical personnel. It was costly not only to have so many staff respond to an incident (often unnecessarily) but also to have large equipment present at a scene (again, often unnecessarily).

Over the next several years, the city began investigating ways to more efficiently provide public safety services. City staff conducted site visits to several public-safety departments in Michigan, home to a large number of public safety departments (Wilson, Weiss, and Grammich 2012).

By 2010, a consolidation plan emerged. By that time the number of fire calls in the city was about 50 per year, and many of those were fire calls in neighboring communities. While there continued to be a number of EMS calls, including about a "dozen" life-threatening ones each year, there is excellent private EMS service available in the region, with which the city could contract and use resources more efficiently.

The public-safety plan involved three employee groups: police, fire, and public service. Upon launch, all of the police officers were trained and certified as firefighters. They also received training to be certified as Medical First Responders.

Of the four firefighters, two were laid off, and one firefighter with a law enforcement background was offered a position as a police officer (after attending the police academy). The fire chief was retained as fire marshal. The actions with the fire department were made somewhat easier because the members were not members of a union.

The transition for the public service employees was somewhat complicated. As noted, 10 public service employees served as paid on call firefighters. As such, they were closely aligned with fire department operations and culture. As a result, some paid on-call firefighters resisted the public safety model.

To address this issue, the city changed the job description of the public service staff to include firefighting. That is, the ability to do firefighting became a condition of employment for public service workers. The employees did not object to this suggestion but sought and received additional compensation. Including the public service employees in the public safety department was critical, given their considerable firefighting experience.

San Mateo County (CA) Sheriff's Office

San Mateo County, located immediately south of San Francisco and north of Santa Clara County, includes more than 700,000 residents on 455 square miles of land (County of San Mateo 2015). The county has relatively high racial diversity—less than half the population is non-Hispanic white—as well as education and income levels above state and national levels (U.S. Census Bureau 2014b).

The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office (SMCSO) provides law enforcement services to the 70 percent of the county that is unincorporated as well as contract law enforcement services to more than a half-dozen jurisdictions (San Mateo County Sheriff's Office 2015). The authorized staffing for FY 2013 was 680 sworn and non-sworn employees. Some of the cities (e.g.,

Portola Valley and Woodside) have successfully contracted with the sheriff for police services for many years (San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury 2013). As more communities with their own police departments have investigated contracting for law enforcement services, the sheriff has developed a set of policies and procedures to ensure a smooth transition from city to county services.

Cities offer a variety of reasons for seeking contract services (Ibid.). The City of Half Moon Bay did so in response to increasing costs and decreasing revenues that led to reducing the size of its small police department. It found contracting with the SMCSO to offer a more sustainable solution at greater savings. Similarly, "in 2011 the City of Millbrae determined it could no longer provide police services at desired levels within the City's adopted and projected budgets" (Ibid.). Likewise, the City of San Carlos, after "more than a decade of unsustainable public safety cost increases combined with lower public safety levels for the community," contracting with the SMCSO to maintain minimum staffing levels and response times as well as "to restore many of the key community programs that the San Carlos Police Department had provided in better economic times" (Ibid.).

Creating a law enforcement contract in San Mateo typically begins with a consultation with the undersheriff who oversees the process. The current undersheriff, before joining the sheriff's office, served as chief of police in Redwood City, California, one of cities in the county with its own police department. The undersheriff indicated that in his view the main reason that communities are interested in contracting is that they can provide high quality service at lower cost. As the sheriff has taken on more contract communities, the department has grown and diversified. This makes the office able to expand the number of specialized services it can provide as well as the number of opportunities for employees to work in specialized fields.

After the initial contact between the community and the sheriff's office, a member of the sheriff's staff will conduct a staffing study to determine the number of personnel needed to provide services in the contract community. The department then prepares a proposal that describes the recommended personnel and the cost. The contract community will have input into the staffing level but the sheriff will ensure that there is enough staff before agreeing to the work. (For a more general discussion of contracting processes, see Wilson, Weiss, and Chermak 2014.) Table 1 depicts contract characteristics for Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, and San Carlos.

In general, the sheriff agrees to provide

- patrol services at all hours;
- management and oversight;
- personnel, recruitment, and training;
- response to high-priority calls within four minutes or less;
- all criminal investigations;
- department operations center;
- maintenance of all records, reports, property, and evidence;
- court liaison;
- K-9 and SWAT services.

The Millbrae contract also required that the city provide a facility (at no cost to the county) for a sheriff's substation. Contracts specify both staffing requirements and calculated cost rates for each year. These

Table 1. SMCSO contract characteristics for Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, and San Carlos

	Half Moon Bay	Millbrae	San Carlos
Approximate annual cost	$2.3 million	$5 million	$7 million
Approximate annual savings	$500,000	$532,000	$2 million
Captain	n/a	n/a	1
Lieutenant	n/a	1	n/a
Detective	n/a	1	1
Sergeants	n/a	4	5
Deputies	6	8.66	14
Community service officers	1	2	4
Patrol officers	n/a	n/a	12
Motor patrolman	n/a	n/a	1
Records officer	1	1	
Officers shared with unincorporated areas	1.55	n/a	n/a
Administrative personnel	n/a	n/a	1
Office assistant	n/a	1	1

Source: San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury (2013)

are based on a review of staffing and performance and on changes in the costs for staff and support.

The cost per employee is based on direct costs for

- salary;
- benefits;
- workers compensation;
- night shift pay (if appropriate);
- replacement costs for officer leave;
- other personnel costs (training, uniforms, experience).

In addition to the direct cost, the rate includes an allocation of shared costs for

- radio and communication;
- auto liability insurance;
- safety equipment and training;
- departmental support services;
- other miscellaneous expenses.

Table 2 illustrates how these costs are distributed for two night-shift deputies in Millbrae in FY 2014.

In other words, the cost to staff one deputy on one shift, seven days per week, is $293,063 (one-half of the $586,125 to staff two deputies).

Table 2. Costs for two night-shift deputies in Millbrae, FY 2014

Category	Dollars
Salary	221,321
Benefits	219,471
Workers compensation	24,104
Night shift	82,807
Other personnel costs	21,665
Allocated expenses	4,657
Total	586,125

In addition to the contract for law enforcement services, the city and county also entered into agreement for the "Transfer of Personnel and Equipment" that describes the transition process. This is a critical component of the contracting process. City employees are generally offered county employment by the county, but they must apply for it and undergo background, medical, and psychological evaluations. All pending disciplinary matters must be resolved before an employee of the city can be transferred. Within seven days of signing the agreement, the county notifies the city which employees are being offered county positions.

The transfer plan also describes in some detail how the county will treat accrued benefits such as vacation, sick leave, compensatory time, and retirement. After this adjustment, employees are subject to the county benefit plan.

Most personnel are transferred at their current rank in the county system. For example, a police officer would become a deputy sheriff. In some cases, a city supervisor may transfer as a deputy sheriff. In such a case, the transfer agreement may specify a provision to adjust for the difference in compensation.

New employees use the transfer date as their county seniority date. Nevertheless, employees can use their city hire date as the basis for decisions regarding promotional eligibility, longevity, and seniority among other new employees.

Recent contract cities appear to be satisfied with contract services (San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury 2013). The cost savings from contracting range from approximately $500,000 in Half Moon Bay to approximately $2 million in San Carlos.

Contracts for Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, and San Carlos have remained within budgeted costs, and public response to the transition has been positive. Millbrae, reported a 17-percent decrease in crime after the transition, and the other two cities reported no increase. Former city personnel also appear satisfied with the transition.

Conclusion

Just as "trust" or "understanding" appeared to be common themes in our focus-group considerations of varying scenarios, so, too, here understandings of "culture" appear to be prominent. The Fraser and Winter Park merger occurred among two cities whose origins were similar and whose new employees were familiar with the area and the differing issues each community faced or emphasized. The Buffalo Valley communities were also similar in size and other characteristics and chose as their chief and assistant chief the former chiefs of the separate departments—a situation that can be delicate, to be sure, but one that also ensures equal understanding of both participating communities. The Rockford public safety consolidation ensured understanding of, and acceptance by, retaining the fire chief as fire marshal and perhaps also by retaining many of the public service employees in their duties as paid on-call firefighters. Finally, the SMCSO may have helped boost understanding of contract communities by giving charge of contracting arrangements to an undersheriff who was also a former chief.

Each community also had its challenges in adopting new policies. The Fraser/Winter Park regionalization had to overcome ill will toward the sheriff's office that had terminated the contractual relationship the communities had. The Buffalo Valley department had fewer participants than it might otherwise have achieved because some potential participants did not want to give up state police service altogether. Rockford public service employees who also served as paid on-call firefighters were reluctant to give up that work. The San Mateo contracting appears to have had fewer challenges, but was precipitated in some cases by dire municipal finances, perhaps making merger more of a necessity than it was elsewhere.

Common Themes

Each of the organizational changes described above—mergers, sharing services, extending or contracting for services, adopting a public safety model—has operational and logistical implications that merit serious study. For example, police and fire cultures have several common characteristics, but also rather dramatic differences. Both cultures are value-driven and committed to the concept of serving the greater good, even when doing so places their own lives in peril. Both cultures enjoy significant public respect. Yet a key cultural difference is that the police service may be perceived as highly individualistic, whereas the fire service is very team oriented. While this difference would not seem initially to be significant, it takes on greater importance when developing shift schedules, training modules, and so forth. While the idea of blending these two cultures could seem more appealing from the budgetary perspective, the ongoing debate as to the efficacy of the public safety model seems to reflect an inherent tension between budgetary and operational perspectives. Such budgetary and operational considerations must be identified and addressed in all other types of organizational change as well. (For more on savings or their lack from public-safety models, see Wilson, Weiss, and Grammich 2012. The study focuses on Sunnyvale, California, which claims substantial savings from the model, and Highland Park, Texas, which pays more for the model but whose citizens want the broader services each individual public-safety officer can provide.)

The challenge of merging community policies can be similarly challenging. The communities we reviewed and that participated in common efforts all had many shared characteristics, including location, population size, and socioeconomic characteristics. Yet they also had their own unique characteristics that policymakers had to address when undertaking initiatives with their neighbors.

While each initiative faced unique challenges, there are, nonetheless, common themes evident in this overview.

1. **It is important to emphasize how a proposed change will affect the quality of service delivery.** Communities often contemplate sharing service delivery to reduce cost. Whether the community is seeking to be more efficient or it is facing a fiscal crisis, reducing costs will normally be a necessary but not sufficient measure of success. Agency leaders must demonstrate to citizens that any proposed change will result in service delivery that is at least as good if not better than the status quo. Some stakeholders may argue against or be threatened by any change, so it will be critical to spend time and effort to share with residents both the costs and benefits of the new model.

2. **Any plan to share services must include extensive discussions with employees and they must be treated equitably. In the private sector, mergers and acquisitions often result in loss of jobs.** While these actions are certainly hard, most employees understand that is part of the business cycle. In the public sector, and particularly among

public-safety employees, there is a much stronger expectation of job security. In many police and fire departments, employee seniority is key in assignments, shift, and benefit time off. In the organizations we studied, every effort was made to ensure that positions were not lost, and that employees retained their seniority, benefits, and pension upon transition. While it was not always possible to make an employee "whole," every employee knew precisely how he or she would be affected by the change.

3. **Details are important**. It is relatively easy to create a new model for providing service. When these plans emerge, communities are often inundated with public outcry, lawsuits, or labor challenges. Nevertheless, in the communities we examined, agency leaders ensured that they had answers to questions that were sure to emerge. It is important to remember that critics of these changes will identify scores of reasons why a new plan will not work. Those seeking change must be able to address these.

4. **Leadership is fundamental.** In every community that we studied, we found an individual or group of individuals that devoted significant time, energy, and, in some cases, political capital to ensuring a successful implementation of the new organization scheme.

5. **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, particularly through mergers, such savings can be elusive—especially after agencies have undergone years of budget cuts. Some agencies in cooperative ventures may find they are subsidizing others—but willing to do so, given the other benefits cooperative agreements have yielded. In extreme cases, jurisdictions may, in seeking savings, decide to forego police protection for whatever level county or state police will provide, rather than seeking a cooperative venture. Nevertheless, in some long-standing cases, contracting jurisdictions appear to have been able to realize some savings. (For more on short-term costs but possible long-term savings in a merger, see Wilson and Grammich 2012.)

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About the COPS Office

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.

Rather than simply responding to crimes once they have been committed, community policing concentrates on preventing crime and eliminating the atmosphere of fear it creates. Earning the trust of the community and making those individuals stakeholders in their own safety enables law enforcement to better understand and address both the needs of the community and the factors that contribute to crime.

The COPS Office awards grants to state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders and all levels of law enforcement. The COPS Office has produced and compiled a broad range of information resources that can help law enforcement better address specific crime and operational issues, and help community leaders better understand how to work cooperatively with their law enforcement agency to reduce crime.

- Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than $14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing.

- To date, the COPS Office has funded approximately 125,000 additional officers to more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the country in small and large jurisdictions alike.

- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.

- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than 8.57 million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs.

COPS Office resources, covering a wide breadth of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—are available, at no cost, through its online Resource Center at www.cops.usdoj.gov. This easy-to-navigate website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

Merging police organizations is a complex process, which often requires changing the structural delivery of public safety services. To successfully implement these transitions, all stakeholders need to engage in an open, honest, and constructive dialog. Key to this dialog is information derived from independent research, analysis, and evaluation. This report discusses the views and experiences of a wide range of law enforcement practitioners, and it includes a wide range of findings that are critical to various forms of consolidation. Divided into two parts, it provides practical, field-based lessons derived from focus groups in which participants discussed transition issues and challenges in different scenarios, as well as empirical evidence from four case studies. *Pathways to Consolidation: Taking Stock of Transitions to Alternative Models of Police Service* offers an evidence-based foundation for making the decision to consolidate, as well as insights on the best ways to facilitate implementation.

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