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Police consolidation, regionalization, and shared services: options, considerations, and lessons from research and practice

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Preface

Since the economic recession of 2008 and 2009, police agencies have found it increasingly difficult to maintain proper staffing levels, provide basic police service, and deliver certain functions, particularly community policing and problem-solving activities. Decision-makers have sought to respond to these challenges in several ways, including: managing demand (e.g., requiring victims to file reports in other ways besides through an officer dispatched to the scene); relying more on technology (e.g., surveillance cameras); and regionalizing, consolidating, or sharing police services. To facilitate the sharing of research and experience-based lessons on regionalization, consolidation, and shared police services, the Michigan State University (MSU) School of Criminal Justice, through its Police Executive Development Series, hosted more than 75 national and Michigan police leaders at a 3-day event. The event, occurring on September 27–29, 2011, included an overview of sharing public safety services and consolidation, presentations on similar initiatives elsewhere, and discussion of these issues in Michigan. This report summarizes the key discussions, conclusions, and lessons of the symposium.

Acknowledgments

We express our thanks to the many individuals who made this report possible. First and foremost are the expert presenters and participants of the event. Without their insightful contributions and constructive discussions there would be nothing worth summarizing. Kim Lawrence, with the support of Sandi Cox, of the MSU School of Criminal Justice effectively coordinated the event, managed logistics and facilitated discussion throughout the event. Dr. Alexander Weiss, of Alexander Weiss Consulting, LLC, worked alongside the MSU team and was instrumental in planning the structure and substance of the event. Finally, we'd like to thank the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services for their assistance in making this report available to all whom may find its contents helpful.



About this BOLO

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) present the BOLO series, supporting the publication and dissemination of experiences and implications discovered during ongoing research in the field, with the goal of regularly communicating these resources to the law enforcement community at large. “Be on the lookout” for these field-driven, evidence-based resources that will help illuminate the nature, function, context, costs, and benefits of community policing innovations. For questions about this specific report and consolidation research activities underway, contact Dr. Jeremy Wilson, Associate Director for Research and Associate Professor, at jwilson@msu.edu or 517.353.9474.

The Current Landscape for Regionalization, Consolidation, and Shared Services

The United States is unique in the industrialized world for the number, size, and distribution of its law enforcement agencies. There are 18,000 state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States, with 765,000 personnel. Alexander Weiss, a public safety consultant, told the conference that this is much different from other countries. Canada, for example, has 80 police agencies, while England has 40, and Japan has 50.

U.S. police agencies vary greatly in size. Nearly half employ fewer than ten full-time officers, while two-thirds of officers work for agencies with at least 100 officers. Research tends to focus on very large agencies, which have little in common with smaller ones. Even large suburban agencies may have little in common with small rural ones.

This fragmentation of law enforcement has both positives and negatives, Weiss told the seminar. Fragmentation, he said, can provide more local control and provide more career choices for officers. Participants in the seminar said that smaller agencies can also cater to Americans who are distrustful of big government as well as provide very personalized services. As one participant explained, “A lot of things officers do have nothing to do with law enforcement. We can contribute to the vitality of communities.” Indeed, Weiss added, bigger is not necessarily better.

At the same time, fragmentation can have negatives for law enforcement. Because offenders do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries, Weiss noted, crime-control strategy should be more regional than many agencies are. The fragmentation of agencies means that there is a duplication of administration, facilities, communications, and equipment. Duplication can require more officers. Also, an agency may find it difficult, for example, to provide 24-hour, 7-day service with only five officers. Small departments also lack the ability to support specialized units.

To gain access to specialized and other services, Weiss said, agencies may consider some form of sharing police services. These include:

- Functional consolidation— in which two or more agencies combine functional units like communications, or a crime lab, or a special-weapons-and-tactics (SWAT) team. In Will County, Illinois, for example, 37 agencies combined to form a major-crime task force.
- Regionalization— in which a number of agencies combine to police a geographic area. The Northern York County (Pennsylvania) Regional Police Department, for example, has provided police services to two boroughs and six townships for nearly 40 years.
- Metropolitan departments— in which two or more agencies serving overlapping jurisdictions join together. Examples of metropolitan departments that combined local agencies include Nashville, Tennessee; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Indianapolis, Indiana.
- City-county consolidation— in which a city and county consolidate their entire governments. Examples of city-county consolidation include Jacksonville and Duval County in Florida, and Broomfield, Colorado (in which the city of Broomfield and portions of four counties united to form the new Broomfield County).
- Contracting— in which smaller jurisdictions contract with larger ones for police services. Examples of contracting include jurisdictions who acquired services from the Los Angeles County (California) Sheriff and from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (particularly outside Québec and Ontario).
- Local merger— in which two separate agencies form a single new entity. An example of this was the merger of the Winter Park and Fraser departments in Colorado, where the police chief reports directly to both the Fraser town manager and the Winter Park manager.

Though offering some advantages, Weiss noted that such efforts have their challenges. Creation of a metropolitan department in Indianapolis lagged by nearly 30 years behind the creation of “unigov” there, and was realized only when local governments sought means to better support their high number of officers. A joint effort between Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County in Michigan faltered over rising contract costs,

with Ypsilanti threatening to form its own department, but ultimately deciding not to do so. A prospective joint effort between two adjoining northeastern Illinois communities of similar size, triggered when each needed a new police station, faltered over concerns about department and community culture.

Still, jurisdictions will continue to search for such opportunities, Weiss said. The Illinois communities noted earlier are now considering a consolidated department of four communities in an effort to realize savings and efficiencies. Within Michigan, the city and township of Holland considered consolidation of services when police and fire chiefs announced their retirement. Traverse City and Grand Traverse County have pursued some contracting arrangements, sharing a building and administrative services, though further consolidation is made difficult by financial arrangements.

Participants agreed that further consolidation is likely or needed, given changes in the Michigan policing landscape. One person said, “We cannot keep doing business as we have. My [department’s] response times are going up because my [officer] numbers are going down.” Another noted, “By 2015, the suburban agencies may be in the same boat and bailing water with the rest of us.”



Prospects for Consolidation

Michigan has led the way in much of the consolidation of public safety services, Jeremy Wilson of the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice told the conference, but consolidation is likely to proceed elsewhere as well. Such efforts can be complicated by collective-bargaining agreements reducing management flexibility (e.g., minimum staffing levels), as well as by the success public safety employees have had in winning public support for the status quo.

Nevertheless, the traditional reluctance to cut public safety funding has given way to unprecedented changes. Communities now focus on public safety (the largest portion of their budget) and personnel costs (the largest portion of their public safety budgets) for further ways to reduce the cost of government.

Wilson noted four typical models, representing a continuum for public safety consolidation.

- **Full consolidation:**
Full integration of police and fire services, public safety officers cross-trained in both police and fire services, and a consolidated management and command.
- **Partial consolidation:**
Partial integration of police and fire services, cross-trained public safety officers working alongside separate police and fire personnel, and consolidation limited to select positions within the organization's hierarchy.

- **Functional consolidation:**
Where police and fire services are not integrated but consolidation occurs within middle or upper management.
- **Nominal consolidation:**
Where police and fire services are not integrated, there are no cross-trained public safety officers, but in which separate police and fire services may share facilities or training and dispatch resources and a public safety director may oversee separate police and fire services.

Among the benefits of consolidation are possible increases in efficiency, promotion of community policing, and enhancement of community safety and homeland security preparedness efforts.

Consolidation can make more staff continuously available to respond to a wider variety of calls. This reflects an evolution that's happened in the firefighting industry from fire suppression to emergency medical services (EMS). (Wilson said that nationally, in the past quarter-century, the number of fires fell by 38 percent, while the number of firefighters increased 42 percent and the number of fire departments increased 7 percent—EMS responses increased 166 percent.) Consolidation can also reduce duplication of administrative, communications, and physical infrastructure.



By making more staff available for a wider variety of calls, consolidation can promote new efforts such as those for community policing, Wilson said. A consolidated department with a larger total staff provides increased access to staff and flexibility in deployment. Expanded roles may also attract officers with broader skills. Increased efficiency of public safety departments can also help community policing activities avoid reduction or elimination.

Consolidation can also enhance community safety and homeland security preparedness, Wilson said. It can do so by improving communication among all public safety personnel, unifying command structures, planning for all-inclusive emergency responses, and comprehensive training.

At the same time, Wilson noted, consolidation has perceived costs that can inhibit initiatives for it. The upfront costs for consolidation can be prohibitive, including those for increased training and those for new branding, uniforms, equipment, and vehicles. Consolidation requires organization and can exacerbate labor- and facility-management

problems. In some areas, such as Durham, North Carolina, Wilson said, residents perceived deterioration in the quality of public safety services, which unfortunately led to deconsolidation. In some areas, organized labor has succeeded in blocking consolidation efforts by changing local and state statutes, charters, or pension regulations. Administrators have also opposed consolidation efforts in some areas.

Nevertheless, consolidation continues to grow according to data Wilson and his colleagues have been collecting. As of September 2011 more than 150 agencies across the United States have been identified as having some form of public safety consolidation, with consolidation being most prevalent in Michigan, where it appears to have first occurred. Although nearly 15 agencies have deconsolidated in the past decade, many more agencies have recently adopted the model or are actively considering it. Consolidation has occurred among small and medium-size agencies, and is being actively considered in such large jurisdictions as Henderson, Nevada; Palo Alto, California; and Buffalo, New York.

The Metro Policing Model in Louisville, Kentucky

One of the larger efforts at developing a metropolitan police department was a result of a merger between governments done for other reasons, said Steve Conrad. Conrad, chief of the Glendale, Arizona, police, and former assistant chief of police in Louisville, Kentucky, said the 2003 merger of Louisville with unincorporated portions of Jefferson County was accomplished to improve economic development of the community, to improve services, and to save money.

The money savings, Conrad said, were difficult to realize immediately. The metro mayor, according to Conrad, believed “in the synergy of merger: ten people here, ten people there, they could work more efficiently together. The problem with that logic was we had deferred hiring people we needed to hire. We probably needed 15 or 20 here, and 15 or 20 there.”

Nevertheless, Conrad was a longtime proponent of merger, something he said could be realized only through compromise. Voters had previously rejected a merger of governments in 1956, 1982, and 1983. Success of the 2000 referendum depended, Conrad said, on simplifying the question, catering to the concerns of public-employee unions, and excluding suburban municipalities, fire-protection districts, and other taxing districts.



Conrad claimed that department personnel “cared more about pride in the uniform than what they get paid.”

With the consolidation of governments on January 6, 2003 came a merger of the Louisville Division of Police, a force of more than 700 sworn officers serving 262,000 persons over 66 square miles, with the Jefferson County Police, a force of more than 500 serving 402,000 persons over nearly 400 square miles. The city and county police had different perspectives on the merger. City officers, Conrad said, worked in a higher-crime area and had their own academy as well as a thick policy manual often based on individual incidents. County officers covered a larger area and often lacked backup but had a broader range of equipment and also had their own training academy and a thin policy manual that was more a list of guiding principles. (The merger did not affect responsibilities of the sheriff in any way.)

As a result, Conrad said, when Robert White arrived from Greensboro, North Carolina, to become the chief of the new department, he became chief of the metro department “in name only.” It was still essentially two larger departments operating under one name. The department had an urban division for the city area, and a suburban division for the county area. To counter this, White had Conrad issue an open invitation to all members of the department to help with the merger, and solicited about 150 suggestions on how to accomplish it. White also moved city leaders to the county and county leaders to the city so that they would get new perspectives on department issues.

The department was able to gain “employee buy-in,” Conrad said, “because our employees’ fingerprints were all over this.” White had the rank-and-file help design new badges, uniforms, and markings. The subsequent union election to choose these had more participation than a contract vote—indicating, Conrad claimed, that department personnel “cared more about pride in the uniform than what they get paid.”

Some issues proved nettlesome, Conrad said. When the department did not realize immediate efficiencies, it went through a complex workload analysis that reduced the number of patrol divisions from ten to eight and the number of beats from 51 to 44. The department also pushed decentralization of some specialized units and sought to place civilian employees in more positions. The metro department also had five different unions representing 11 bargaining units, many with pay discrepancies such as that inherited between city and county officers.

One particularly difficult issue was communication systems. City officers, Conrad said, had a “great radio system engineered to work in urban areas, with great building penetration but not good range. It was state-of-the-art in 1970s, but old in 2003.” County officers had a “great radio system for range, but not in buildings.”

As a result, the merger did not result in immediate savings. Rather, Conrad estimated it cost about \$85 million. Upgrading communication systems accounted for about \$70 million of the cost, and achieving parity in pay, health insurance, and equipment allowances accounted for more than \$10 million.

The merger did result in some reductions of personnel as well as in some needed consolidations. Both departments had problems managing property in evidence, Conrad said, with city property in a cramped basement and county property stored at each substation. The metro department was able to get a donated warehouse to store property, though this required further investment to make it suitable. Despite all the difficulties, however, the city is safer than it was before the merger, and is one of the safer cities for its size, Conrad claimed, with the merged department no longer having to contend with jurisdictional issues and being able to ride the “wave” of decreasing violent crime.

Among the lessons learned from the merger, Conrad identifies those in leadership, planning, involvement, and flexibility. Conrad praised the choice of selecting White, an outsider as chief, noting if the metro mayor “had picked locally, he would have been criticized for favoritism,” either toward the city or county department. Planning could have been better in the 26 months between the time of the 2000 referendum and the 2003 creation of the metro government, Conrad said. He noted, “The unions did use time wisely, but the leadership of the departments missed the boat.” Involvement of all department personnel helped the merger, Conrad said. Yet he thinks the department was “so busy on outreach in telling the community what we’re doing” that it “came up short” in actual involvement of the community. Being flexible can help the transition, Conrad said, noting the merger was “a chance to reinvent ourselves. We took a best-practices approach to everything. We did adopt some old county ways and some old city ways but only if these were the best ways.”

Conrad expects the transition to last some time. An officer from Lexington, Kentucky, which merged its city and county governments nearly 3 decades before Louisville did, said the merger was complete “when the last old Lexington officer retired.”

Contracting Police Services in King County, Washington

The Sheriff’s Office of King County, Washington, has been among the leaders in providing contracted police services. Sue Rahr, the current sheriff, said the first contract the sheriff had for contracted services was with the city of North Bend, Washington, in 1973. Contracted services grew rapidly, Rahr said, after passage of the 1990 Growth Management Act in Washington State. Among the ultimate effects of this act was incorporation of several new cities needing police services. The sheriff’s office, seeing this growth in municipalities, had “not an altruistic but survival” motive for offering further contract services, Rahr said. She noted the Multnomah County, Oregon, sheriff’s office “nearly disappeared” after similar legislation in Oregon.

Among the earliest issues the sheriff had to confront in contracting services was local control. The sheriff’s office lost a contract with the city of Federal Way, Rahr said, when it was unwilling to accommodate the city’s desire “to have officers look like they belonged to the city.” As a result, the sheriff now works with cities on uniforms, markings, and other trappings of a municipal department. This results in better perception of services. Rahr claimed that residents of one municipality perceived more cars and better service in its community when the markings of the contracted services changed, even though the personnel did not change.

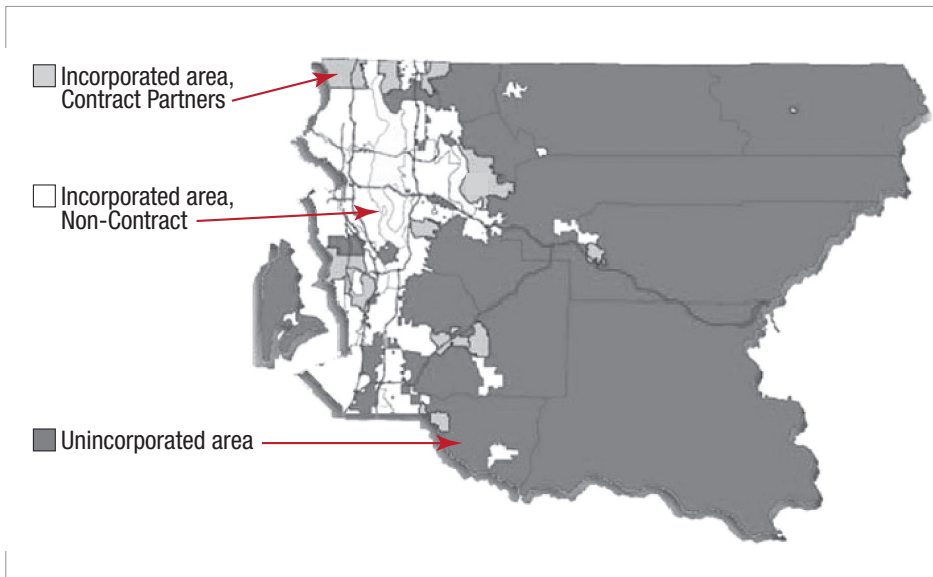


Figure 1:
King County Sheriff's Jurisdictional Areas

Source: Sheriff Sue Rahr,
King County, Washington

The sheriff offers both countywide services, such as bomb disposal, court security, search-and-rescue, and sex-offender registration, paid by county tax dollars, and more specific local services, such as patrol, SWAT, and 911 services, paid by tax dollars of contracting jurisdictions, Rahr said. The sheriff holds twelve contracts for municipal services, as well as contracts to provide services for three transit police departments, a tribal police department, and several specialty and seasonal service contracts.

In addition to designating their own uniforms and markings, Rahr said contracting municipalities are able to select their own police chief from among the sheriff's employees. A contracting city works with its chief, who is the primary contact with the sheriff, to determine contracted police priorities. The chief, Rahr said, "is part of the civic structure" in a contracting city. A contracting city can also choose the mix of assigned or shared officers it wants. Sheriff's deputies serving as contract officers are accountable to the city and its citizens and take part in community events, council meetings, and other similar activities.

Because contract employees are sheriff's deputies, the county and contracting cities save money through cross-dispatching (see Figure 1 for map of jurisdictional areas). "Citizens don't say a word when 'blue' [a contract city officer] or 'green' [a sheriff's deputy not on contract] comes to the door," Rahr said.

The twelve cities contracting with the sheriff negotiate together and operate under identical terms that still allow some flexibility. It provides for flex services (provided by deputies in green sheriff's uniforms), shared supervision (a mix of shared supervisors, some in green uniforms and some in blue uniforms), and city services (precinct-level services provided by officers in blue uniforms dedicated to the city). This Interlocal Agreement is automatically renewed annually unless renegotiated or terminated.

The contract relies on average rather than marginal costs, and includes such costs as officer pay and allowances, communications support, and proportional share of additional police services such as SWAT. The sheriff has been able to provide police services at a lower average cost per capita than that of other King County cities, Rahr said (Figure 2). In addition, although the county may not profit or give away services, the sheriff's office has seen nearly all of its discretionary growth in expenditures in the past decade offset by its contracting revenues.

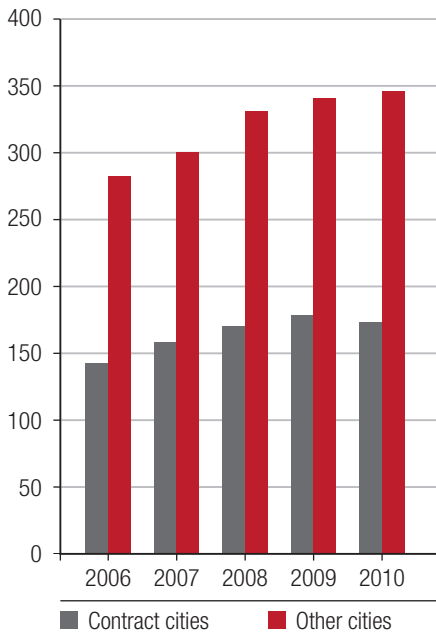


Figure 2: Average Cost of Police Services Per Capita, Contract and Other Cities in King County, Washington, 2006 to 2010

Source: Sheriff Sue Rahr, King County, Washington

At the same time, Rahr says the finances of contracting can vary by type of jurisdiction. Sheriff contracting for transit police, for example, has been even more financially successful than for cities. But the contract for the King County International Airport, she said, has not been as easy, because airport police, who are also firefighters, require expensive cross-training which many agencies might not find worth pursuing. (To a large degree, this is due to FAA regulations for airport firefighters.)

Michigan Perspectives on Consolidation and Shared Services

Michigan has moved to the forefront of these issues in part because of efforts by the recently created Council on Law Enforcement and Reinvention (CLEAR). Jeff Barnes, deputy chief of staff for Governor Rick Snyder, told the seminar that the CLEAR is holding wide-ranging discussions on topics such as law enforcement and public safety, prosecutors, courts, corrections, sentencing, the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards, exam reform, the Michigan State Police, and consolidation and regionalization of services.

The Council's efforts are also part of a "reinventing government" effort, which would replace statutory revenue sharing with an Economic Vitality Incentive Program (EVIP). Under the EVIP, communities eligible for funding from their state government would qualify based on their adoption of best practices for accountability and transparency, consolidation of services, and employee compensation.

One pending effort to consolidate governments in Michigan is that of the One Kent Coalition to combine the governments of Grand Rapids and Kent County. Nyal Deems, a leader of the coalition, noted improving public safety as a reason for the proposal. He claimed the Grand Rapids police department and the Kent County Sheriff had, between them, lost nearly 200 officers in recent years. In many areas, Deems told the seminar, law-enforcement officers "don't even patrol any more but go from call to call."

Kriste Etue, director of the Michigan State Police, noted several ways her force had consolidated operations. Such moves, she said, were necessary given shrinkage in the force that was reducing its levels to those of the 1960s. The force once had a dispatch center in each of the 83 counties in the state, but now has only four. It once had 62 posts and 20 detachments, but now, Etue said, has 29 posts and 58 detachments. One chief attending commented that his force had been able to shrink from 160 to 100 officers because the state police had use of his city's facilities and prevented his force from being stretched too thin.

Consolidation and sharing of services, as noted, has long been present in Michigan. Jeffery Hadley, chief of the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety, told the seminar his department had been consolidated, with cross-trained public safety officers, since the early 1980s. Upon initial implementation of the model, Hadley said, the city offered to let firemen and police officers remain in their same position at their same rate of pay or become cross-trained public safety officers for a 10 percent increase in pay. Officers hired since then have been cross-trained, with the last "true" firefighter leaving the department in 1997.

Part of the reason for the evolution, Hadley said, was the evolution of police, emergency medical, and, especially, firefighting services. Modern codes and building materials, Hadley claimed, have helped reduce the number of fires, particularly those to building structures, which accounted for just over one-fourth of the 200 fires the department fought in a recent year. By contrast, the department had 87,500 calls for police services, and 5,600 calls for emergency medical services.



Police personnel have been more supportive of the consolidation than firefighters have, with the firefighters' union, Molloy claimed, a "tough group to deal with" on these issues.

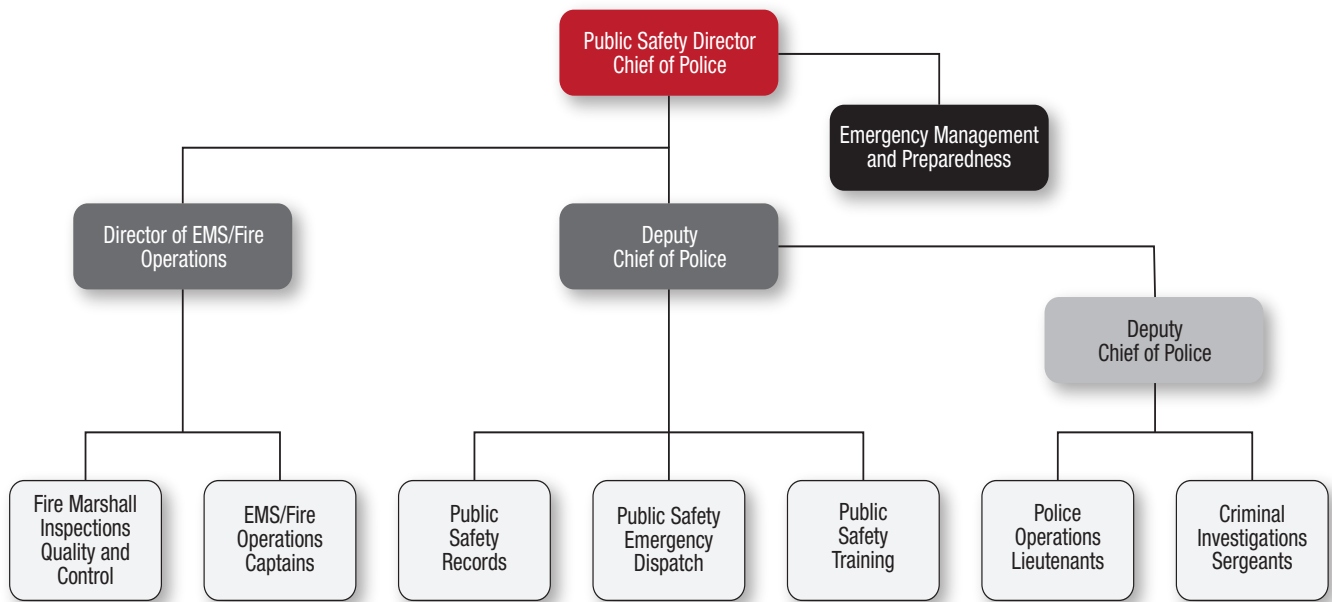
Cross-training, Hadley said, had increased equipment costs, particularly those needed to provide each public safety officer with both police and fire gear. Nevertheless, he contended the public safety model provided greater capacity to the department, taking resources that might otherwise be dormant in a fire department and making them more available, and allowing the department to pursue more community and other (e.g., narcotics) policing efforts. Hadley said that any public safety model would have to take care to "honor" both police and firefighting professions. In particular, he cautioned that public safety directors from policing backgrounds should take care not to favor police services and to understand the firefighting profession better so as to make intelligent decisions regarding its services.

The city of Novi recently moved to a consolidated public safety model, said David Molloy, director of public safety for the city, when a fire chief retired. The city government was hesitant at first, Molloy said, but realized budget constraints would likely cause the need for the move. Local residents rated fire and police services among the best of all city services, and the city also ranked above comparable jurisdictions in several public safety benchmarks.

In consolidating police and fire services, Molloy said the city sought to streamline its staffing, noting that "we realized we didn't need redundancy in administrative structures." Police personnel have been more supportive of the consolidation than firefighters have, with the firefighters' union, Molloy claimed, a "tough group to deal with" on these issues.

The resulting reorganization placed a director of emergency medical services and fire operations as well as a deputy chief of police under the public safety director, who also served as chief of police (Figure 3). The deputy chief of police, who has responsibility for many broad public safety functions, also has an assistant chief of police with more responsibility for police operations. In hindsight, Molloy suggested the department might be better with one director and three deputy directors.

The reorganization has had some early successes, Molloy claimed. It has improved communications throughout the department, and streamlined training through use of software. It has used COMPSTAT to have more "data-driven" decisions. It has reduced its firefighting, emergency medical service, and police response times. Crime rates are also down, as are overtime and idling time for department vehicles,



while traffic stops and citations have increased.

The city of Jackson has sought but failed to adopt a public safety model, its police chief, Matt Heins, told the seminar. Budget cuts of nearly \$5 million in the past 2 years led the city of more than 34,000 residents to reduce its sworn officers from 67 to 47. The city also had to reduce its firefighters from 28 to 18 in 2011.

The city government has sought to change its charter so as to allow the city council to combine the police and fire departments into a single public safety department. Efforts to launch a public safety department were, in Heins' opinion, stymied in part by strong opposition by the International Association of Fire Fighters, as well as by comments from the city manager and some council members that the firefighters perceived as threatening. Nevertheless, given a pending city election in which, according to Heins, "all candidates think a public safety model is the way to go," the issue will likely be revisited.

Seminar participants offered mixed perspectives on the future prospects of public safety consolidation. Cost savings, improved service and efficiency, and greater ability to respond to emergencies were among the advantages they cited in an informal survey. At the same time, the theory that public safety consolidation would save money was most often cited as the most important *misconception* about consolidation. Participants also noted high start-up costs, upfront transitional equipment costs, and decreased firefighter morale as disadvantages of consolidation. They cited concerns with existing collective-bargaining agreements, particularly those with firefighter unions, as among the biggest challenges to public safety consolidation.

Figure 3: Organizational Structure of Novi, Michigan, Department of Public Safety

Source: Director of Public Safety David Molloy, Novi, Michigan

Conclusions and Implications

Speakers at the seminar noted the need for further research and discussion on consolidation as well as the need to understand how best to execute regionalization, consolidation, and shared services.

Jeremy Wilson noted that what evidence exists is largely anecdotal, based upon scattered and dated case studies. Many questions remain about the options for and feasibility of regionalization, consolidation, and shared services and the contributors to its success and failure. As a result, Wilson said, there are few systematic, data-driven lessons for practitioners and policymakers.

The Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice and the COPS Office have launched a partnership to provide these much needed evidence-based lessons. This effort will include a comprehensive assessment of consolidated public safety services, including a literature review, focus-group research, a national survey of consolidated public safety departments, and further in-depth case studies of both consolidated and deconsolidated public safety departments. It will seek to answer questions on the organization of public safety departments, their short and long-term costs and benefits, contributors to their success or failure, their effects on community policing, and how employees respond when the nature of their jobs change. Additionally, with support from the Michigan State University Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, the School of Criminal Justice will be conducting a statewide survey to assess Michigan residents' opinions about consolidation.

Jurisdictions wishing to regionalize, consolidate, or promote some other sharing of public safety services may wish to use an interest-based approach to doing so, Michael Polzin and Julie Brockman of the Michigan State University School of Human Resources and Labor Relations told the seminar. Such an approach first explores the need for change (e.g., what triggered the change) and prepares for designing the change (e.g., selecting principles to guide the process). The interest-based approach then relies on stating the problem or issue in a single sentence or question, identifying stakeholders and their interests, generating and evaluating options, and crafting a solution.

Participants noted that stakeholders, needs, and interests in public safety consolidation can include the following:

- Elected officials—who must fulfill statutory interests, respect the culture of the community, foster positive community engagement and economic growth, and may fear loss of control
- Administrators—who have concerns about liability, departmental identity, fiscal issues, position security, organizational culture, and employee morale and efficiency
- Employees—who may seek job security and benefits, transparency and opportunities for advancement, and have concerns about leadership and working conditions
- Citizens—who may wish to maintain levels of services, or even seek premium services at lower costs, and may seek more transparency and problem-solving in public safety operations

The options that municipalities have to address these concerns range widely, from consolidation to privatization to changes in taxation to specifying minimum levels of service. The optimal solution will vary by community. The challenge in Michigan, given the statewide initiative to “reinvent government,” is widespread, with other governmental sectors, such as education, perhaps offering lessons to law enforcement agencies as well.



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