



A Statement By Police Executives, Police Labor Leaders, and Elected Officials On Principles for Building Trust and Collaboration February 23, 2015

As we strive to improve policing services and strengthen police-community relationships, we must not overlook the importance of building strong collaboration among police executives, police labor leaders, and local elected officials.

The words and actions of these leaders set the tone for how officers do their jobs and interact with people in the community. Police leaders and elected officials determine policing goals and priorities, and they make decisions that impact both the community and the officers on the street.

In light of these responsibilities, it is critical that police executives, police labor leaders, and elected officials collaborate to develop workable strategies for protecting public safety, strengthening police-community relationships, improving officer safety and wellness, and building more effective police departments.

To explore strategies for improving trust and collaboration, during the past year the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), with support from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), hosted a series of Roundtable Discussions that brought together police executives and labor leaders from around the country. As an example of what can be accomplished when labor and management work together, in November 2014 these leaders reached a groundbreaking agreement in support of mandatory policies requiring officers to use body armor and vehicle seatbelts.¹

At the most recent Roundtable Discussion in February 2015, PERF and the COPS Office invited local elected officials to share their perspectives on how collaboration with law enforcement can improve policing in their communities.

Emerging from these discussions is a set of key principles that participants agreed are critical for improving trust and collaboration between police executives, police labor leaders, and elected officials. We call upon leaders across the country to commit to adopting the following key principles as they work to build relationships with one another:

1. **Focus on finding common ground:** Police executives, labor leaders, and elected officials work towards similar and interconnected goals: protecting the safety and well-being of the community; improving officer safety and wellness; increasing professionalism; and building a police department that effectively carries out its mission of serving the community. By

¹ Statement in Support of Mandatory Body Armor and Seatbelt Wear Policies,
http://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Web_Uploads/body%20armor%20and%20seatbelts.pdf.

focusing on these shared goals—rather than on their differences or on their individual interests—leaders can find common ground on which to build collaboration and trust. Whenever possible, leaders should publicly stand together on key issues. This demonstrates that the local government and all elements of the police department are united in their efforts to serve the community.

2. **Engage in open communication and seek input from one another:** Communication and transparency are key to building trust and collaborative relationships. This means meeting frequently, sharing information, engaging each other in the decision-making process, and seeking to build personal connections with one another. Open communication is important to building strong relationships at all levels, including with rank-and-file officers. Effective communication should be a part of standard training at all levels.
3. **Handle disagreements with respect and professionalism:** Inevitably, there will be times when police executives, labor leaders, and elected officials disagree. When disagreements occur, it is more important than ever to treat each other with respect. This sets a good example for officers, demonstrates professionalism to the community, and ensures that the working relationship—and potential progress—are not irrevocably damaged. This means not taking differences personally, refraining from spreading rumors, and resolving disagreements privately rather than through the news media. If leaders must discuss disagreements publicly, they should give one another notice prior to doing so. Leaders should remember that their words matter—especially when speaking to the media—and should avoid making negative generalizations or criticizing each other’s motives when voicing concerns.
4. **Understand and respect each other’s roles and responsibilities:** Police executives, labor leaders, and elected officials each have distinct responsibilities, must answer to different constituencies, and have perspectives that are informed by their unique experiences and backgrounds. Rather than viewing these differences as obstacles, leaders should strive to learn from one another, understand each other’s perspectives, and acknowledge the challenges and limitations that the other may face.
5. **Recognize the link between promoting officer safety and wellness and building strong police-community relationships:** Police executives and labor leaders agree that there is an important link between officer job satisfaction and performance. Thus, leaders should strive to treat officers the way we want officers to treat people in the community. This means getting input from officers on decisions regarding equipment, new technology, and working conditions, as well as valuing officers’ views regarding policing strategies and tactics. It also means promoting officer safety and wellness and improving responses to officer stress and mental health concerns.

By working together, police executives, labor leaders, and elected officials can make a difference. This is why we have come together to support these principles for building trust and collaboration. **We believe that all leaders should commit to these principles as they strive to improve policing services, strengthen police-community relationships, and build better police departments.**