

[FINAL DRAFT]

Police Department Budgeting:

A Guide for Law Enforcement Chief Executives

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Introduction

Police departments are major participants in municipal budgeting. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, police departments spent \$20.9 billion in 1991-92. To a degree, municipal agencies in the budget process compete with each other for limited resources. In that competition, police departments have a definite advantage: the public's interest in safety. Even as crime rates fall nationwide, most police departments continue to be successful in obtaining federal, state, and local funding. Yet not all departments are equally successful.

Under a grant from the National Institute of Justice of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) undertook this project to discover why and how some police departments are much more successful than others in obtaining funding. The methodology was both quantitative and qualitative. In 1998, PERF sent a survey to all municipal or metropolitan police departments serving more than 50,000 persons. The response rate was 61 percent. In April 1999, PERF held a one-day focus group session with police executives from five agencies. Four criteria were used to select the participants: their departments had been highly successful in increasing their budgets during fiscal years 1997 and 1998; they represented different forms of local government; they were geographically diverse; and they were diverse with respect to the size of population served.

This report summarizes the literature on budgeting by police departments and other government agencies. It then presents the findings of the 1998 PERF survey. Finally, it offers highlights of the 1999 focus group of police executives.

Review

Law enforcement agencies gauge their budgetary success in two ways: (1) whether they have maintained a harmonious working relationship with the local government chief executive and budget staff and (2) how successful they were in expanding their prior year's base budget or, in times of fiscal retrenchment, how successful they were in defending their base against cuts. Duncombe and Kinney found that state agency heads believed that keeping a good relationship was much more important than increasing appropriations (1987: 27). Still, getting budget requests funded is an important barometer of budgetary success.

Successful Budget Strategies

Research suggests that police agencies primarily employ these budget strategies:

- Use crime and workload data judiciously.
- Capitalize on sensational crime incidents (ideally not occurring locally).
- Carefully mobilize interest groups.
- Plan strategically.
- Participate carefully in the federal grant process.
- Maintain a close working relationship with the local government chief executive and governing board members.
- Involve all levels of the police department.

Use Data Judiciously. Government executives and police professionals have received considerable guidance on measuring and evaluating police performance. Numerous organizations and researchers have developed measures of patrol services, investigations, traffic services, drug control, crime prevention and control, community policing, and overall police effectiveness.

How do performance indicators relate to budgetary outcomes? Greene, Bynum, and Cordner found that increased workload was the second greatest factor contributing to an increase in positions (1986: 537).

Capitalize on Sensational Crimes. Research on the effect of sensational crimes on police funding decisions has been limited, and results are mixed. One survey indicated that critical incidents were not a significant factor in budgetary success (Greene et al., 1986: 537). However, the study also found that certain critical incidents, such as killings of police officers, were responsible for a “massive infusion of resources into the problem area despite economic conditions, public ideology, or political considerations” (Hudzik et al., 1981).

Mobilize Interest Groups. Government agencies often mobilize interest groups to build support for their budget requests. Wildavsky and Caiden note that federal agencies influence policy makers by finding a clientele, serving it, expanding it, and securing feedback from it (1997: 57-58). Federal agencies are described as forming either iron triangles or issue networks. An iron triangle is a fixed relationship between legislative committees, the agencies they oversee, and their allied interest groups. Issue networks, on the other hand, is a loose-knit, changing relationship between interest groups, involved citizens, experts, and agencies concerned with a particular issue (Heclo, 1979: 102). Police departments tend to form issue networks, not iron triangles. Hudzik found that law enforcement agencies formed relationships with particular constituents to secure funding, but that such relationships were highly transitory, rising to support an agency one year and disappearing the next (1978).

Police departments have always had a natural constituency of neighborhood groups, civic organizations, and business groups concerned about crime. Moreover, the widespread adoption of community policing has greatly expanded both the formal and informal ties that police departments have to the community. Police agencies place school resource officers in public schools and meet routinely with established neighborhood organizations, civic groups, business groups, and victims’ organizations. In addition to these permanent relationships, police officers form temporary issue networks with community groups to address particular problems, often identified by the citizens themselves. Once the problems are solved, the coalitions dissolve.

Because police departments are so visible in the community and crime is so emotionally laden, police departments enjoy considerable public support, which sometimes manifests itself in the budget process. Police departments have effectively blocked fund-

ing cuts by taking their case to the public (Green et al., 1986). Interest group support can also help police departments obtain more funding.

Plan Strategically. Strategic planning explores policy alternatives, emphasizing the future implications of present decisions (Bryson, 1995: 5). It also develops a statement of long-range goals and objectives and is a sound management practice that should occur before the budget cycle. The long-range strategic plan enables decision makers to make better one-year, operating budget policy decisions. Bryson surmises, however, that most budgets are formed without strategic thought (1995: 152). The reason may be similar to that behind Rubin's finding that some mayors did not want budget performance targets published because they feared that their political opponents would unfairly dwell on missed targets (1990).

Participate Carefully in Federal Grants. Police departments access a variety of external funding sources, primarily grants from state and federal government agencies, foundations, and business groups. Often funds are spent on sophisticated technology, which may increase a police department's effectiveness or efficiency. Technology may free up officers' time, yet technology also may require expensive support. After obtaining a grant, a police executive may find it difficult to obtain additional funding from local government for support and maintenance. Therefore, police executives must take care to think through all the related costs before accepting government grants.

Maintain Close Relationships. It is important for police executives to maintain close working relationships with both government chief executives and elected board members. Those relationships may have to be tailored to the particular officeholders. For some, crime may be an overriding concern, while for others it may not be. Responding quickly and accurately to governing board members is critical.

Involve All Departmental Levels. In the 1980s and 1990s, a marked shift occurred in organization behavior in both the private and public sectors. Viewing the success of the Japanese, especially in manufacturing, American businesses and government agencies adopted such successful techniques as total quality management (TQM), quality circles, reengineering, team engineering, and strategic planning. One cornerstone of these reforms has been employee empowerment. In *Reinventing Government*, David Os-

borne and Ted Gaebler document the success of public agencies that have used empowerment and competition to improve performance.

Survey

Following two waves of pre-tests, the mail survey was administered to 490 municipal police agencies. The sample comprised all police departments serving populations of 50,000 or more. One follow-up to non-respondents was carried out by mail.

The survey yielded 297 responses (61 percent). Consistent with the survey population, responding agencies ranged in size from 100 personnel to 46,431, with a mean of 862 (including both sworn and civilian personnel). Twenty-nine percent of respondents had fewer than 200 personnel, 41 percent had 201-500, and 30 percent had more than 500. The service populations for the responding agencies ranged from 47,500 to 1.822 million, with an average of 208,037.

Key findings are presented in the following categories: personnel spending, budget size indicators, budget growth, budget growth indicators, budget processes, capital budgets, and additional resources.

Personnel Spending. Police agencies responding to the survey spent, on average, 85 percent of their budgets on personnel, ranging from 61 to 98.5 percent.

Budget Size Indicators. The study found a strong correlation between operating budgets and several other indicators: workload (Part I UCR and calls for service), population, and tax revenue. Differences in tax revenue, service population, total number of personnel, and calls for service explained about 90 percent of the variation in agency budgets.

Budget Growth. Most departments reported increases in their operating budgets from one year to the next. To identify agencies successful in the budgetary arena, PERF added the percentage budgetary increases from 1996 to 1997 with increases from 1997 to 1998. Among respondents, the average budgetary increase over that period was 12.7 percent, ranging from a decrease of 9.6 percent to an increase of 60 percent. In this study, 29 police agencies reported large gains—that is, 20 percent or more for the two-year period.

Budget Growth Indicators. Departments with large gains in operating budgets differ in some important ways from the average department in this study. The agencies

reveal no distinction by tenure of the police chief, agency size, or political structure. The most significant difference appears to be population growth. Only 25 percent of departments in this study reported a major increase in population (10 percent or more) from 1992 to 1997. However, among police departments with large increases in their operating budgets, 52 percent had experienced that large amount of population growth.

The policy objectives of police departments highly successful in the budgetary arena also differ from those of the average respondent in the study. PERF's study asked respondents to indicate up to three policy objectives of the agency's chief executive. Departments with the objectives of increasing agency staffing and modernizing the department fared somewhat better in the budgetary process than other agencies. Among all agencies, the most commonly reported objective was to implement or expand community policing. Seventy-four percent of all respondents reported this as one of the chief's primary policy objectives, while only 55 percent of departments with large budget expansions reported community policing as among the top policy objectives.

Major crime events, such as killings of police officers and increases in crime, may also positively affect police funding. The PERF survey found that agencies with large budget increases were slightly more likely to have experienced such critical events.

Budget Processes. The local budgetary process is the relevant policymaking arena for police chiefs, according to Greene et al. (1986). When in danger of losing resources, those authors say, police agencies can benefit significantly by taking their case to the public because police services are a visible local function. Police in this study reported that community groups often have an active voice in the local police budgetary process: 68 percent of respondents reported that neighborhood groups took an active role, 42 percent said business groups did so, and 34 percent reported civic groups as taking such a role. These constituents were heard primarily through public hearings (reported by 62 percent of respondents), lobbying of council members or the mayor (reported by 59 percent), and letter-writing (reported by 41 percent).

The form of budget used also seems to affect police departments' strategic approach to budgeting. The line-item budget is typically considered a mechanism of control (Pursley, 1993; Rubin, 1990; Hudzik, 1978), while program or mission-oriented budgets are more likely to relate policy goals to budgets and hence are useful for police in

meeting policy objectives, such as community policing. In PERF's study, 51 percent of respondents reported that line-item was the sole budget format; 10 percent reported using a program budget format; 5 percent used a performance budget, which is zero-based or target; and 2 percent named a mission-driven budget. Thirty-two percent reported using a combination of these budget formats; two-thirds of those respondents combined program and line-item budgets.

Other budgetary practices, too, may constrain the ability of police departments to engage in linking policing objectives with funding. Over half of respondents reported that budgetary limits or targets are typically set by the mayor, city manager, or finance director. In a third of agencies, budgetary targets or limits are negotiated between the city manager or mayor and department heads, while in 11 percent of agencies, targets or limits are determined by revenue projections. In 92 percent of cases, revenue projections precede or coincide with expenditure projections, providing either an explicit or implicit goal for the budgetary process.

Despite numerous controls of police objectives by the budgetary process, more than half the agencies in this survey (55 percent) have a written strategic plan, and another 13 percent have some form of strategic plan that may be incorporated in council goals or capital improvement plans. Stamper (1992: 154) urges that budgetary processes be the "preeminent management function" and be linked closely with planning processes, especially long-range planning. In contrast to Hanna (1987: 34), who says that police chiefs have little control over budget decisions, "which are ultimately made outside the police department," the existence of long-range strategic plans suggests that police may have an activist role in shaping the jurisdiction's budget.

Capital Budgets. Operating budgets are not the only budgetary issue. In this study, 71 percent of respondents reported they have separate budgets for capital expenditures, 17 percent said they do not, and 13 percent reported they have a somewhat separate capital budget, often depending on the value of items purchased or varying from year to year.

Among departments with separate capital budgets, major technology items (such as dispatch systems or mobile data terminals) and major equipment purchases are the most commonly included expenditures. But capital budgets also include expenditures for

buildings (75 percent of respondents), vehicles (59 percent), and property (48 percent). Despite their inclusion of large-cost items, capital budgets were typically dwarfed by operating budgets. For 1997-1998, among the 164 agencies reporting separate capital and operating budgets, capital budgets exceeded operating budgets in only one department.

Additional Funding Resources. Even operating and capital budgets together do not tell the entire story of the police budget process. Grants are relatively common among police departments, as is shown in the table below. Funds from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) are widely tapped, as are funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). About 47 percent of departments reported receiving discretionary grants from the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Drug Enforcement Administration, Office for Victims of Crime, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

In addition, some departments routinely tap into non-government sources of funding. About 8 percent of agencies reported grants from private foundations in amounts ranging from \$500 to \$242,760. About 10 percent of police agencies received grants from local corporations in amounts ranging from \$414 to \$7,641,214. Police departments with these outside funding sources reported receiving a range of \$1 to \$32 per capita. Success in obtaining grants was somewhat related to having a full-time grant seeker. Overall, 28 percent of respondents reported having a full-time employee or contractor charged with seeking out grants, while 38 percent of the agencies with higher grants per capita reported having at least one full-time grant seeker.

Sources of Grants to Police Departments

Funding Source	Departments Receiving Funds (n=299)	Range
BJA	155	\$1,231-\$28,277,320
COPS	200	\$2,622-\$99,317,610
HUD	88	\$3,366-\$62,682,000
NHTSA	67	\$1,049-\$6,680,701
Foundations	24	\$500-\$242,760
Businesses	30	\$414-\$7,641,214
Discretionary Grants	139	\$6,161-\$21,620,099
Other Sources	130	\$5-\$64,892,873

Roundtable Findings

The PERF survey identified police departments with especially high increases in annual operating budgets. To learn how departments find budget success, PERF invited executives from five such departments to a roundtable meeting in spring 1999. Participants were as follows:

- Chief Jerry Bloechle, Largo (Florida) Police Department
- Chief Douglas L. Bartosh, Scottsdale (Arizona) Police Department
- Deputy Chief Jack Borger, Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department
- Chief Donald Carey, Omaha (Nebraska) Police Department
- Chief Terrence Sheridan, Baltimore County (Maryland) Police Department

Participants said the key to success in obtaining budget increases is *strategy*. Police executives who obtain the budgets they want work within their political systems effectively. They typically have short- and long-range plans, fallback plans, interim plans, program-specific plans, and general plans. They get to know the decision makers and others who affect their requests. They also show creativity in finding alternative sources of revenue, such as government grants or corporate contributions. Such chiefs also make an effort to capitalize on current political and economic circumstances.

Participants' observations and suggestions are presented in three sections: making the case for the budget, building relationships, and seizing opportunities.

Making the Case

Roundtable participants said that to obtain the budgets they want, they must work within their political systems effectively. They carefully define their goals and develop persuasive arguments for reaching those goals.

Participants said police executives must respond to what is considered urgent and at the same time build and maintain a community-oriented law enforcement apparatus. The ideal is to be able to justify extra resources when crime trends show a need but

somehow hold the line when crime rates improve. Having it both ways is not impossible but requires skillful planning.

Community Expectations. Because their departments' efforts are more complex and less "sexy" than political slogans can capture, participants said police executives need to make an articulate case that growth both generates and depends on more effective police services. Community policing's attention to quality-of-life issues is a vital point but one not readily appreciated by the political process, they said. Deputy Chief Borger observed, "The definition of policing has changed..., but politicians understand maybe 20 percent of that new definition." Thus, Chief Carey added, police executives need to educate legislators about new public expectations and the level of service that is desired. He noted, "Politicians need to understand that...if budgets are cut, expectations will not be met."

Some police department goals may have a greater effect on budget success than others. In Largo, for example, police respond to traffic accidents in parking lots, even though that is not a common practice elsewhere. Chief Bloechle said the community is happy with that service, but such work is not reflected in crime statistics. Thus, it is important for police executives to provide politicians with a new definition of policing, one that emphasizes the range of services that are important to the community.

Similarly, in Baltimore County, the crime rate declined as more criminals were incarcerated, drug use dropped, and the police increased their prevention efforts. The decrease in crime does not create a sense of urgency that would boost the case for increasing the department's budget. However, citizen satisfaction and safety surveys indicate that residents want the crime rate to remain at its new, lower level. Therefore, for budget purposes, the goal may have to be stated as maintaining a low crime rate, not combating a high one.

The Fruits of Growth. In jurisdictions with growing populations, the argument that "growth pays for itself" may be especially persuasive to decision makers. For example, people are moving from the city of Baltimore to Baltimore County, and the over-65 and under-14 groups are growing fastest. This situation makes it easier for police to obtain funds to address elder abuse and youth issues. In fact, the Baltimore County Police

Department now has an elder abuse unit. Participants agreed that obtaining higher budgets is easier when the economy is flourishing and more difficult during a recession.

Problem Solving. Community policing's emphasis on problem solving sometimes leads to results that are very satisfying to the public. In Baltimore County, for example, where a third of violent-crime arrestees were juveniles, the police department assigned a captain to head a school resource officer program with the public schools. In the pilot program, officers were posted full-time to two high schools. They spent time in classrooms, teaching conflict resolution, violence reduction, and other prevention topics. The decrease in calls for service in the schools and surrounding areas was so great, Chief Sheridan said, that the police department is expanding the program to eight more schools. He hopes to include all 24 high schools in Baltimore County within the next three school years and then to begin including middle schools. Thus, what began as a general goal, reducing juvenile crime, has evolved into a program that solidifies police alliances with youth and the school system. A small budget outlay (three positions and some support) led to widespread political support and commensurate budget increases.

Force Multiplication. Police technology is a major budget issue that can raise tension between police departments and decision makers. Roundtable participants differentiated between equipment that increases efficiency and that which increases effectiveness. Some equipment clearly serves as a "force multiplier," freeing up officers' time. Such equipment increases *efficiency* by reducing costs. For example, a dictation system enables officers to dictate in less than 10 minutes what would take over 20 minutes to type. Other equipment, however, may decrease efficiency yet increase *effectiveness*. For example, laptops and mobile data terminals allow officers to check license plates expeditiously. *Effectiveness* is thereby increased, but efficiency is decreased (that is, overall costs go up) because of the need for support personnel.

Sensitive to this distinction, Chief Bloechle had the opportunity to use grant funds to buy laptops at \$5,000 apiece but decided instead to buy personal digital assistants for \$700 in order to avoid the need to hire additional support personnel.

Details of Budgeting. Most police executives at the roundtable discussion said they rely on budget staff to perform the details of budget drafting, while the executives themselves concentrate on defining the department's mission and developing staff.

Budget Flexibility. A budget that specifies, in great detail, what money goes where can create awkward inflexibility for police executives. Chief Bloechle observed, “There was a lack of flexibility to move money where the problem was.... [Reducing the number of specific, budgeted programs gave] division and sector commanders the ability to move things around and spend the funds where they feel they need to.... It’s very important, in this day and age, to be able to respond to emerging problems.”

Scottsdale operates on a modified zero-based budgeting system, also known as performance budgeting. Said Chief Bartosh, “It helps us to make maximum use of our budget. If we identify areas that no longer present a priority, we can take that money and move it somewhere else...based on the overall critical objectives and our goals.” Scottsdale’s two-year budget cycle makes this flexibility more useful; the budget process takes less time and resources than if it were done annually, and the zero-based option makes up any responsiveness that the longer cycle could compromise. According to Chief Bartosh, “Again, the emphasis is on strategic planning. If you’re doing good strategic planning, you shouldn’t have to come in mid-budget cycle and change things around.”

Building Relationships

Participants identified several aspects of relationship building that they felt were essential to getting budgets approved.

Knowledge of Administrators’ Standards and Needs. Roundtable participants stressed the importance of developing personal relationships with council members or city administrators in order to learn how they view their responsibilities in approving spending. For example, Largo takes pride in having the lowest city tax rate in the state, a position gained by conservative spending. Knowing that situation, Chief Bloechle said he asks “only for ‘got to have’ things, not ‘nice to have’ things, and we very carefully justify them.” Citing a mobile computing program, he added, “But give me something that makes sense as a force multiplier.... Those are the kinds of things they want me to tell them. They want me to tell them this is cost-effective, a better use of the police officer’s time, so that when I make that proposal it’s credible.”

Chief Sheridan added, “You have to have the relationship first. It’s terribly important. My relationship with the county executive goes back 25 years to when he was prosecutor in Baltimore County, so our feeling about crime is pretty similar.”

Satisfying administrators’ needs and concerns also helps in the budget process. Chief Sheridan observed that he encourages city council members to come to the police department with their problems, and the department responds quickly. “With that kind of service,” he explained, “they don’t have an issue with what the police department does.”

Chief Bartosh pointed out that his “terrific” relationship with the city manager and council makes public safety “an absolutely top priority.” When contacted by a citizen about a neighborhood problem, the city manager or a council member notifies the police department, which moves fast to resolve the problem. Chief Bartosh noted, “It makes us look good, it makes them look good, and that’s kind of the relationship we [cultivate] with the council.”

Chief Carey noted, “We try to operate based upon a healthy, mutual respect of what their needs may be, as well as what the city’s overall policing needs are. The secret for us is to build relationships and meet the particular needs of those constituencies through various programs by various initiatives, so we’re constantly changing gears—between an overall strategy of policing and then putting out brush fires or addressing the hot spots in certain political districts.”

Community policing, too, can improve key relationships. Chief Bloechle explained, “We tend to reject the idea that community-oriented policing is a PR program. We know it’s much deeper than that, but if it has the effect of changing the community’s perception of their police department, that [has an impact on politicians]. They are more willing to support us when the people say they like us and when we’re supporting all of their programs.”

Participants noted also that a police executive does not have to like council members or city administrators in order to respect them. It is important, however, to be aware of their styles and preferences and how best to deal with them.

Strategic Use of Access and Information. Chief Bloechle assured one of his skeptics on the city commission, “If your primary source of information about the police is the news in the media, then you’re going to hear a lot of negative stuff.” The chief

brought the commissioner into his office, pointed to his file cabinets, and said, “If you want to go through my information, there it is.” The relationship was immediately changed, and the commissioner began to see issues from both sides, the chief reported.

Chief Bartosh observed, “As politicians, council members don’t like to be surprised. They like to be on the inside of things, to have the inside information.”

Judicious Use of Citizen Advocacy. Most of the chiefs said that urging citizen groups to pressure politicians can be disadvantageous. Citizen advocacy, Chief Bartosh observed, is likely to be seen as a threat. Chief Bloechle said that he would be “very hesitant” to ask citizens to rise up and apply leverage on politicians. “Elected officials,” he observed, “can’t hope to have that kind of connection with the people who live in the community or even with the business community...so if they see us consolidating and using that [access] to overcome their own [agenda], I think that could backfire on you.”

Most participants agreed that citizen support works best when applied indirectly. For example, activists could work to establish a positive tone in the media about a particular need.

Citizen involvement can be a positive force in budget matters when bond issues or public initiatives arise, participants noted. If the goal of the fund-raising is a police-related matter, police executives can promote their cause at neighborhood and community meetings and functions. An alliance to lobby for this kind of direct benefit is not likely to be politically controversial.

Working with the Media. News media influence the public’s perception of crime and politics, participants observed, so police executives and others in their agencies should learn how the media work and how to make them, if not allies, at least not enemies of the agency’s agenda and budget.

It makes sense, police executives noted, to train agency employees to “interview well” from the police point of view. However, Chief Carey observed, in the final analysis, “Nobody builds credibility with the media. Build credibility with the community.” Also, if newspapers and news shows want sound bites, police executives should turn to crime statistics, offering comparisons to previous years, neighboring jurisdictions, or national trends.

Chief Bloechle said a newspaper editor told him that accurate, in-depth crime reporting was too “cerebral” for most readers. Chief Sheridan felt that in fact the media outlets themselves simply did not want to tackle complex stories.

Structuring Internal Communication. Participants also raised the notion of spreading budget issues more widely in police agencies. Deputy Chief Borger called for “increasing the number of people in your organization who are trained or willing to participate in the budget.... If they understood the process a little better, I think you’d have better results.”

The Largo Police Department also benefits from involving “literally everyone in the organization, from the bottom up, in the preparation of that budget,” Chief Bloechle said. Doing so “contributes to our credibility in the submission that we make because the elected officials and city administration by now understand that every element of the organization is involved in preparing that budget.”

However, chiefs should take care not to cede power to specialists who do not fully understand agency needs. According to Chief Carey, “A police chief needs to set direction and tone and have just enough budgeting knowledge to be an effective manager.” Chiefs may not be technical experts, but they “need to know enough so that specialists can be [harnessed to] fit into the entire conceptual design of where you want to go.”

A related issue is whether budget managers should be civilians or sworn officers. Four of the five police executives in the roundtable had civilian budget managers; the fifth had an officer who was appropriately qualified. Participants noted that while civilian budget managers might, in general, be better trained, sworn budget managers might be more likely to stay with their departments and would certainly be better able to “speak cop.”

When an agency uses a civilian budget manager, Chief Carey cautioned, “it’s critical to have somebody in the next layer who has a conceptual understanding of how budget and work programs fit into the philosophy of the department.... You need to have cops somewhere in the process, overseeing what happens, so they can put everything together...with the management philosophy of the department.”

Another communication issue that may affect budgeting arises when there is a gap between working cops and information technology (IT) staff. Chief Bloechle observed

that “what is most efficient and cost-effective from [IT’s] standpoint may not have anything to do with what we are trying to accomplish in the field. There can be some real difficulty communicating with the folks who are wired into that computer all day long. Quality customer service [may not be] what drives them.”

Seizing Opportunities

Police executives noted that certain trends, incidents, and changes of philosophy could present opportunities to increase budgets or obtain needed items.

Major Crime Incidents. Roundtable participants stated that if police executives have developed the kinds of relationships described above, then some crime-related incidents that arise—locally or elsewhere—present an opportunity to enhance programs. The success of requests for equipment, training, and other budget items can be influenced by a number of perceptions: Is crime threatening to rise in the jurisdiction? Has there been an incident that threw a harsh spotlight on the need for some previously disapproved budget item? Did a regional or national case demonstrate the need for training, personnel, or equipment that the department does not currently have? As Deputy Chief Borger observed, “It’s almost a law of nature. When any jurisdiction anywhere makes a major mistake...we all look to our own operations, and ask ‘Could that happen here? Do we have that problem?’”

Especially powerful is the killing of a police officer. Such an incident may generate outrage and usually creates genuine sympathy throughout the community. Politicians and decision makers may find themselves wondering, “What can we do to make sure this never happens again?” The actual answer may be “not much,” but in the wake of the tragedy, police departments may be the beneficiaries of a legislative gesture that upgrades the force.

Even when there is no evidence that a specific piece of technology or other resource would have prevented an incident, the political reaction to the incident may result in that item being provided. Participants mentioned such resources as forward-looking infrared (FLIR) devices for helicopters and better lab equipment. For example, Deputy Chief Borger said that after a serial killer case in the Charlotte area that was not solved until 10 women were killed, the department’s homicide unit is now “much better

equipped. It's about two and a half times the size it was then." Similarly, in Omaha, after a suspect was killed in the minority community, the police department received funding for "new combat training programs, as well as training in avoiding confrontations and using the full spectrum of the force continuum," Chief Carey observed.

Once a department has received special resources, it may be useful to demonstrate their use. Chief Carey said his department made videotapes showing how a helicopter-mounted FLIR camera was used to catch "burglary and robbery suspects in salvage yards and other places where the cops could not see them. That opened some eyes."

Crime Trends. Participants pointed out that the crime rate is usually not a major factor in budget success. They noted, however, that targeting police efforts at specific types of crimes in particular hot spots convinces policymakers to spend more for crime reduction. For example, Chief Sheridan gathered data showing that one-third of all violent crime was being committed by juveniles. After he presented the data to the county executive and governing board, additional monies were appropriated to hire school resource officers (SROs) and to build recreation centers. Consequently, juvenile crime declined significantly, giving the chief evidence to obtain future funding for other targeted efforts.

Chief Carey pointed out that he has been "trying to [draw the] focus away from equating success in government with reduction in reported crime because we all know that crime is under-reported, and the more people become confident in your ability to handle crime, the more they tend to report crime. I tried to tell the mayor that if we're successful, reported crime is going to first go up. Then it will level off and probably go down as our programs come into place and actually have results." Participants noted that because many factors besides policing practices affect crime rates, emphasizing those rates may not be the best approach at budget time.

Community Policing and Information Sharing. Certain techniques of community policing, several participants noted, give police executives leverage in the budget process. By responding to what citizens are asking for, police departments assume a strong position in the budget battle. Several participants agreed that an effective question to ask political decision makers was, "Just which of these services—services people demand and are happy with—should we stop providing?"

Community policing's emphasis on information gathering and analysis may give police departments more accurate information on what is happening in the city than any other government agency. Chief Sheridan observed, "Police officers are out there seven days a week, 24 hours a day, dealing with these issues. They have a better sense of what's going on throughout the county than most other organizations do." For example, the Baltimore County Police Department has a unit dedicated to scanning, forecasting, and planning. Other government agencies turn to that unit for information.

Chief Bloechle noted, "Ten years ago I couldn't imagine the police chief having a seat at the table with city administration when they were talking about the strategic plan. That was the planners' stuff, the city manager's stuff.... That's a big change in the influence police departments have in the overall process of government."

To keep other political actors from feeling at a disadvantage, roundtable participants agreed that an open policy about information is best, in part to overcome the historical image of the police as keeping information secret.

Police agencies can share information through several means. Community newspapers and city magazines often focus on police issues, so departments may find it useful to provide them with information. Police agencies may also find the Internet a good medium. Chief Bartosh explained, "We put crime information up monthly so that people can dial up our website and find out precisely what the property crime is like in their area. Even our budgets go on the Web." Providing information directly to the community via the Internet may help by reducing the impact of media stories.

Citizen surveys, too, may blunt the impact of negative news stories. In Charlotte, for example, Deputy Chief Borger observed a disconnect between the sensationalistic reporting in the news and how citizens actually felt about the police. He said that through surveys, the department documented that citizens felt safer and had a higher level of satisfaction with the police. The survey evidence refuted news stories that made crime seem high and showed the city council that there was no cause for blaming the police.

In Omaha, Chief Carey said, the police invited media outlets' assignment editors to a catered meeting and then took them to an interstate overpass to demonstrate how the newest laser technology—which happened to be a photogenic device—could be used effectively. In a concentrated effort to reduce speeding, the department wrote 25,000

speeding tickets in 31 days. The applause poured into the newspaper, and “the media played it up.... We even used a helicopter to locate and follow [instances of] road rage. We would follow these people to their houses, knock on their doors, and arrest them.” That, too, drew applause, and it made great pictures. “We used the media,” Chief Carey explained. “We dumbed [the message] down and showed them how this makes a difference in the way we live, and they bought into it.”

Grants and Other Support. Grants and other sources of funding present both an opportunity and a danger, participants noted. For example, Chief Bloechle said federal demonstration projects for technology have been “extremely successful” in Largo, where the government philosophy has been to hold the line on taxes. However, when it came to federal support for community policing officer positions, several commissioners were wary of the strings attached, realizing that accepting the federal support would obligate them to fund those positions ultimately. Still, because “no elected official really wants to be in a position of saying, ‘Let’s lay these cops off,’” Chief Bloechle predicted that in fiscal year 2000 local decision makers would take money from another city department rather than raise property taxes to fund COPS officers.

The same challenge seems to apply to technology grants. Deputy Chief Borger said his department uses grant money to buy technology, but local politicians are reluctant to pick up the cost of maintaining it. “We have a \$12-\$13 million investment in technology, which...[could be] jeopardized because they won’t spend general fund money to maintain and update it,” he added.

Baltimore County, Chief Sheridan explained, takes advantage of any grant money it can find. For example, grant money that comes to the school system for drug education is being used to fund a police department-based program. When programs are successful, the police department is committed to trying to continue them with general funds. But, Chief Sheridan warned, the department must tell council members honestly whether a program is working so they can decide whether it is worthy of support by general budget funds after the grant expires.

In addition to federal funds, roundtable participants said they tap other sources of support. In Baltimore County, about two dozen major corporations fund an organization called the Police Foundation, which provides resources for the Baltimore County Police

Department: cash, staff, and training and education (including sites and trainers). In Omaha, Chief Carey hired a fundraiser to work for the executive director of a police foundation. The fundraiser will attempt to obtain funds from some of Omaha's charitable foundations, which number over 300. Chief Carey said, "I call it creative budgeting, and we hope it will provide us upwards of a million dollars a year." Other police departments work directly with local businesses, which are eager to help improve public safety. For example, Charlotte operates four rent-free substations in shopping centers; in Scottsdale, businesses donated land to build a police station.

MIS Technology. Technology, participants said, usually comes into the budget under the capital improvement program (CIP) process. Both state and federal RICO money can be used (with certain restrictions); other outside funding sources can also be tapped. On occasion, Chief Bartosh said, voters are asked to approve a special bond issue earmarked specifically for technology or other big-ticket capital improvements. In procuring technology, police executives need to analyze "future costs—what it will eventually cost to support all that technology" Chief Bloechle pointed out.

Participants said they found it particularly challenging to argue for technology spending. It is not hard to demonstrate the need for technology, but convincing politicians that the technology will work and will not become obsolete immediately can be difficult. Chief Bloechle observed, "In a conservative fiscal environment, my elected officials are going to ask those kinds of hard questions: Can you show me what works, where it works, how it works? What's it going to do? What's the net effect? You can't blame them, when they can pick up the paper and read horror stories about agencies in our area who purchased a new system that then collapsed and they had to go out and replace it."

Chief Bloechle lamented the conflicting stories about what technologies work well for police agencies, as well as the rapid obsolescence. Chief Sheridan said it would be helpful to have a clearinghouse of information about the reliability of companies that supply technology to police departments.

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