

Facing the Economic Crisis

Challenges for Massachusetts Police Chiefs

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Facing the Economic Crisis

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Executive Summary

Police chiefs across Massachusetts are embroiled in an extraordinary management struggle – balancing unrelenting public safety demands while adapting to drastic reductions in resources. The general public may not instinctively think of local police chiefs as executive-level managers engulfed by the financial and operational effectiveness of their organizations, but the exceptional financial state of the Commonwealth and municipalities requires a new level of human and financial management by police chiefs and local administrators. There remain high expectations from the community and local officials as a result of community policing and increased community participation in public safety and increased pressures for transparency and accountability. The interplay between these factors calls for a more sophisticated system for managing the contemporary police organization. More than simply “top cops,” today’s police chiefs must serve as a public safety executive, identifying ways to maintain and improve public safety in the face of rapidly declining resources, increasing costs, and limited flexibility in this time of economic adversity.

To understand the experiences and challenges of local police chiefs, we interviewed six (6) Massachusetts police chiefs who represent the Commonwealth’s “Middle Cities.” In-depth interviews offered insight into the operational, strategic and community challenges facing police chiefs as a result of the state’s current economic crisis.

Police chiefs reported on the significant management resources directed towards developing and revising budgets, an inescapable side-effect of the constantly changing financial environment. While their experiences and strategies mimic many in the private and non-profit sectors, the pressures surrounding budgetary decision making are decidedly different for public safety managers. Investments in community policing strategies are being tested,

and increasing expectations to demonstrate value to citizens and civic leaders alike create additional pressures on public safety leaders. The chiefs interviewed expressed frustration with two common and reasonable demands: to engage with the public in a meaningful and valuable way and direct sufficient resources to emergency calls for service. While the chiefs have been able to balance these proactive and responsive services, they report that it is increasingly difficult to do.

Financial predictions for the coming fiscal years are dismal, and chiefs are holding on to those strategies which allow them to get the biggest bang for their buck. These chiefs believe that safe and thriving communities require continued investment in proactive work and emergency response strategies, and they believe community economic development is directly linked to public safety. As a result, the chiefs are being strategic in the way that they address resource shortfalls. Grant programs from state and federal governments allow the chiefs to address technology or equipment shortcomings, among other gaps, and their agencies aggressively pursue these resources. Further, they are committed to partnerships with local, state, federal, non-profit organizations, and the community. Through these partnerships they work to sustain the many gains achieved through the adoption of community and problem-oriented policing. The community connections, innovative and proactive engagement, and resource multiplication that have been realized through these partnerships have helped them get through this time of financial shortfall.

This paper provides a brief account of experiences and challenges facing police chiefs in several mid-sized cities in Massachusetts, the factors which impact their decision making and the strategies they utilize, and discusses the various ways in which chiefs are adapting to changing financial and social contexts.

The Middle Cities

The Middle Cities Initiative

The Middle Cities Initiative, spearheaded by the Pioneer Institute, focuses on Massachusetts historic industrial centers. Middle Cities are defined as older industrial cities in a state of political uncertainty due to their position between the traditional power base of greater Boston and the growing political strength of the suburbs, and transitioning between their former industrial role and newer market functions.

The Pioneer Institute has been working with the executive leadership of Middle Cities - City Managers and Mayors - with a focus on revitalization. It has become increasingly clear to those who lead urban communities that an important factor in improving the economic environment of communities is public safety. Therefore, a focused examination of public safety was a natural next step for the Pioneer Institute in working with leaders in the revitalization of their communities. In fact, similar conversations are already underway at the national level, beginning in 2008, when the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) initiated discussions with police

chiefs across the country on the impact of the economic crisis on public safety.¹

The current study focused on police leaders representing these Middle Cities in Massachusetts, and included interviewing a geographically diverse group of police chiefs to ensure a cross-state perspective. Of the 14 communities identified as part of the Middle Cities initiative, we completed interviews with six cities' police chiefs. The table below outlines the comparative populations and relative geographic locations of the six communities detailed in this report.²

Demographics of the Middle Cities

Population growth for Middle Cities in this study has been uneven, with 2008 population counts falling short of US Census predictions despite population increases in the years immediately following the 2000 Census. Additionally, some Middle Cities have needed to adapt to rapid expansion and contraction of their city populations in the intermediate years between 2000 and 2008.³

As shown in Table 2, some cities highlighted in this study have been more economically fortunate

Table 1: Population and Geography

Community	Population (2000)*	Population (2008)**	Distance from Boston[^]	Geographic Region
Middle Cities Included in Study				
Brockton	94,304	95,650	25 mi (S)	Southeast
Fall River	91,938	90,760	67 mi (S)	South
Fitchburg	39,102	40,377	54 mi (NW)	Central
Lawrence	72,043	69,812	30 mi (N)	Northeast
Lynn	89,050	90,042	14 mi (NE)	North Shore
Springfield	152,082	151,249	90 mi (SW)	West
For Comparison				
Boston	589,141	604,465	-----	[Metro]

* US Census data.

** As reported by city police departments to US Department of Justice as "population coverage".

[^] Approximate distance by car, directionality in parentheses.

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Table 2: Income and Unemployment

Community	Median Household Income *		Unemployment Rate^		
	2000	2008	2000	2008	2009
Brockton	\$39,507	\$51,835	3.4	6.8	10.7
Fall River	\$29,014	\$35,633	5.1	9.4	14.0
Fitchburg	\$37,004	\$49,581	3.5	7.2	11.6
Lawrence	\$27,983	\$32,007	5.6	10.6	16.4
Lynn	\$37,364	\$42,933	3.2	6.3	9.9
Springfield	\$30,417	\$41,478	4.1	7.9	11.7
For Comparison					
Boston	\$39,629	\$51,849	3.0	5.2	8.1

* US Census data.

^ Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

than others. Communities such as Brockton had larger economic gains between 2000 and 2008, with median household income rising 31%, and in 2009 has weathered the economic storm better than more than three-fourths of all Middle Cities in the Initiative. In stark contrast, Lawrence saw household incomes rise by just 14% (from a lower starting point) and had the highest average unemployment rate - nearly one-sixth of the labor force.

Common Challenges Facing the Six Middle Cities

Even though there are obvious demographic and geographic differences among the communities studied, when asked about challenges facing their respective communities, the police chiefs were nearly unanimous. Three interrelated themes emerged from all six leaders: 1) the declining economy; 2) the lack of commercial tax base as a source of revenue; and 3) the perception of the city as an unsafe area. The chiefs recognize the overlaps in these issues, and in many ways these challenges are mutually reinforcing.

In the case of the economy, the decline has led to significant joblessness. Unemployment and lack of economic opportunity lead to decreased stability of families and individuals. Foreclosures impact not just individual homeowners; one chief reported the foreclosure of multi-tenant

buildings led to the sudden homelessness of 90 families. Though just one case reported, the chief suggested that this case will likely impact the schools, social services, and possibly the public safety systems in the community. The lack of revenue for the community results in fewer or limited funding for essential services, not just police services. While this may not obviously relate to “public safety,” this chief noted that the health and welfare of citizens has a direct impact the overall well-being of the community – which is of great concern to the police. At least two of the chiefs in this study recognize and consider the plight of other service organizations in this economic climate. “We’re more reliant on each other now,” said one chief, of other public and non-profit agencies.

Additionally, the lack of a strong commercial tax base has hit communities especially hard, as the property tax revenue has, as one chief bluntly stated “tanked.” Instead, cities are more reliant on state aid to local governments (referred to as “local aid”). In fact, the chief of one community reported 70% of the municipal operating expenses were from local aid, thus there is even more reliance on this funding for essential services. Even shallow cuts to local aid at the state level can create a financial crisis at the local level. One chief cited this as the number one challenge facing his community, but it is a hard fix: the geographic location of the city means it is

hard to attract commercial development; however without economic development, he perceives his city is “left out of state-level planning” as there is little growth to attract attention of state policymakers.

An overlapping challenge facing both the community and the police department centers on the perception of safety. A reduction of service affects perceptions, thus affecting how residents, visitors and businesses feel about the community. The majority of the chiefs interviewed reported that reduced resources for quality of life issues (i.e. loitering, graffiti, and even support services) will impact the impressions citizens and visitors have of the community. They know that if there is a perception of crime and disorder, then businesses and families will reconsider that community. Thus, chiefs are challenged by this vicious cycle, as one chief said, “It’s a Catch 22. There are no resources to increase public safety. Decreased economic development means decreased public safety.”

All of chiefs interviewed were adamant about the connections between the challenges of economic development and employment, and the resulting decisions and responses from their departments. They are clear that the availability of resources for public safety is directly tied to revenue. Across all interviewed, the common challenges facing their

police departments are 1) crime 2) community expectations; and 3) resources. The table below shows the numbers of crimes reported in three different years. These numbers were reported to the Department of Justice by the community departments and retrieved from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics online database.⁴

Public safety executives are as expected, concerned about what’s happening on the street. Just under half of the respondents to the PERF national survey expressed concerns about the increased levels of crime at a time when budgets are shrinking.⁵ The chiefs interviewed here in Massachusetts mention an uptick in violent gang activity and drug dealing. One chief summarized the two major crime concerns as such: “Drugs fuel most crimes – B and E’s [breaking and entering], robberies, prostitution, car break-ins. We can’t specialize [fewer task forces] because of the reduction of personnel.”

Additionally, all six Massachusetts chiefs reported significant increases in the number of and accessibility to guns and weapons – one reporting a three-fold increase in the number of guns confiscated by the department in just four years. The concern was articulated by one chief who said, “When there are more weapons, lethality is greater. More lethality results in

Table 3: Public Safety Statistics: Reported Crimes

Crimes Reported (Type)	2000		2005		2008	
	Violent	Property	Violent	Property	Violent	Property
Community						
Brockton	996	3,877	1,158	3,710	1,151	3,050
Fall River	548	3,079	1,171	3,654	1,089	3,528
Fitchburg	431	1,692	345	1,080	288	1,182
Lawrence	649	3,431	584	1,711	456	1,979
Lynn	1,021	3,756	1,070	2,925	824	3,017
Springfield	2,791	9,798	2,692	8,703	1,898	7,351
For Comparison						
Boston	7,322	28,548	7,479	25,205	6,676	22,429

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lengthy and more in-depth investigations, thus a toll on police resources.”

To adequately address the widespread problems of both drug activity and gang activity, these chiefs report utilizing a comprehensive strategy that includes suppression and enforcement, prevention, intervention and the connection to other social and educational services through referral or direct partnerships. An interesting example noted by one chief: Prevention of gang and drug crime in immigrant communities is difficult, as traditionally these communities harbor a deep mistrust of police. His department has cultivated partnerships with “informal leaders” within the communities to assist such outreach efforts. Other departments have strong relationships with non-profit and other governmental agencies that provide support services needed to implement comprehensive programs which aim to address the root causes of violence, gangs, and substance abuse. The police departments have become a vital part in these service networks. Engaging a variety of stakeholders in the comprehensive prevention, intervention and enforcement efforts requires substantial police time and energy. All of the chiefs we interviewed talked about the role of these comprehensive efforts in dealing with community challenges, such as gang violence. With dwindling resources, the personnel responsible for maintaining these extra-organization networks are often cut first. As one chief stated “Street crime units have unfilled vacancies - investigate divisions suffer before patrol... Hard to [stay] proactive... too reactive and you can’t do what you want.” State grants such as the Shannon Community Safety Initiative support comprehensive approaches when they would normally be eliminated because of budget cuts.

Given their reductions in staffing dedicated to some of these “wicked” problems, the chiefs interviewed were anxious to find ways to deal with these growing community safety concerns as they continue to grapple with reduced budgets. As noted previously, families are under

extreme stress and social service providers are close behind. When police and social service resources are adequate, the police are able to serve as a resource to residents in need. This supports police-community connections. In fact, as one chief in the PERF report pointed out “a strong police-community relationship can reduce feelings of desperation in bad times”.⁶ So, engagement with the community and service providers is more important now than ever.

Since the inception of community policing, residents have been living under different circumstances whereby the police are very active and engaged and 911 response doesn’t interfere.⁷ In the past, the chiefs interviewed here, and across the nation would assign officers and police managers to attend neighborhood meetings so that residents could meet and talk with those street-level officers assigned to their neighborhoods, and so that the manager could explain management decisions, or make on-the-spot decisions. All of the Massachusetts chiefs report that they are no longer able to consistently and predictably dedicate an officer or more to neighborhood meetings, walking a beat downtown, or to the middle and elementary schools.

A common theme related to this dynamic was a frustration both with the inability to be more proactive and contribute more to improving the quality of life in their communities due to budget and staff reductions, and a sense of greater expectations from the community expectations. “Citizens want visibility,” according to one chief. “They want precincts, beats, bikes.”

Staffing shortages brought on by layoffs, retirements and vacancies, and the significant reductions in equipment and capital improvements are foremost on the minds of these Middle Cities chiefs. While reductions in personnel may be the strategy of last resort, the fact that the majority of police budgets are dedicated to salaries and wages makes personnel costs inevitable in some cases.⁸ One succinct quote summed the sentiment from all six chiefs:

“Most money is people, so that’s all there’s left to cut.” The reduction in human resources requires a daily assessment of operations and deployment, usually involving competing priorities.

The chiefs are committed to proactive visibility and engagement, but must consider these priorities in relation to minimum staffing and emergency calls for service. These frustrations are illustrated through the comments of the chiefs. One chief noted, “How can you be proactive in this context?” while another says, “We are bracing for 2011.” In turn, there exists an overall anxiousness and uncertainty about future funding which remains a significant distraction for management, staff and officers on the street. Chiefs grapple with how they can allocate their resources to be both proactive and reactive given the resource challenges that face them.

Experiences of Some Massachusetts Police Chiefs in a Time of Economic Decline

The next several pages provide further details of the experiences, challenges and strategies of six Massachusetts Police Chiefs who are facing significant financial challenges in their own communities and in the police departments they manage. The section begins with a description of how the chiefs were selected and what experiences have brought them to their current positions.

Methodology

The Pioneer inquiry set out to interview Middle Cites police chiefs. The primary criteria for selection was to select a geographically diverse group of police leaders who could report on their actual and perceived impacts of budget cuts on their management, operations and service to the community. Of the 14 cities, we were able to schedule and complete 6 interviews. Interviews were conducted with chiefs from Brockton, Fitchburg, Lawrence, Lynn, New Bedford,

Springfield. As was the objective, geographic diversity was foremost on our minds.

The interviews took place either in person or over the telephone and ranged from one to one and a half hours in length. The chiefs were provided with the questions in advance of the interview to best prepare. The questions served as a general guide for the conversation. In at least three of the cases, others from the Police management joined the interview, to provide additional or more detailed insights into budget changes, resource allocation or grant status.

Using established qualitative data analysis methodologies, the data from each question was compared across interviewees. This comparison showed common themes as well as unique responses. These results were summarized and are presented here as part of the story playing out here in Massachusetts.

The Police Chiefs

In terms of interviewees’ professional experience, four of the six chiefs had “risen through the ranks” in their current organizations, with the remaining two having been brought in from outside the organization. All of our interviewee’s have spent their careers in law enforcement. This development resembles police leaders’ trajectories in American society.⁹ These chiefs have had a wide range of organizational experiences such as running specialty units and serving as executive officers (i.e. Deputy Chief, Captains). Of the six, four had experience serving as the fiscal oversight officer over the course of their careers, some of those experiences preparing them for the financial crisis they experience today. Two of the chiefs had no prior experience with budgets before taking over. Their collective tenure at their current posts is rather short: Only one chief has experience of longer than five years in his current position.

The police chiefs report similar experiences in terms of their current role in police department budget decision-making, and there are similarities

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in the process of preparing and submitting their organization's budget to local administrators. As noted, the interviews revealed that two-thirds of the Chiefs had prior experience in the budgeting processes prior to becoming chief of police. Previous management assignments within their department, or affiliations with credit unions or professional associations, provided them with the budgeting knowledge and experience they so badly need today. These experiences were cited as invaluable. Depending on the departmental structure, budget preparation and review is performed by either sworn (e.g., Captains) and/or civilian (i.e., budget analyst) staff, and each of the chiefs works closely with these internal experts to manage the department's financial resources. It is with these staff members that the chief reacts to the constantly changing financial situations facing their organizations and communities.

The Reality of Today's Budget Process

The budget preparation process happens parallel to police chief's daily responsibilities of public safety service delivery. In fact, as chiefs work through budget preparation and identify potential cost saving measures, they must also tackle the realities of operationalizing these measures in real-time. These chiefs report going from meeting to meeting planning for cuts and notifying personnel of the consequences. During the past two budget cycles, chiefs have seen millions of dollars cut from their budgets.¹⁰ The current budgets for our representative agencies range from just under \$6 million dollars to over \$37 million. The chiefs reported that they experienced cuts for the fiscal year 2010 from between \$1.1 to 3 million dollars. Further, they expect additional cuts in 2011 but have no real indices of exactly how deep those cuts will be. These experiences mirror what was detailed in the PERF report where chiefs have already experienced several budget cycle reductions, and are planning for reductions in the coming years (2009).

The Massachusetts chiefs reported that the current economic crisis has brought police

organization finances to the forefront of police management in an unprecedented way. One chief emphasized this point in this way: "We talk about the budget every day; it affects every decision that we make in this department."

The centralization of budget reporting is idiosyncratic to each community, although there are similarities. In at least two cases, the chiefs reported the use of exceptionally systematic budget management and preparation processes. In at least one case, police managers (e.g. Captains) are given line item budgets for their respective units and are charged with reporting weekly on expenditures and public safety outcomes. In yet another example, a centralized system was put into place whereas the chief must regularly provide an explanation for each and every expenditure to municipal leaders. While this seems reasonable given the need for efficient and transparent use of resources, it is a new level of detail from one previously employed around a general line item budgeting process with general reporting practices.

The municipal budgeting processes across these six communities are quite similar, even more so with the recent economic situation. Police chiefs are beginning the budget preparation process anywhere from 7-9 months before the budget is submitted to city administrators. Given the complexity of projecting costs and consequences, seven to nine months sounds like a much needed time frame. The time and energy of police management dedicated to these efforts seem significant. When interviewed, one chief's budget cycle was underway. He laughed that he was "right now in it up to his eyeballs."

“Balancing distractions of money with crime needs”

All of the chiefs we interviewed reported working closely with their team on preparation, beginning with a review of the previous years’ budgets. They consistently ask: In what ways have the budgets and line items changed from year to year? How has crime changed? Have we had or are we expecting considerable retirements of staff, position vacancies, etc.? These questions and many others seem to be important factors in how the budget is created for the coming fiscal year. In one case, these details are tied directly to metrics developed in the previous year’s budgeting process. For others, weekly meetings on budget expenditures and balances occur, with comparisons from previous years used as benchmarks. These meetings often occur in concert with meetings on crime fluctuations so that chiefs and other managers can project what resources are needed to tackle emerging crime problems. Consequently, new systems have been established that link human and financial resources to police activities and outcomes. Compstat is one example, where chiefs are looking at crime data in various neighborhoods and assessing the costs of reacting to or keeping crime in check. These new systems are not always welcome, as one chief expressed frustration this way: “There has been such a focus on finances and financial data that those making demands do not recognize that the police are responsible for the complicated happenings of crime and public safety.”

In the current financial management environment, the next step in the preparation process usually involves notification from city administration on the availability of funds, and more pointedly, the percentage of funds to cut from the prior fiscal year. In all cases, the police management teams then revisit their projections and do their best to align their budgets with city administration allowances. Most often, the uncertainty and tentativeness of local aid figures means that these conversations happen two and three times over the course of several months. In truth, chiefs

know that city administrators are as uncertain as police chiefs in the percentage of local aid cuts. In the end, all of the chiefs spoke of the “real” management problems of constantly responding to reductions in financial resources.

As has been the historical practice of municipal budgeting, police chiefs are asked to appear before the local governing body to discuss their proposed budgets. There is one very significant area of change: In the most recent budget preparation process (FY10), each of the chiefs created at least two and as many as four different budgets for consideration. In addition to presenting their proposed budget, these police executives are asked to also provide the forecasted consequences expected, given projected cuts.

This last point illustrates how these processes have changed. In the current economic circumstances, the chiefs are asked to not only generate cost saving measures, but they must to provide detailed explanations of the internal and external consequences (short and long-term) associated with these measures.

Data-Driven Decisions

As the public safety financial environment changes, it is important to understand the information that chiefs consider in the preparation of the budget and in allocation of organizational resources. In a climate of decreased resources and increased demands for efficiency and effectiveness, chiefs are using data in a variety of ways to affect public safety outcomes.

The chiefs report numerous operational and contextual (community-based) considerations in their budgeting and resource allocation decisions. In fact, the chiefs reported that data-driven conversations occur on a regular basis, rather than just during the budget process. As noted previously, the budget preparation and management process includes a review of the following types of data: local and state aid;

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previous budgets and expenditures; variations in the expenditures over time; union contracts and upcoming obligations; upcoming retirements or vacancies of personnel; and any necessary equipment upgrades. These internal budget data points inform how the budget has been utilized in the past and what projections are necessary for the future.

When preparing the police budget, these Massachusetts chiefs look to acquired grant funds so that they can weigh distribution, and make strategic decisions based on community and financial priorities. The inflexibility of the municipal budget means that supplementary resources such as grants are often pursued as a means to achieve those services and needs not budgeted each year. Often, investments in technology, training, and equipment are made through grant programs, allowing the police to provide critical services not accessible through their very restrictive municipal budgets. One chief, who utilizes grant resources, mentioned his capital/equipment budget was reduced to (literally) almost nothing. “Capital expenses ended up being \$1.00 for new cars”, he says. “I requested \$300,000.” Looking outside for funds seems to be a critical strategy for the chiefs.

An equally critical set of data reviewed in budget and resource decisions are crime data. The chiefs review crime data on a regular basis through Command Staff meetings or forums such as CompStat - a regular meeting of police managers to review and discuss changes in crime over a certain period of time.¹¹ Crime data of importance to budget discussions concentrate on fluctuations of crime and its impact on the deployment of personnel. Fluctuations occur seasonally (i.e. summer versus winter months) or as a result of a spike in a particular crime problem (e.g. drugs, gangs, etc). Police must delve into the crime problem in order to develop the most appropriate and effective response.¹² Increasingly, public safety managers are focusing on crime hot spots¹³ as an analytical and response tool. Simply stated, decisions are made in response

to a rise in particular types of crime in specific areas that require concentrated police resources. Conversely, if there is a major community event that requires increased visibility or services, police presence and involvement are weighed.

Whether in response to crime or to prevent crime, these are examples of the changing nature of crime that directly impact financial expenditures in the police department. These chiefs are well informed of what crime strategies fit what crime problems as a result of current research and being connected to national chief organizations like PERF. The data-driven focus on crime numbers and the effort to reduce crime and victimization is an example of police departments’ desire and effort to increase efficiency.

Two of the chiefs noted one additional factor that influences police financial decision-making. That is the expressed goals of the mayor, city council or city administration. The chiefs noted that the goals of the community’s leading official can influence how resources are deployed. Community perceptions can override allocation, according to one chief: “We tend to make political adjustments to perceived trends in crime, such as reinstating a gang unit when there is a short term spike in homicides, even though the crimes are not shown to have any gang connection.” From the chief’s perspective, this is a consideration in personnel deployment, and in the allocation of grants or outside partnerships in an attempt to alleviate the violence problem.

It is also important to note that, while the use of data to drive decisions was the consensus of the chiefs, and acknowledgement that data-driven management is considered a “best practice,” a there was a strong dissenting voice:

“I would like to say that we practice data driven police management, but that would not be honest. The truth is that the city gives us very limited room for adjustment from year to year, and this year was the worst I have experienced because of the economic downturn.”

Such inflexibility makes the management of police resources all the more complex when the executive is managing in a rigid and yet unpredictable, and often highly politicized, environment.

Other Factors Considered

There are two additional points that came out of the discussions with the police chiefs. First, they expressed great concern for how the community will perceive the reductions in personnel, a shift in priorities, and reduced participation in community events. The discussions and decisions made during this process are imbued with the chiefs' desire to maintain positive relationships with the community and to minimize any negative perceptions the community may have of the actual reduction in services. One chief called it a "tightrope balance." Another said "There is a human, feeling aspect of what the police do. How do you put a figure on that?"

Secondly, two other chiefs spoke with fear about the substantial reductions of what some communities call the "rainy day fund" or "stabilization funds" used in the past for public safety budget emergencies. In the past, chiefs have had to approach city administrators and request funds above and beyond what was submitted in their budgets. These instances most often center on the need for overtime funds as a result of an unexpected increase in crime, homicides or investigations. This situation is brought on by the unpredictability of some crimes, thus certain occurrences are beyond their control. However, with decreased funding available at the municipal level, chiefs have to prioritize investigations, which tend to have negative implications for victim and community expectations. With other support services also being adversely impacted, tough choices will have to be made.

Cost-Cutting Strategies

There has been, and these chiefs agree will continue to be, significant reductions of funds for public safety from local and state government. One chief reported that his departmental budget has been level-funded or cut for the last three fiscal years. They all believe reductions and elimination of staff and services are unavoidable. All reported having to reduce the number of officers dedicated to task forces or specialized units established to confront increases in crimes such as auto theft, drug dealing and gangs. These are similar strategies to those occurring in police agencies across the country.¹⁴ A majority of the chiefs interviewed report reductions in or the complete elimination of School Resource Officer programs, where officers work within the local schools to offer support to disruptive or problematic students, and to build relationships with youth that carry over into the community. These types of provocative and preventative programs have become an important tool in building relationships between youth and the police, and in fostering communication and coordination between the schools and the police, which are part of the prevention and intervention network as mentioned above.

One chief indicated that he has approached the process with the goal of making "responsible reductions." Rather than eliminate services or programs, he is reducing the number of individuals or activities associated with any given crime strategy – cutting every remaining task force by one patrol officer, for example, instead of eliminating an entire specialized unit. Others concurred that there have been significant gains in crime prevention and fighting over the past decade, so they fear that the *elimination* of any strategy may have dire consequences. Reductions appear to be the primary choice for achieving cost savings. One chief commented that elimination of resources directed towards prevention or quality of life issues can have an impact on perceptions of safety and the use of public spaces. He noted, "How can we have good

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parks without public safety?” The chiefs are well aware of the broader, community consequences of the cutting services, especially personnel. “Police budgets are mostly labor so you lose people. In this kind of community, when you reduce people it will have an impact on the level of crime.”

While reductions in activity or personnel dedicated to specialized units seem to be the chiefs’ preferred approach, the reality is that police department budgets are overwhelmingly made up of salaries (for these departments anywhere from 94-96%) so the cuts necessarily involve people, and less people often results in the elimination of some programs or services. In fact, in one community the financial deficit was so dire “the day a group of new police recruits graduated from the police academy, they were laid off.” Chiefs reported they have not yet filled police officer vacancies, which results in fewer officers on the street. In addition to laying off sworn and civilian staff, personnel have agreed to take furloughs (meaning time off without pay), or made contractual concessions such as no uniform allowance. Chiefs are relying on attrition to meet some of the shortfalls, which means keeping critical positions open and redistributing the work.

“Lots of civilian cuts, so now cops are doing civilian jobs.”

Each of the chiefs reported that contractual obligations with sworn and civilian unions mean that they have to maintain minimum staffing levels by relying on overtime.

We are also limited by the collective bargaining agreement with the police union. For example, our contract has both a minimum personnel requirement and a job protection clause. The former limits what we can do to allocate resources out of the conventional patrol division, and the latter restricts us from following the national trend of making greater use of non-sworn personnel.

A majority of the chiefs reported they are contractually obligated to, after laying off civilian personnel, replace them with sworn members of the department - thereby reducing the number of patrol officers available on the street. Further, some communities are required to supplement the state reductions in the Quinn Bill education incentive program, which results in further depletion of financial resources available for hiring and retaining personnel. While chiefs reported that staff and unions have made important concessions in an attempt to save jobs and maintain public safety, the elimination of equipment upgrades and training, staffing shortages and the atmosphere of uncertainty has taken their toll on police management, staff and officers on the street.

The experiences of Massachusetts chiefs mimic those of chiefs across the nation. At the national level, the primary strategies for savings were reductions or eliminations in overtime expenditures, technology and training. Additional measures include hiring freezes, delaying or eliminating recruit academies, layoffs and furloughs, and staffing level reductions through attrition were common trends.¹⁵ Other strategies cited in the PERF report but not explicitly revealed in this Massachusetts study was an increase in fees for police services, shifting to civilian employees, prioritizing calls for service, cutting public access hours, closing district stations, and the discontinued use of take home vehicles.

To manage the reductions in human capital, the continued expectations of constituents and the constant threat of crime, chiefs and their managers are changing priorities on a daily basis. The current environment has forced these chiefs to be more reactive than they have become accustomed to in recent years. They admit that it is very difficult to engage in long-term strategic planning when their days are filled with budget revision conversations, laying off staff or fielding calls from the community or a local official regarding police visibility. Yet, as will be discussed, they

continue to search for and invest in efficient ways to provide the proactive and reactive public safety services needed in their communities.

Resourceful Solutions

The police chiefs interviewed here in Massachusetts are making tough decisions that impact those within and outside of the organization, and thus are responding to reductions in financial resources with a number of different strategies. Layoffs, vacancies, union negotiations, delays in technology and safety equipment upgrades, reduced ranks, merged units, and reduced community engagement have been some of the ways in which police chiefs have adapted. Indeed, tough decisions are part of the job, and they know that they own the responsibility for these decisions. However, there are many positive things the chiefs report doing to try to maintain their commitment to proactive policing as part of keeping their communities safe.

The police chiefs report utilizing management practices from the private sector by gathering their own group of experts, or internal managers to forecast, project and reflect on the organization's operations and deliverables. Each chief noted that they meet regularly with their staff to review and analyze a variety of data points in their decision-making. "Responsible reductions" was cited by one chief to characterize the process. Responsible suggests there is reflection on the short and long-term impacts.

One way the chiefs are being proactive is in investing human and financial resources in identifying, securing and managing state and federal grant programs. Moreover, they are using these grants strategically to secure the necessary equipment, technology, training or programs that they are not able to do from local resources in the current economic situation. For example, state grants support comprehensive gang reduction programs, while federal funds support

the enhancement of critical infrastructure (911 emergency centers). One Chief suggested that the grants have really helped to fill the gaps in the budget. He went on to say "the community has not seen a dip in services because of these grant funds." Though many recognize the complications brought on by some grants. Recent grants have been a "godsend" according to one Chief, but there are also concerns about the long-term obligations of sustaining new or returning positions in a troublesome economic environment.

These chiefs dedicate at least one if not more staff to building relationships with funders at the state and federal levels, and staying on top of the grant programs coming out of these offices. Chiefs reported that the investment was worth it even though it means either taking a sworn person off of the street or hiring a civilian staff member rather than an officer for patrol. This was echoed by police chiefs in the PERF survey who suggested that reducing grant-writing staff may actually have negative consequences. For example, recently, the chiefs have been able to utilize the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to rehire laid off workers.

However, it is also important to note that grants are not a panacea, and the requirements of the grants can sometimes cause an extra burden on the community. Grantors often have stringent reporting requirements that add to the administrative cost of the grant. And in the case of the recent stimulus funds, one-half of the chiefs in our study stated some misgivings about using ARRA funds to hire staff, due to the stipulations attached to the grant that the department must keep the position for 4 years, even though the funding does not last that long. "You can't take on what you need because of sustainability" says one chief, regarding relying on grants for operational funding.

An additional strategy to minimize the impact of cuts and enhance proactive activities and impact focuses on partnerships. The Massachusetts chiefs

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talked about the importance of partnerships as a way to maintain crime prevention and enforcement, another recognized strategy in dealing with reductions.¹⁶ These chiefs reported that while it may appear to some that reducing outside partnerships is a logical first step in dealing with budget reductions, the reality is that partnerships with local, state and federal law enforcement and non-profit organizations are a valuable strategy in maintaining critical activities in their communities. For example, partnering with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration allows the department to dedicate local *and* federal personnel to local drug problems. Partnerships with the U.S. Marshall's Service and the FBI bring additional human and equipment resources in to focus on local problems. Strategies such as hot spot policing are enhanced by the human and technological resources of local and state partners. In at least one instance, a Chief called upon the Sheriff's Department to assist in the holding of prisoners or for assistance with a K-9 (canine) unit, as the funds for these activities were cut in the local police department. In a similar vein, chiefs in the PERF survey cited "contracting work out" as an option as well.¹⁷

Other law enforcement partnerships referenced by the Middle Cities Chiefs included work with the Massachusetts State Police (MSP) on gang suppression and investigations. Additionally, the MSP have become an important resource for collecting and analyzing data through their Fusion Center. Lastly, by working with surrounding local police departments the chiefs are able to collaborate on training and information sharing. These strategic relationships were reported to enhance local capacity without adding costs to the municipal department.

Strong partnerships with local school districts were yet another way to continue the proactive work with young people in the community. One of the chiefs discussed the merging of sworn positions so that officers are doing proactive and detective work, serving as liaisons to the schools. The chiefs are also partnering with colleges so

that they secure interns and volunteers to help with critical organizational work. These and other types of volunteers have filled important gaps in the management and delivery of services.

The partnerships described above are mutually beneficial and produce real value for the community. This seems to be a change based on the adoption of more community-oriented approaches. Policing research supports this idea as building and investing in inter-agency relationships allow for opportunities for collective problem identification and solving (Moore, 1995). The chiefs secure additional resources for fighting local crime problems, while partners are also accountable to their organizations for deliverables. These are precisely the kinds of strategies that are necessary in tough economic times, and in some instances the only way that chiefs can maintain their commitments to the community.

Conclusions

The exceptional financial state of the Commonwealth and municipalities requires a new level of human and financial management by police chiefs and local administrators. Still, high expectations from the community and local officials as a result of community policing and increased community participation in public safety and demands for transparency and accountability continue. The interplay between these factors calls for a very different system for managing the contemporary police organization. As a result of repeated cuts and increasing costs, there are fewer officers on the street and fewer civilian staff to provide critical supports. Officer equipment is failing and cannot be replaced; training has been all but obliterated; and the ability of police to be consistently and actively engaged in myriad proactive public safety initiatives has been severely hampered. Yet, they are holding their ground in terms of the community engagement gains made in the recent past. To

attend to the relentless certainty of crime and the legitimate expectations of the community, chiefs are investing in the acquisition and management of grants, and seeking and strengthening partnerships with other agencies as a way to gain and share resources. They are employing these strategies while they are simultaneously planning and strategizing about the human and financial resources available now and in the future.

Suggestions and Recommendations

During the course of this study, several questions were raised and recommendations formulated – by both the chiefs and researchers - regarding this particular set of circumstances. These suggestions had four major themes: further research, increased flexibility, management training, and maintaining or creating inter-organizational partnerships.

With regard to research, one police chief specifically called for “lots of research on new and creative ways to deal with crime and community concerns”. Public safety executives want to be using research-based strategies to tackle harder core issues, they are willing to try innovative and creative approaches if there is a good chance the program will work within their communities.

The desire for increased flexibility was a common desire among the chiefs. Many chiefs cite the binding nature of the departmental union’s collective bargaining agreement (CBA), which often circumvent current “best practices” of police organizational management (i.e. more civilian positions). The CBAs often create a financial drain as well, as overtime is increasingly used to maintain contractually obligated staffing levels regardless of the budgetary need for layoffs. The adaptive ability of the chiefs to respond to changing contextual variables is not only limited by contractual commitments, but by the political environment in which public executive leaders exist. One chief mentioned a tendency of the department to make political decisions in reaction to the perception of the community

(i.e. reinstating special gang units in response to a spike in homicides). An important question to ask, then, is: Do such politically-influenced decisions by police departments actually result in safer communities?

If police chiefs are spending an exuberant amount of time and energy, and if staff of the agency are increasingly managing and projecting financial scenarios for now and in the future, then more attention should be directed towards professional development and training of police leaders. The current standards and promotional systems seem to fall short of this sort of training, as the changing organizational and financial environment continues to evolve into a more complex factor in public safety. The important question may be how are police leaders and managers trained in the business of the police organization?

Finally, there is a focus on partnerships. The partnerships fostered by the police departments are to be recognized, and there is a potential for even greater proactive work. In addition to identifying collaborative models that have been shown to work in other jurisdictions and working to apply them to their local contexts, public safety leaders could also, perhaps, create or expand current collaborations with non-profit and public human service organizations to identify the impacts of economic downturns on such public safety measures as homelessness, domestic violence, and theft. Once these effects are identified, continue to work within these partnerships to develop preventative and responsive strategies that can be used in context to mitigate the impact of economic instability on community safety.

As the chiefs look to the future there is concern over the ability to handle additional cuts and manage the preventative and enforcement aspects of the job. In truth, they know additional reductions are approaching. They are troubled by this truth, but cognizant of the great responsibility that comes with their titles. Further, since the tenure

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of the chief is unpredictable⁸ they know that the decisions today will greatly impact the direction of the organization and their community in the future. As such, they are even more determined to find new and creative, yet financially prudent ways to deliver the most efficient and effective public safety services for those who live and work in their communities.

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Debunking the Myths About Charter Public Schools, Policy Brief, January 2010

Drawing Lessons: Different Results from State Health Insurance Exchanges, Policy Brief, December 2009

Endnotes

1. (PERF, 2009)
2. Please refer to Appendix A for comparative tables of all fourteen Middle Cities Initiative cities.
3. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, local-level crime trends database
4. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline>
5. (PERF, 2009)
6. Pg. 8
7. (Mastrofski, 2007)
8. (PERF, 2009)
9. (Mastrofski, 2007)
10. Please see Table A-4 for a comparative table of Middle City public safety expenditures.
11. (Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, & Willis, 2003)
12. (Goldstein, 1990)
13. (Weisburd & Braga, 2006)
14. (PERF, 2009).
15. (PERF, 2009)
16. (PERF, 2009)
17. Ibid.
18. (Mastrofski, 2007)

Appendix A: Data Tables

Table A-1: Demographic Data – Geography & Location

Community	Population (2000)	Population (2008)*	Distance from Boston [^]	Geographic Region
Middle Cities Included in Study				
Brockton	94,304	95,650	25 mi (S)	Southeast
Fall River	91,938	90,760	67 mi (S)	South
Fitchburg	39,102	40,377	54 mi (NW)	Central
Lawrence	72,043	69,812	30 mi (N)	Northeast
Lynn	89,050	90,042	14 mi (NE)	North Shore
Springfield	152,082	151,249	90 mi (SW)	West
Other Cities Included in the Middle Cities Initiative				
Chicopee	54,653	54,941	89 mi (SW)	West
Holyoke	39,838	39,722	94 mi (SW)	West
Leominster	41,303	41,095	51 mi (W)	Central
Lowell	105,167	110,136	31 mi (NW)	Northeast
New Bedford	93,768	91,473	73 mi (S)	South
Pittsfield	45,793	42,597	136 mi (W)	West
Taunton	55,976	55,745	38 mi (S)	South
Worcester	172,648	177,151	43 mi (W)	Central
For Comparison				
Boston	589,141	604,465	-----	[Metro]

* US Census data.

[^] Approximate distance by car, directionality in parentheses.

Table A-2: Demographic Data – Income and Unemployment

Community	Median Household Income *		Unemployment Rate [^]		
	2000	2008	2000	2008	2009
Brockton	\$39,507	\$51,835	3.4	6.8	10.7
Fall River	\$29,014	\$35,633	5.1	9.4	14.0
Fitchburg	\$37,004	\$49,581	3.5	7.2	11.6
Lawrence	\$27,983	\$32,007	5.6	10.6	16.4
Lynn	\$37,364	\$42,933	3.2	6.3	9.9
Springfield	\$30,417	\$41,478	4.1	7.9	11.7
Other Cities in the Middle Cities Initiative					
Pittsfield	\$35,655	\$43,136	3.2	5.3	8.5
Leominster	\$44,893	\$56,713	3.1	6.4	10.5
Lowell	\$39,192	\$50,944	3.1	6.8	11.2
New Bedford	\$27,569	\$36,809	5.5	9.4	14.2
Chicopee	\$35,672	\$57,116	3.3	6.4	10.0
Holyoke	\$30,441	\$35,828	4.1	7.8	11.6
Worcester	\$35,623	\$44,794	3.1	6.3	9.9
Taunton	\$42,932	\$57,096	2.9	6.1	9.8
For Comparison					
Boston	\$39,629	\$51,849	3.0	5.2	8.1

* US Census data.

[^] Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

Table A-3: Public Safety Statistics: Reported Crimes

Crimes Reported (Type)	2000		2005		2008	
	Violent	Property	Violent	Property	Violent	Property
Community						
Brockton	996	3,877	1,158	3,710	1,151	3,050
Fall River	548	3,079	1,171	3,654	1,089	3,528
Fitchburg	431	1,692	345	1,080	288	1,182
Lawrence	649	3,431	584	1,711	456	1,979
Lynn	1,021	3,756	1,070	2,925	824	3,017
Springfield	2,791	9,798	2,692	8,703	1,898	7,351
Other Cities Included in Middle Cities Initiative						
Chicopee	716	1,575	343	1,749	323	1,678
Holyoke	461	2,324	720	2,214	451	2,348
Leominster	87	1,371	62	217	224	1,248
Lowell	808	3,262	1,009	3,295	1,172	3,753
New Bedford	838	2,495	1,032	3,140	1,200	3,461
Pittsfield	139	1,208	358	1,047	298	1,103
Taunton	256	1,410	280	1,238	305	1,267
Worcester	1,506	7,374	1,391	6,081	1,720	6,362
For Comparison						
Boston	7,322	28,548	7,479	25,205	6,676	22,429

Table A-4: Public Safety Expenditures by Middle Cities

Community	2000 Expenditures (\$)			2005 Expenditures (\$)			2008 Expenditures (\$)		
	Police Department	Other Public Safety	Total Public Safety	Police Department	Other Public Safety	Total Public Safety	Police Department	Other Public Safety	Total Public Safety
Brockton	13,796,064	514,613	14,312,677	14,937,477	706,420	15,645,902	17,566,293	687,459	18,255,760
Fall River	14,423,186	2,275,667	16,700,853	17,242,175	1,952,757	19,196,937	20,641,113	2,970,411	23,613,532
Fitchburg	5,576,826	388,149	5,966,975	6,834,930	27,215	6,864,150	6,769,793	22,466	6,794,267
Lawrence	8,334,224	1,141,668	9,477,892	14,602,978	1,065,090	15,670,073	13,676,874	1,092,152	14,771,034
Lynn	12,367,886	579,216	12,949,102	15,868,806	2,967,943	18,838,754	17,957,010	12,554,954	30,513,972
Springfield	33,705,629	2,229,146	35,936,775	31,642,051	2,785,866	34,429,922	37,141,829	3,087,456	40,231,293
Other Cities Included in the Middle Cities Initiative									
Chicopee	6,253,856	408,047	6,663,903	7,667,900	461,021	8,130,926	8,530,192	656,014	9,188,214
Holyoke	8,374,607	532,722	8,909,329	9,996,071	378,179	10,376,255	12,056,025	362,928	12,420,961
Leominster	4,508,546	829,942	5,340,488	4,886,538	900,677	5,789,220	6,303,061	1,172,861	7,477,930
Lowell	7,516,524	473,551	17,992,075	19,994,767	589,384	20,586,156	21,312,353	661,755	21,976,116
New Bedford	17,152,513	3,858,457	21,012,970	20,280,534	3,322,784	23,605,323	23,578,340	3,655,706	27,236,054
Pittsfield	4,993,050	505,118	5,500,168	5,712,378	281,947	5,996,330	7,054,218	294,915	7,351,141
Taunton	7,257,914	707,521	7,967,435	8,474,663	645,586	9,122,254	11,031,786	824,536	11,858,330
Worcester	27,755,799	3,920,455	31,678,254	31,669,497	3,809,363	35,480,865	40,110,711	4,295,101	44,407,820

Appendix B: Interview Tool

Final Questions for Police Chief Interviews – 12/11/09

Interviewer: Brenda J. Bond, Ph.D.

1. How long have you served as Police Chief
 - a. in your city?
 - b. in this city?
 - c. other cities?
 - d. range of Experiences?
2. How many budget cycles have you experienced as the Police Chief. Have you participated in budget preparations before taking on the role of Police Chief?
 - a. If yes, please explain.
3. Can you talk about how budget decisions are made? For example, who is involved at what stage (eg, you, you and your staff, you and city manager, others) and is there a typical process that you utilize to develop the budget? What is that process? What is the political environment for decision making?
4. In your most recent budget cycle, how many versions did you have to generate and over what period of time?
 - a. What were the general reasons for multiple versions?
5. Can you tell me what the approximate change was in your budget from last fiscal year to this year? What had been cut in the previous year?
 - a. What specifically did you have to cut out of year budget, each year? What did these cuts mean (e.g., hiring freeze, layoffs, OT, training, no new equipment, etc)?
 - b. Did you do any reorganizing in the Department as a result of the cuts this year? (prompt: sworn vs. civilian staff, merging units, calls for service prioritizing). If so, please explain.
6. Can you tell me about the general distribution of funds in your budget (e.g. percentage of staff, percentage of equipment, training, etc)?
7. When generating the budget, what type of data do you consider in making decisions about agency resources (prompt: OT, staff out injured, grants, crime)
 - a. Where does the data come from and how useful is it? Benchmarks?
8. Do you have a designated person to seek out grants? (position?)
 - a. Approximately how much funding do you currently have from grants? State? Federal?
 - b. Has that amount changed over the years?
9. Do you or another member of you staff have regular, proactive contacts with state and/or federal grantmakers?
 - a. If yes, can you talk about the nature of the relationship?
 - b. If no, what are the challenges to doing so?
10. What are the top 3-4 challenges facing your city today? Facing your police department?
11. Can you offer specific strategies you have use or are using to overcome these challenges?
12. What will you do differently this year to prepare for the next FY budget cycle?
13. What strategies have you used to
 - a. Fill budget gaps?
 - b. Address community expectations in this changing budget environment?
 - c. Deliver services with budget cuts?

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