



Breaking Down Barriers: The Importance of Collaboration Between a
City Manager and Chief of Police in Today's Society

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Introduction

Public trust of governmental institutions and government officials at the local, state, and national level is low (Pew Research Center, 2021). Compounding the general mistrust between community members and local government officials is the tension between the police and the public related to aggressive policing, which has resulted in increased calls for police accountability and transparency. In most local governmental structures, the chief of police reports to the city manager. In order to rebuild public trust, the city manager and chief of police must develop a productive collaborative relationship. In effort to build a mutually collaborative relationship, these executive leaders need to understand each other's role and the challenges each face. There are steps that each can take to ensure that a collaborative partnership is established and maintained to achieve both community safety and organizational goals.

The City Manager

A top priority of a city manager is to be a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars. Research has shown that the fiscal condition of the city may be tied to city manager turnover (Lee & Lee, 2021). Cities across the United States vary in populations, economies, crime, and other specific needs. In spite of community differences, there are commonalities in the basic services most residents expect their local government to provide, such as police and fire services, parks and recreation, planning and zoning, and public works. All of the aforementioned services are important to the vitality of a community. Yet, revenues are rarely robust enough to fully staff and equip each department. City managers must balance competing personnel and department needs with shrinking local revenues, decreased support for increasing local taxes, and a public demand to do more with less.

Determining budgets is not just a matter of figures and spreadsheets. A wise city manager should also understand how local social issues affects city operations and community relationships. Today's societal issues are plentiful, and often reflect neglected resources for mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, and other basic needs. This absence of community safety-net resources has resulted in policing agencies serving in a

variety of human services roles, often without proper training and funding (Serpas, 2021). Regardless of perspectives on policing, law enforcement agencies have historically had one priority: public safety. Successfully taking on traditional social safety-net services requires more human and budget capacity at a time when many cities are trying to balance community desires to reduce police funding. In today's environment, law enforcement agencies across the nation are under a microscope, and often deservedly. City managers, city councils, and chiefs cannot ignore the national civil unrest related to racism within policing, and the calls for police reform. For all of the aforementioned reasons and more, the relationship between the chief of police and city manager necessitates deep collaboration and trust.

The City Manager and Collaboration

A collaborative city manager and chief of police relationship is one of mutual benefit. City managers are generalist requiring knowledge about everything from policing to public works. As such, the city manager must be able to rely on the chief of police to be an expert in policing practices and trusted to provide an honest assessment of police staffing, budgetary needs, and community relationships. To achieve full transparency and honest disclosure, the city manager should be trustworthy, emotionally intelligent, and prepared to ardently review facts from multiple perspectives (Berman & West, 2008). It is the city manager's job to act on community expectations and to navigate the barriers intrinsic in policing. A successful city manager strives to build and maintain healthy communications with the chief of police and is able to identify when accountability and correction is needed, coupled with being supportive of the men and women tasked with ensuring public safety.

The Chief of Police

The collaborative and professional relationship between a city manager and chief of police is very important to the success of delivering an optimal level of quality of life in a community. As Gould (2016) stated, "local government managers and assistants must ensure their relations with chiefs of police are strong, respectful, and mutually, supportive." Each municipal executive has the responsibility to make sure that the

community is a safe and productive place for citizens to live and enjoy their families. If not, then conflict will occur, and this can produce discord between the city manager and chief of police. This may result in the police department experiencing a change in executive leadership. This change in leadership may redirect the police department in mission and vision, which can create morale issues within the police department and a decline in service to the public.

Responsibilities

The chief of police is responsible for planning, organizing, controlling, and leading the police department. The police department in many cities is the largest portion of the operating budget. This is just one of many obligations that creates a significant amount of accountability on the chief of police. Monitoring the police department budget concerning expenditures and meeting budget projections are a daily activity. Police department expenditures can fluctuate depending upon many factors, such as unexpected civil litigation, community needs, department/officer equipment needs, fuel price increases, line of duty death, line of duty injuries, officer retirements, officer overtime, recruitment needs for sworn and non-sworn personnel, staffing requirements both sworn and non-sworn personnel, technology repair/upgrades, training needs, and vehicle repair/replacement needs. Depending upon the size of the police department the chief may delegate some of the budget oversight, however, the chief is accountable for budget stewardship. It is imperative that the chief of police educate the city manager concerning public service demands that impact the budget and efforts to stay ahead of the crime rate, along with other needed police department resources. Gould (2016) suggested that managers and chiefs of police must share similar visions and values for their police departments. The city manager plays an important role in generating collaborative working relationships. This also assists when cities are faced with external recruitment for the chief of police position or when there is an internal promotion to the new role of chief of police. This understanding will assist in communication between both leaders when unexpected community incidents arise. The city manager and chief of police must be seen as a “team” by city officials, business leaders, civic groups, media, police department employees, and special interest groups.

The Chief of Police and Collaboration

The chief of police must have a clear understanding of the importance of cultivating and sustaining a collaborative working relationship with the city manager. Gould (2016) stated, these two highest ranking executives must understand each other's perspectives and support one another. The chief must gain the trust and confidence not only of the city manager but also the community. This can be achieved by staying as transparent as possible, champion community involvement, maintain a consistent policy of communication, and be dedicated to not only the safety of their community, but also to implementing a robust Community Policing philosophy throughout the police department and community.

Understanding the importance of collaboration, the chief of police should share with the city manager the Six Pillars of "Building Trust and Legitimacy" recommended by the final report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (COPS, 2015). Following the Six Pillars must become part of the shared vision and mission of both the city manager and chief of police. The first pillar is Pillar One: Building Trust and Legitimacy. As we have witnessed in today's society "trust" of the police and city government has become nationally debated topics. Regaining community trust can begin by instituting Pillar One which can commence by working closely with the city management. According to the President's Task Force (2015) law enforcement culture should embrace a guardian, rather than a warrior mindset to build trust and legitimacy both with agencies and with the public. To make this transition the city manager must be open to supporting the chief with needed resources to begin the transformation to a true Community Policing philosophy within the police department. This should begin at the hiring process by ensuring that the police department reflects the community of which it serves and institute new training initiatives concerning Community Policing.

The chief of police and city manager should be in collaboration establishing Pillar Two: Policy and Oversight. One of the functions of the chief of police is establishing control by implementing and improving Policies and Procedures. All policies and aggregate data should be made publicly available to ensure transparency (COPS, p.2, 2015). To go further, law enforcement agencies should have clear and comprehensive policies on the use of

force, mass demonstrations, consent before searches, gender identification, racial profiling, and performance measures among others such as external and independent investigations and prosecutions of officer-involved shootings and other use of force situations, and in-custody deaths (COPS, p.2, 2015). The city manager and chief must work together in a collaborative fashion to accomplish Pillar Two.

In today's ever-changing world of technology, a chief of police must collaborate with the city manager to ensure that the police department stays current. This includes computers, mobile data terminals, radio and communication systems, and using social media as a way to connect with the community. Pillar Three: Technology and Social Media suggests that the use of technology can improve policing practices and build community trust and legitimacy, but its implementation must be built on a defined policy framework with its purpose and goals clearly delineated (COPS, p.2, 2015). Implementing new technologies can give police departments an opportunity to fully engage and educate communities in a dialogue about their expectations for transparency, accountability, and privacy (COPS, p.3, 2015). The use of social media can assist a chief in the implementation of Community Policing within their community. It will aid the chief in communicating with citizens, business leaders, media, and special interest groups concerning various topics, such as police officer recruitment.

With recent civil unrest and mistrust of police the need for police departments to embrace a robust Community Policing philosophy is incredibly important. This action will support building trust and crime reduction within communities. According to Pillar Four: Community Policing and Crime Reduction, focuses on the importance of Community Policing as a guiding philosophy for all stakeholders (COPS, p.3, 2015). Law enforcement agencies should work with community residents to identify problems and collaborate on implementing solutions that produce meaningful results for the community (COPS, p.3, 2015). The chief of police and city manager should collaborate to ensure that resources are available to implement and maintain a robust Community Policing philosophy within the community and police department.

The city manager and chief of police must be in agreement and dedicated to quality training and professional development for both non-sworn and sworn personnel. Pillar Five: Training and Education, as our nation becomes

more pluralistic and the scope of law enforcement's responsibilities expands, the need for expanded and more effective training has become critical (COPS, p.3, 2015). Today's line officers and leaders must be trained and capable to address a wide variety of challenges including international terrorism, evolving technologies, rising immigration, changing laws, new cultural mores, and a growing mental health crisis (COPS, p.3, 2015). The resources to ensure that police officers receive quality and updated training and education must be championed by both the city manager and chief of police.

Recently, not only the country but also the law enforcement community have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has become an additional challenge for both the city manager and chief of police to address concerning officer wellness and safety. Pillar Six: Officer Wellness and Safety, emphasizes the support and proper implementation of officer wellness and safety as a multi-partner effort (COPS, 2015). The wellness and safety of law enforcement officers is critical not only for officers, their colleagues, and other agencies but also to public safety (COPS, p. 4, 2015).

The city manager and chief of police must work collaboratively to ensure that resources are available to develop, administer, and maintain a quality wellness and safety program. Officers should be provided with equipment to protect them from COVID-19, issued properly fitted ballistic vests, provided with properly working and safe police department equipment, safety equipment in vehicles, and the appropriate training to stay safe and improve wellness.

Conclusion

The importance of positive collaboration between the city manager and the chief of police is incredibly important to the safety of the community and well-being of police department personnel. They must work towards a shared mission and vision for public safety. Each executive leader must be dedicated to maintaining transparency with each other and to always work as a team for the benefit of all stakeholders.

You can find the personal interview of Dr. Don Munday on this subject on Leadership Perspectives, an educational video series at research.phoenix.edu. Link is provided here: [Leadership Perspectives with Dr. Don Munday](#)

About the Authors

Donald Munday, EdD

Dr. Munday is a retired law enforcement officer with over 23 years of experience eventually attaining the rank of Chief of Police. During his years in law enforcement, he was assigned to units such as Patrol, Crime Prevention, CSID Team, Bunco/Larceny, Exploited and Missing Child Unit, Fatal Accident Investigation, Vice/Organized Crime, Planning/Research, Community Policing, and Training/Recruitment. Dr. Munday has been a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Fraternal Order of the Police Lodge#5. During his public service he received numerous police department commendations including the Bronze Wreath of Valor, Bronze Wreath of Meritorious Service (2), Community Service Award, and the Distinguished Service Award. Dr. Munday received the Devore Foundation “Excellent in Public Service” award, and a school district “Golden Apple” award for his community service.

Dr. Munday currently is a faculty member in the ACCESS Program for the College of Doctoral Studies at the University of Phoenix. Prior to this position he served as a Dean of Assessment for the College of Criminal Justice and Security, and a College Chair for the Criminal Justice program at a local campus. Dr. Munday has been teaching Ethics, Leadership/Management, and Criminal Justice courses in university settings for over thirty years. He has authored Criminal Justice Bachelor of Science programs of study for two private universities. Dr. Munday has been a presenter at conferences concerning the topics of Adult Learning Strategies, Programmatic Assessment, Implementation of the Community Policing Philosophy, and First Responder PTSD. He is a contributing author to a recent Criminal Investigation textbook. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Resource Management, a Master of Science Degree in Management from Friends University, and an EdD in Occupational and Adult Education from Oklahoma State University.

Marie Peoples, PhD

Dr. Peoples has 20+ years of experience in local and state government. She currently serves as City Manager of Webster Groves, Missouri; an inner-ring City in St. Louis. Previously, she served as Deputy County Manager for Coconino County, the second largest County in the nation, and was responsible for leading justice and human service-related departments. Her career began within Missouri’s correctional system. In addition, she has worked for the Missouri Supreme Court, Missouri Department of Mental Health, and served as the Health Director for the Cole County Health Department. Dr. Peoples has successfully led many large initiatives and always strives to provide visionary leadership and to develop innovative and collaborative approaches to issues.

Dr. Peoples holds a Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice Administration, a Master’s Degree in Sociology and Criminal Justice, a Master’s Degree in Public Health, and a PhD in Public Health Epidemiology. Dr. Peoples is also a graduate of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

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