



GFOA RESEARCH REPORT
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TIME FOR CHANGE

A Practical Approach to
Rethinking Police Budgeting

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RESULTS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINANCIAL FOUNDATIONS FRAMEWORK

A Practical Approach to Rethinking Police Budgeting

The need for a new look at police and public safety has wide popular support. However, the path forward is not clear. Local governments need a way to reach good decisions about police funding—the traditional local government budgeting system is not up to the task.

Fortunately, a better approach is described by the GFOA's [*Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities*](#).

It is based on a Nobel Prize winning body of work about how to make good decisions on shared resources, like a local government budget. These financial foundations consists of five "pillars." The next page summarizes how these pillars can be applied to the police budget.

Pillar 1

**ESTABLISH A
LONG-TERM
VISION**

Pillar 2

**BUILD TRUST
AND OPEN
COMMUNICATION**

Pillar 3

**USE
COLLECTIVE
DECISION
MAKING**

Pillar 4

**CREATE
CLEAR RULES**

Pillar 5

**TREAT
EVERYONE
FAIRLY**

FINANCIAL FOUNDATIONS FRAMEWORK

A Practical Approach to Rethinking Police Budgeting

1

ESTABLISH A LONG-TERM VISION

A long-term vision defines desire for a better future

- A shared public safety vision brings people together & creates cohesion
- Encourages thinking long-term and broadly about police and public safety
- Defines goals and measures to support better budgeting for public safety services

2

BUILD TRUST AND OPEN COMMUNICATION

The key for people to work together on a vision and budget

- Show concern by listening to the public.
- Show that officials hold similar values to the public
- Allow the public to scrutinize government's public safety work
- Help the public understand the decision-making process

3

USE COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING

Making hard choices requires bringing people together

- Bring together the public, police, and elected officials
- Provide a forum for the public to voice concerns with day-to-day policing
- Establish a common set of facts as the basis for conversation
- Have the conversation

4

CREATE CLEAR RULES

The new rules for budgeting

1. Historical precedent should not determine public safety spending, instead ask: what is the most cost-effective way to achieve our goals?
2. Departments and divisions are not the best decision unit for budgeting, instead more details on services are needed

3. Think outside of department "silos" and look for multidisciplinary solutions to public safety issues
4. Make sure services that prevent problems have a fair chance in the budget
5. Identify services that work and those that don't
6. Look for smart, strategic opportunities to save money
7. Don't budget "either/or," budget "both/and"

5

TREAT EVERYONE FAIRLY

Fair process, fair results

- Ensure decisions are objective and transparent
- People should be given a voice and treated with dignity
- Recognize that different constituencies have different needs and experience with the public safety system
- Budgeting outcomes ought to reflect the community served





83%
of survey
respondents
think some
type of police
reform is
necessary.¹

The death of George Floyd has sparked an international conversation about policing and the money spent on police. The need for a new look at police and public safety has wide, popular support. For example, in a June 11, 2020, YouGov poll, 83% of respondents thought some type of reform is needed and only 17% said that “police departments don’t need to be reformed.”¹ However, there is not much support for radical change either. The same poll showed only 24% believed that “we need to defund police and reinvent our approach to public safety.” Everyone else (59%) believed change should be made within the current system. These attitudes were consistent across people who live in cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas.* A more recent Gallup poll survey (late June, early July)² showed single-digit support for the proposition that “no changes were needed” in policing among all racial groups, but the same survey showed little support for “abolishing police departments” (15% support across all racial groups[†]).

The June 11 YouGov survey also asked about attitudes toward funding and service strategies. The most striking finding was the lack of a clear majority for many strategies and the large number of “not sure” responses to questions. Regardless of race, gender, political persuasion, or urban versus rural, most people believe the current system needs to be changed but don’t have clear ideas about how that should be done.

Local governments need a way to reach good decisions about police funding. The traditional local government budgeting system (i.e., take last year’s budget and make changes around the margins) is not up to the task for several reasons.

First, because the traditional approach is based on historical precedent, it tends to freeze past practices in place. It does not provide a way to thoughtfully reexamine what is working well and what isn’t and then make changes accordingly. Though local governments should always strive to provide the best value to the public, it is especially important to do so with police and public safety.

Second, the traditional budget is intended to reduce conflict. Relying on historical precedent can reduce conflict because it reduces the amount of possible change. However, the question of police funding seems to have reached a point where conflict is inevitable. That conflict can either be constructive or destructive. The traditional budget process does not provide good outlets for constructive conflict.

* The attitudes toward “defunding the police” were largely consistent among racial groups, ranging from 21% support among Black and Hispanics to 29% among the survey’s “Other” category. Whites were at 23%.

† This ranged from 12% support among Whites to 27% support among Asians. Full survey results are in Appendix 1.

Third, the traditional budget process works best in times of revenue growth because distributing new revenue is less controversial than deciding what to cut or how to reallocate funding. Hence, the traditional budget process is doubly disadvantaged in the current circumstances of revenue declines and demand for a departure from past practices.

A final disqualifying feature of the traditional budget, especially the police budget, is that decisions are largely driven by professional staff, with little input from the community. A June/July 2020 Gallup poll shows that police are still the fourth most trusted institution, beating churches, all branches of the federal government, public schools, and others. However, the same poll shows that trust in police has declined from 2019 to 2020 by about 10%. This continues a long-term trend of declining trust in police: Trust is down 25% from its 2005 peak. Now, less than half of people have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the police.³ This means that the experts within the police department may not enjoy the same legitimacy they once did. Legitimacy is needed for the public to trust that their concerns will be taken seriously. This legitimacy can be created by engaging citizens in the conversation on police budgeting to work together with public safety experts to find workable solutions. By “citizen,” we mean people who share a civic identity. This is the “self” in self-government. It also means participation in the creation and receipt of public goods. This is the “government” in self-government.*

Clearly, a better approach than the traditional budget is needed. Fortunately, a better approach is described by GFOA's *Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities*. It is based on a Nobel Prize-winning body of work about how to make good decisions on shared resources, like a local government and its budget. Financial Foundations consists of five “pillars” described below and shown in Exhibit 1.

- **Establish a long-term vision.** Give people a reason to work together in the budget process and a better future to strive toward, together.
- **Build trust and open communication.** Create the conditions for people to work together.
- **Use collective decision-making.** Develop forums for working together, including for the public to be part of decisions.
- **Create clear rules.** Put the systems in place for making and carrying out decisions.
- **Treat everyone fairly.** Promote and protect mutual trust and respect.

We believe the Financial Foundations framework is needed because the police and public safety budgets are what is known as a “wicked problem.” A wicked problem is one where there are competing values at play, which must be balanced against each other as best as possible.[†] It is impossible to solve the problem; it is only possible to reach a temporary equilibrium. *Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities* emphasizes the vision, open communication, joint decision-making, and trust-building that are needed to handle a wicked problem.

Trust in police
is down
25%
from its
2005 peak.³

“Police” vs. “Public Safety”

In this paper, “police” refers to traditional police department activities, such as patrol and investigations. “Public safety” is used to denote a broader effort, beyond traditional policing, to address acute public health and safety issues. Responsibility for these issues is often assigned to police, but the contention of this paper is that a reexamination of the policing budget should allow the possibility of addressing these acute problems in other ways. We do not intend public safety to refer to fire safety or disaster preparedness.

* This definition is courtesy of Valerie A. Lemmie, Director of Exploratory Research at the Kettering Foundation, and is based on research on democracy in local communities performed by the Kettering Foundation.

† The “wicked problem” is a concept that applies to difficult issues of public policy, not just policing. See: https://www.wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php



ALEJANDRA VILLA LOARCA/NEWSDAY RM VIA GETTY IMAGES

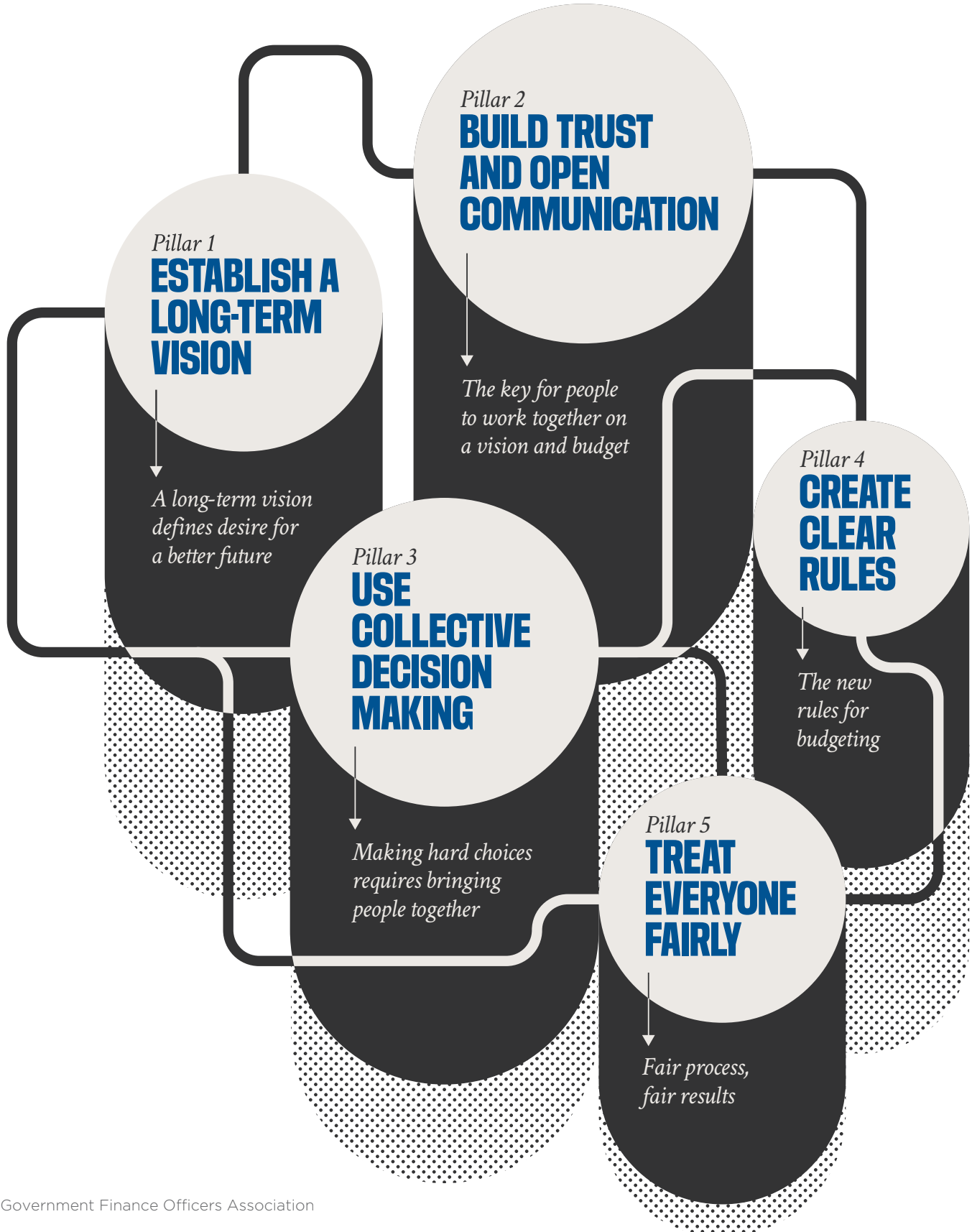
Police are still the **fourth most trusted institution**, beating churches, all branches of the federal government, public schools, and others.³

In this paper, we will walk through how local governments can use each pillar to address the budget for police and public safety. At the end of the discussion for each pillar, we will pose questions and conversation starters to help you evaluate your local government's approach. Keep in mind that the five pillars of the Financial Foundations framework are not sequential. Instead, they interact with and support each other, as Exhibit 1 shows. This means that you might need to build more than one pillar at the same time. For example, there may be an impediment to trust and open communication (Pillar 2) that needs to be addressed *before* people are ready to talk about a long-term vision (Pillar 1) or a budget (Pillar 4). Also, fair treatment (Pillar 5) needs to be present during the entire planning and budgeting process—it cannot be accounted for just at the end.

Finally, the primary focus of this paper is the budget. Policing is a multifaceted, complex issue. Though the budget is an important perspective, it is just one perspective. This paper is not a comprehensive guide to everything local governments might need to do to provide the best policing and public safety services to their constituents.

EXHIBIT 1 | The Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities Framework

There are five pillars in Financial Foundations that interact with and support each other.



Pillar 1

**ESTABLISH A
LONG-TERM
VISION**

JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

The long-term vision must **define the police and public safety issues** that local government and the public will work together to address.

Above, Chief of the Houston Police Department, Art Acevedo, greets people standing in line to attend the public viewing of George Floyd at the Fountain of Praise church on June 8, 2020 in Houston, Texas. Acevedo was one of many officers across the nation who marched in unity with peaceful protesters following the death of George Floyd.

There will be conflict in the budget process that can drive people apart. A long-term vision defines everyone's common desire for a better future. The common vision brings people together and provides the cohesion needed to move forward. The vision is where a consensus is formed between elected officials, staff, and the public that the local government should think about (and budget for) public safety differently.

It has been said that "a problem well-defined is a problem half solved."⁴ The long-term vision must define the police and public safety issues that local government and the public will work together to address. If these issues are defined as just "annual budget" or "police" issues, that might close off the potential to think longer term and more creatively about how to deal with homelessness, street and domestic violence, and other "public safety" issues that have been assigned to police, but where there might be different and more cost-effective solutions available.

Instead, a local government must ask: "What long-term policing and public safety goals are important to our community?" Achieving these goals may be too much to try for in one annual budget (especially one already complicated by revenue shortfalls). To attempt to do so would be like trying to design and build an airplane while in flight. A long-term vision and plan creates the space for better decisions and provides the basis for an orderly approach to carrying out these decisions over successive annual budgets.

Let's see a visceral example of the need for a long-term vision. A persistent and tragic problem that many communities suffer from is street-level violence. There has been much talk about finding alternatives to traditional policing for this problem. One proven alternative is "[Cure Violence](#)."⁵ Cure Violence sees community violence through the lens of epidemiology: Violence is like a disease, and the spread can be stopped by intervening with the carriers. Community members are trained to recognize signs of impending violence among people in their neighborhood, along with how to intervene and de-escalate. The optimal location for this program is in a public health department because of the emphasis on seeing violence as a disease and treating it accordingly.⁶ However, city public health departments (if one exists at all) are often not up to the task of administering the program. As a result, the program is sometimes treated as a "special project" in the mayor's office, which leads to another problem: Community violence will not be eliminated during the term of office of any mayor. Like our most successful fights against microbial disease, an ongoing effort is needed to keep the disease in check. Cure Violence needs to be staffed by career employees who have expertise in public health. It needs an institutional home to survive changes in political office holders and deliver the sustained effort needed to have a lasting impact.

The need for a long-term vision applies within the police department as well. For example, the “Memphis model” of critical incident training blends social work skills with policing to create more cost-effective responses to disturbances by people who are mentally ill. A long-term plan can be used to start a program like Cure Violence or the Memphis model as a special project and provide the path for transitioning it to a long-term, institutional capability.

However, a long-term vision should not be limited to policing and public safety. Public safety is influenced by factors such as unemployment and poverty, segregation, social relationships, mental illness, and more. Therefore, governments should develop a true *community* vision that addresses the quality of life and economic issues that citizens care about. Many of these issues are interrelated with public safety, so a broader vision will support both better public safety *and* a stronger financial foundation for local government and a thriving community.

Because this paper is mainly about the *police* and the *budget*, we will not cover broader community visions in detail. You can learn about the benefits of broader community vision and how to develop one in [other GFOA publications](#).⁷ Next, we will highlight key points about long-term planning for police and public safety that are relevant for budgeting and resource allocation.

First, we must recognize that policing and public safety is a complex topic with many different perspectives. This means local governments must bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders to have a conversation about the vision for public safety, including members of the public, especially those who may have had negative experiences with police or who have been historically marginalized. Stakeholders from these demographic and geographic communities will have different views and lived experiences when it comes to the police. They will likely have different preferences for how policing and public safety services are delivered.⁸ These views must be part of the conversation to reach resource allocations that are fair and meet the community’s needs.

This conversation must also include the police themselves. We must recognize that police may have views that differ substantially from the general public. For example, surveys have shown that just under 70% of police officers thought the deaths of Black people in encounters with police officers were isolated instances, compared to 39% of the general public. Just over 30% of police officers thought these deaths were a sign of a broader problem, compared to 60% of the general public.⁹

For a vision to be shared, we must recognize that although police officers may see the world differently than much of the public, they have expertise that can help inform better approaches to public safety. Without the support of the police, reform efforts will likely flounder, and attempts to allocate resources in a new and better way will face a bumpy road.

The fact is, a new vision for public safety could have positive outcomes for police, perhaps making them eager participants. For instance, the roles and responsibilities of police have come to include many tasks that are best classified as social work.¹⁰ However, police have not been given the proper skills and resources to be successful in these expanded roles. Many police recognize this mismatch between their capabilities—and what they are being asked to do. They would welcome a more limited role that is in line with their capabilities or to be trained and compensated to take on new responsibilities.

The Other Pillars Support the Vision

As local government officials develop the vision, they should keep in mind the other pillars. For example, what concerns do people have with their day-to-day, lived experience with police services? This may be a problem for trust and open communication (Pillar 2) that needs to be addressed *before* a long-term vision (Pillar 1). Community members should have a forum to voice day-to-day concerns about policing as a prerequisite to discussions about money. Pillar 3 calls for the public to be involved in important decisions, like setting the long-term vision for the community. All segments of the community must be treated fairly in terms of their ability to provide input and the results that the plan aims to achieve (Pillar 5).

How to Have a Vision With Staying Power: The San Antonio Experience



A common challenge for local governments is aligning a vision with the realities of electoral politics. The City of San Antonio has a comprehensive community vision that has been maintained through three mayoral administrations, has attracted millions of dollars of resources to help achieve its goals, and, best of all, has had a measurable impact on issues people in San Antonio care about, including public safety. The secret to San Antonio's success is collective decision-making (Pillar 3). Six thousand residents from all over San Antonio and key players from across San Antonio civil society came together to develop the vision. Hence, the community vision wasn't the vision of the then-current city officials. It was the community's vision that the city government helped to define. Future city officials would naturally be more attracted to maintaining the community's vision rather than a prior administration's vision. In fact, the City of San Antonio's current mayor, Ron Nirenberg, has shared that being involved in the original visioning process set him on a path to public service.

The core capabilities of traditional police are enforcing the law and the application of force when needed. While these capabilities have their place, they are not the best answer to all public safety concerns. A broader vision helps a city's department managers look beyond their own interests. The ability to put departmental interests aside opens up new possibilities to better use resources and work together for better public safety and other community goals. A shared vision opens the door for other organizations, besides the local government, to help address the challenges that the community faces. If the community is involved in creating the vision, it is natural for community members to want to be part of bringing the vision into reality. This injects new resources and energy.

A shared set of facts about the status quo

is the basis for envisioning a better future and defining long-term goals for public safety.

The participants in the conversation about public safety should start by reaching an understanding of the needs of the community and how the police are (or are not) responding to those needs—and what historical contexts and current inequities influence people's views of the police. Also, a conversation about policing and informed by public safety data can illuminate the situation, helping distinguish between actual and perceived public safety problems.

A shared set of facts about the status quo is the basis for envisioning a better future and defining long-term goals for public safety. Goals that are measurable and specific on when they will be achieved support better budgeting. Measurable goals enable local officials and the public to monitor progress and track which programs and initiatives work and which ones do not, in turn, pointing to where resources should and should not be allocated.

Measures and metrics matter a lot. Many traditional measures of safety do not lead to smart decision-making yet are included prominently in budget documents and influence budget decisions. For example, the total number of police officers is a common measure, even though it is not clear that higher headcounts reduce crime.¹¹ Obviously, there is a minimum number of officers needed to accomplish the work of policing, but does headcount meaningfully reduce uncertainty around how the police force is performing or if public safety is better? Measures are only useful if they inform a decision. The only decision headcount informs is whether or not to hire more police officers against an arbitrary staffing standard.¹² This squanders an opportunity to use resources more wisely and cements in place an assumption that traditional policing is always the best approach to public safety.

Crime rates are another common measure. Unlike headcount measures, crime rates attempt to measure public safety directly. However, local government should consider what counts as a crime. For example, homelessness, minor drug use, and mental health issues are often deemed crimes. Is law enforcement the best response? Much research suggests criminalization is not cost effective.¹³

As an alternative, define the categories of crime the community is most concerned with. This is a start for determining the best response to crime. For example, neighborhoods with higher crime tend to be lower income. Often, these neighborhoods are where there are tensions with police, including people feeling “overpoliced.” Local governments should then ask: “What is the role of nonpolicing *preventative* strategies?” Preventative strategies often require new ways to allocate resources, as we described earlier with Cure Violence. To the extent that traditional policing is part of the solution to a crime problem, how can traditional policing be applied in a way that builds and maintains trust with the community? It might be worth investing new resources to measure and monitor trust.

Another common measure is the perception of safety or how safe people feel. This too is potentially faulty because people’s perceptions don’t always match reality. Surveys conducted since 1989 show that most Americans said there was more crime compared to the year before—yet, during that same period, the U.S. has experienced an almost uninterrupted decline in crime.¹⁴ These misperceptions have real-world impacts. For example, the presence of homeless people reduces perceptions of safety, which leads to the criminalization of homelessness. Again, this is cost ineffective.¹⁵

So, what measures would work? A community will have to make the decision on which measures to include, but below are some that could be useful.

- **Response time to calls.** A traditional measure that links to the police’s role in responding to crime and resource use. This can be disaggregated to response time for different types of calls and by demographics and/or geography.
- **Community trust in police.** This gets to the heart of many of the concerns the some members of the public have with the police. The Cambridge Police Department, Massachusetts, is prototyping statistics to compare personal interactions between officers and nonminority and minority residents.¹⁶ For many communities, it will be important to measure trust by neighborhoods or racial groups. There could be large differences, and it is important to understand those differences so that local government knows where to direct its trust-building efforts.
- **Clearance rates, particularly around violent crimes.** The rate at which violent crimes are solved has an unambiguous connection to public safety.
- **Representativeness of the police force.** Making a police force representative of the racial/ethnic composition of the community it serves can help make police adaptable to changing service needs, improve public perceptions, and increase trust.¹⁷

Measures and “Accountability”

The reader will notice that we do not describe measures as a way to “hold police accountable.” Clearly, everyone must be committed to the long-term vision for it to become a reality, and people must live up to their commitments. However, when we rely on measures to enforce “accountability,” we open the door to perverse incentives that work against the real vision. For example, if police are held to a standard for clearance rates, might that give the police the incentive to arrest people based on whether or not they believe they can make the charge “stick” rather than if they are guilty? So rather than relying on simplistic measurement-based accountability, the planning and budgeting process should be used to explore where public safety goals are being met or not and then finding better ways to use resources where the government is falling short.

The public could be engaged to help **define goals for the measures,** such as desired response times. These goals would have clear implications for the budget.

The public could be engaged to help define goals for the measures, such as desired response times. These goals would have clear implications for the budget. In Pillar 3, Use Collective Decision-Making, we'll discuss how to engage the public, including framing the trade-offs and compromises that are needed to reach a workable budget.

Once the right measures are agreed upon, the next step for local governments is to identify the sources of the data and ensure its validity and reliability. The measures and data should be made publicly available and communicated so that all stakeholders can see what progress is being made each year toward the long-term goals and vision. Progress, or lack thereof, suggests whether the current resource allocation strategy needs to change.

In conclusion, the long-term vision is an essential part of Financial Foundations. The vision provides overarching guidance for the budget, which is perhaps the longest lever governments have to make steady and meaningful progress toward the vision. To continue our earlier example of Cure Violence, it may not be practical to set up a robust Cure Violence capability in a public health department within one year, especially given declining revenues. However, it would be practical to set up a temporary office of violence reduction to get the program started (which many cities have done, like as part of the office of a mayor or city manager). Future budgets could build institutional capacity around Cure Violence in the health department or a civilian office of neighborhood safety.

Of course, there is more the budget can and should do to advance public safety. We'll talk more about the budget in *Pillar 4—Create Clear Rules*.

Questions and Conversation Starters

- Is there a long-term vision for police and public safety? Has the conversation to reach this vision included the interests and rights of all people in the community? Does the vision invite and empower other organizations to get involved in providing resources and other support?
- Have you engaged in joint fact finding—bringing stakeholders from all segments of your community together to investigate the current conditions, historical contexts, and meaningful data and agree on a common set of facts about police and public safety?
- Do you have long-term goals and measures to define what the desired future of police and public safety looks like? Will those measures support better decision-making? For example, we suggest that headcount measures (i.e., number of police officers) are probably not very useful.

Pillar 2

**BUILD TRUST
AND OPEN
COMMUNICATION**

Trust is essential if we are to reach a balanced budget that provides a safe community for everyone.

Above, Officer Jim Lopez of the Camden County Police Department laughs with Omar Headen, age 13, during a day of action which included the cleaning of Farnham Park on August 22, 2013 in the Parkside neighborhood of Camden, New Jersey.

Trust and open communication are needed for people to work together toward a shared vision. Trust and open communication support the effective operations of the police department. A healthy financial decision-making system requires trust and open communication among officials within government and between local government and citizens. Trust is essential if we are to reach a balanced budget that provides a safe community for everyone. We will focus on building trust between local government and its citizens, as that will probably be the most important concern for many local governments. You can learn more about building trust among the people within government in other [GFOA publications](#).¹⁸

Building trust between government and citizens is not easy, especially when reflecting on the historical context of policing. Trust will be built or eroded interpersonally (e.g., how did the police officer treat me during our encounter?) as well as more broadly, such as the public's view of how well the department fights crime and whether there is accountability for abusive officers.

How can local governments build trust? And how can the budget help? We can start to answer these questions by recognizing the main contributors to how people gauge trust: competence and values.¹⁹

Competence is the ability of a person/institution to achieve goals and perform tasks. One step toward demonstrating competence is to align the police and public safety budget with the needs and desires of the community, as we started to discuss in Pillar 1 and will continue throughout this paper.

Values address the underlying motives of an institution/person, and they speak to the emotions and moral intuition of the citizen. For example, if a citizen believes a local official's motives are pure, then they will be more likely to trust the official. Hence, local governments will need to show that the motives of law enforcement officials can be trusted.



Camden County Police Department officers Jose Delvalle, Louis Sanchez and Vidal Riverago are seen out on patrol in Camden, New Jersey, on May 24, 2017. In 2013 the city of Camden dissolved its police force, replacing it with a new county-run department where they are turning around a city that had one of the highest crime rates in the country.

Now, let's examine four strategies for local governments to demonstrate competence and good values and how those relate to budgeting:

- Communicate concern
- Allow citizens to scrutinize government work
- Communicate similarity in values
- Help citizens understand the decision-making process

Communicate concern. When a government official listens to citizens in a way that shows thoughtfulness and compassion, the official is seen as more worthy of trust. A good place to start is the issues people have with their lived experience with police services. These issues may account for much of the public's desire to have input into policing. For example, in the June 2020 YouGov survey, only 25% of survey respondents said they favor cutting funding for police departments, 53% said they opposed cuts, and the rest were not sure. Yet we saw earlier in this paper that another question in the same survey showed that a majority believed change should be made within the current system. This suggests that many people do not necessarily equate "change" with budget cuts.

Policies that govern how police behave may address many of the public's issues with policing. Getting the public involved in developing these policies shows local officials' concern. A good illustration is the use of force. The Camden County Police Department worked with community stakeholders to develop and adopt a use-of-force policy that goes beyond minimal constitutional principles for use of force. Instead, Camden's policy states that officers must do everything possible to respect and preserve the sanctity of human life, avoid unnecessary uses of force, and minimize the force that is used, while still protecting themselves and the public (see Exhibit 2 for a summary).²⁰

EXHIBIT 2 | Camden County Use-of-Force Policy

	OLD POLICY	REVISED POLICY
Does the policy go beyond the minimal constitutional standard of when force may be used?	⊗	✓
Does the policy emphasize de-escalation tactics?	⊗	✓
Does the policy require officers to stop and report uses of force that violate the law or the CCPD’s policy?	⊗	✓
Does the policy have comprehensive reporting requirements?	⊗	✓

Only 24% of survey respondents favor cutting police funding, despite the fact that a majority believe that the current system requires change.

Some policing policies might have direct budget implications, while others may not. But the importance to the budget is that if the public’s immediate anxieties with how policing is conducted are not addressed, then it will be hard to have trusting and open conversations about the budget. The community may find budget discussions irrelevant, unsatisfying...or even antagonizing if the public believes local government is avoiding a conversation about the public’s day-to-day concerns.

Communicate similarity in values. Citizens trust government officials who share their values. To build this trust, there is no substitute for personal interaction. There is not much research on the best programs to encourage personal interaction between police and the community, but cities have tried things such as police attending community meetings, helping give away food or planting trees, and doing “ride-alongs” with clergy or citizens.²¹ When building a budget, cities should invest in these types of activities, evaluate how well they are working, and adjust the investments accordingly.

The budget can also support recruiting a police force that is demographically representative of the community. A representative police force tends to be more trusted because people may often assume that people who look like them hold compatible beliefs and values.²²

Allow citizens to scrutinize government work. Making performance data available sends a signal that the government values openness and integrity. Hence, transparency about police operations and interactions with citizens builds trust between the public and the police.



Police stand guard before the mandatory midnight curfew on August 16, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. Violent protests broke out following the shooting death of teenager Michael Brown by a Ferguson police officer on August 9, 2014. It is theorized that the violence was also fueled by the community's distrust of the police stemming from skyrocketing public safety and court fines in the years preceding the shooting.²⁵

Transparency has three elements: 1) *type*, 2) *accessibility*, and 3) *frequency* of information shared. The *type of information shared* refers to data about operational performance but can include items such as the department's use-of-force and disciplinary policies, as well as statistics on the demographic makeup of the police force. Other *types* of data that should be shared to build trust include:^{*}

- **Use of force, including shootings by officers.** Is force more likely to be applied in communities of color, adjusting for other factors? How often is force used compared to the number of interactions police have with the public? What are the results of internal investigations into whether the force was justified? The Seattle Police Department's use-of-force data is updated automatically in near real time, and Orlando's officer-involved-shooting data includes detailed review letters from the state's attorney for each incident.
- **Complaints against officers.** What complaints are filed against officers? How are these complaints resolved? The Citizen Complaint Authority in Cincinnati helps the public understand this data in graphs, charts, and maps, making it easier to devise better policies.
- **Police force demographics.** Does the police force look like the community it serves? Are they failing to retain women and people of color? Walkkill, New York, publishes a spreadsheet that details rank, years on the force, gender, and education levels of the people in their department.
- **Pedestrian stops.** Which populations are police most often stopping and for what reasons? The Boston Police Department includes the names of the officers making the stops and their supervisors. NYPD releases annual data with demographic details and the reasons for the stops.

^{*} For other data elements that should be shared and detailed guidance on what to share, readers can consult "Data & Transparency Framework for Policing Agencies," PolicingProject.org at New York University School of Law.

- **Traffic stops.** Are people of color disproportionately likely to be pulled over? Are police actions biased, whether they let someone off with a warning or ask to search the vehicle? The San Diego Police Department releases demographic details on the people stopped, as well as reasons for the stops and any actions taken by the officers.²³
- **Financial information.** Financial information could be relevant to trust. For example, the oversized role of public safety and court fees and fines in the City of Ferguson's budget may have been a factor in the unrest there in 2014.²⁴ The city's public safety system was thought to be focused on raising revenue and not on providing fair treatment under the law, leading to public distrust.²⁵ A local government might disclose how much of its budget comes from public safety fines, imposed fees, and asset seizures—and its policies that govern these revenues.²⁶

The data above are examples of what should be shared. The only way data sharing can increase trust is if it meets the community's definition of transparency. A police department may release a use-of-force dataset, but the community might push to include incidents where police officers drew their weapons. Police departments must also meet community expectations for the accessibility and frequency of data sharing. Local government budgets should invest in smarter transparency that makes the right types of data easily available and in a timely and consistent fashion.

Help citizens understand the decision-making process. If public officials engage citizens in decision-making, citizens may see that the budget is fraught with hard choices, often with no perfect solution. This may lead citizens to empathize with officials. An authentic and well-developed citizen engagement strategy is needed to build trust between citizens and their government. Citizen engagement is the topic of our next section, *Pillar 3—Collective Decision-Making*.

The only way data sharing can increase trust is if it meets the **community's definition of transparency**.

Questions and Conversation Starters

- Has your local government provided a way for the public to address their concerns with their day-to-day, lived experience with police? This is a prerequisite to productive conversations about money.
- Does your budget recognize the importance of activities designed to enhance interpersonal trust between public safety staff and the people they serve?
- Do you have information on how widely your local government and its public safety function is trusted, including breakdowns by salient population groups (e.g., socioeconomic class, race)?
- Do you make important data on public safety performance available to the public? Is it easily accessed and updated at regular intervals?

*Pillar 3***USE
COLLECTIVE
DECISION
MAKING**

The Minneapolis Police Department has been under increased scrutiny by residents and elected officials after the death of George Floyd in police custody on May 25, 2020. According to the Minneapolis City Charter, changes to the structure of the police department require the support of the Minneapolis City Council, the district court-appointed Minneapolis Charter Commission and the voting public, emphasizing the need for collective decision making to advance change.

Making hard choices about where to allocate funds requires bringing people together. In the June 2020 YouGov survey, 64% of people believed “bringing people together” is the best way forward for the U.S. (versus more “law and order”).

Bringing people together necessitates compromise and bargaining. Compromise and bargaining demonstrate that diverse opinions have been included in the decision. Compromise and bargaining also increase the chances that the resulting decision will be implemented successfully. This is because people can live with a compromise decision and are, therefore, less likely to oppose the implementation of the decision.

Collective decision-making and citizen involvement for controversial issues are difficult under the best of circumstances. In 2020, local governments do not find themselves under the best of circumstances. In the following two sections, we will show you how progress can be made, in spite of the challenges. The first section is about building the support needed to carry out difficult decisions. The second section is about how to design a process of collective decision-making.

Building Support for Difficult Decisions

A decision needs to be seen as legitimate if it is to garner the support necessary to be carried out. There are three sources of legitimacy local governments must be mindful of.²⁸ Collective decision-making gives local government a way to harness all three sources.

1) Democratic legitimacy. Citizens need to be part of the decision-making process because the issues that animate budget discussions are often controversies over values, not technical problems. The public can frame value controversies better than public officials alone, and then help weigh these values against each other. Professional administrators are imperfectly placed to select between competing values on behalf of the public.²⁹ Citizens are well placed to weigh these trade-offs. For example, one value conflict might be between: A) individual rights of protection against unreasonable search and seizure; and B) the police’s ability to quickly arrest criminals or otherwise disrupt criminal activity. This conflict shows up in the budget with asset seizures. Seizures might help disrupt criminal activities, like sales of illegal drugs, and bring revenue to local government. However, seizures are often undertaken without conviction of the offender by a court of law. There are well-documented cases of people who have committed no crime, having assets seized based only on police suspicion.³⁰

2) Expert legitimacy. If a decision is consistent with recommendations from relevant experts, it will gain greater support. Achieving a community's vision for public safety will likely require experts from police, as well as from other disciplines. Further, the credibility of the experts with the public must be considered. Though police may suffer from a lack of credibility with some stakeholders, recall police are still the fourth most trusted institution in the U.S. So there are still stakeholders who think the police are credible and who would likely reject approaches to public safety that are not supported by the police. Furthermore, police have experience and expertise that are important for reaching workable solutions. For example, the police would need to be involved in developing and administering many of the measurement systems we have described in this paper.

Police are not the only experts that could bring credibility to the process. Expert legitimacy can take the form of rigorous research into what programs to enhance public safety work (or don't work).

3) Authorizing environment. The governing board must support the change. Making a change in local government and its public safety systems comes down to political will. Political leaders will find it easier to exercise that will if they feel supported by the public and the experts. A strong community vision also helps. If the vision represents the will of the community, then changes that are consistent with the vision will find greater support.

There may be other pieces of the authorizing environment that need to lend their support. For instance, in Minneapolis, the minimum size of the police force is set by the city Charter Commission. Should a reform require going below this minimum, then the Minneapolis Charter Commission would need to approve the change. In fact, the Charter Commission did reject a public safety reform proposal from City Council, showing the importance of understanding and working with the authorizing environment.³¹

Organized labor may also be part of the authorizing environment. It might be important to secure tacit approval or at least indifference to reforms from unions. One way to do this is to involve police officers in the reform. One midsized city had success by involving officers in designing the ideas for reform, then testing the ideas on a small scale, and, finally, using the results from the test to either refine the idea and put it into practice or abandon the idea and try something else that would work better. This way, the officers have input into the design decision. Also, testing the ideas on a smaller scale gives officers confidence that mistakes in the design can be recognized and corrected before the reform becomes institutionalized. To illustrate, one project engaged patrol officers in a review of the patrol shift change with the goal of "reducing the amount of time required for the daily lineup, streamlining the information flow, and reducing overtime." By including the officers, the department was able to earn the officers' commitment to new procedures, which reduced the amount of time spent in the shift change by an average of 8 minutes per officer. This resulted in the addition of the equivalent of one full-time police officer to the patrol function, and it improved the sharing of information across shifts.

"Recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions, and behavior and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect."

One of the nine principles of professional policing, by Robert Peel, the founder of the first modern police force in London, 1829.²⁷

What is the proper role of social media?

Social media may not be reality, but it can feel like it. Hence, social media shouldn't be ignored. Social media is useful for determining community issues of great concern, or for quickly getting a general sense of an issue. For example, a hot issue might start trending on social media. More representative and deliberative methods could then be used to explore the issue further.

Designing a Collective Decision-Making Process

A collective decision-making process brings about democratic legitimacy by virtue of the meaningful participation of the public and creates expert legitimacy by including input from relevant experts at key points. Expert and democratic legitimacy help create support from the authorizing environment. In this section, we will see how to design a collective decision-making process with the following features:

- **Provide a forum for the public to voice their concerns with day-to-day, felt issues with policing.** This could be a prerequisite for budget conversations.
- **Establish a common set of facts as the basis for a conversation.** This includes representative community surveys and data on how money is spent on public safety.
- **Have the conversation.** The conversation could address finances indirectly. Citizens could discuss trade-offs in public safety services they would like to make, and public finance experts would then translate these preferences into a public budget. The conversation could also be about finances directly, where citizens decide spending priorities.
- **Institutionalize public engagement.** Regular citizen engagement will help keep policing and public safety aligned with the community's preferences.

Provide the public with a forum to discuss how they experience police services. The millions of dollars and many programs that go into a police budget will seem abstract to the public, in comparison. If the public's concerns with how police behave are not addressed directly, it will be impossible to have productive budget conversations. Earlier, we gave the example of Camden County's use-of-force policy.

Establish a common set of facts. Policing is a topic with strong opinions on all sides. Furthermore, we now live in a "post-truth" environment where people don't trust the veracity of information (especially information that contradicts their worldview). Nevertheless, there must be some common understanding of reality for a conversation to take place. This is easier said than done, but here is how you can make progress.

To start, we must recognize that social media is not reality. Social media is not representative of the general public. It may be wildly unrepresentative. To provide one striking example, Renee DiResta, research manager of the Stanford Internet Observatory, describes how an attempt in 2015 to pass a state law in California to promote wider vaccination against diseases like the measles was derailed by a social media campaign coordinated by "anti-vaxxers," despite very high public support for legislative action.³² The lesson is that a small, vocal group can have a disproportionate impact on legislation. Local governments will need data that is representative of community opinion.

An indispensable tool for this is a representative and scientifically valid survey. A survey more accurately captures resident sentiments about police and public safety than social media. Surveys conducted by the National Research Center (NRC) on behalf of local governments ask about citizen satisfaction with public safety services, the level of trust in police and perceived fairness of police, and what the focus of law enforcement should be in the future. Surveys can reveal important distinctions between groups of people. For instance, NRC's surveys have found that Black and White people have many similar opinions but also some important differences: Primarily, Black citizens give lower ratings to the use of force and police trustworthiness.³³ This suggests, for example, the need for better use-of-force policies and actions to build trustworthiness.



NRC’s surveys are also notable for what they *do not* ask. They do not ask technical questions about how much should be spent on police or what the money should be spent on. The more technical questions become, the more difficult they are to answer. Budgets are quite technical. Less technical questions, like on attitudes and sentiment, can be answered by everyone and provide valuable information.

Surveys are not the only source of information that should be brought into the conversation. Basic facts are needed around how much is being spent on public safety. First, describe the amount being spent on public safety versus other functions of the local government. The amount spent on public safety might be surprisingly large to many people, so context will be necessary.³⁴ The most basic context is the responsibilities of local government. For example, if many local government services are provided by other units of government (e.g., counties, special districts), then a city will spend proportionately more on police than a city where more local services are provided by the city itself.

Another important piece of context is how money is being spent on public safety. The traditional budget is broken down into *objects of expenditures*, like salaries, benefits, etc. This is a useful start. For example, much of the police budget is made up of salaries and benefits for employees. It is helpful to know this because salaries and benefit budgets are difficult to change quickly due to collective bargaining agreements and because local governments are hesitant to lay off employees, generally.

The limitation of objects of expenditures is that these categories aren’t relevant to how citizens experience public services. Programs are a better way to present how money is spent because they are more relevant to how citizens experience services. Exhibit 3 provides a list of common programs in police departments across 80 U.S. cities, ranging in size from 11,000 people to 727,000 people (average 108,000). The table shows the typical portion of the police budget taken up by the largest programs.³⁵ A program inventory is a foundation for budgeting methods, like [priority-driven budgeting](#), that invites stakeholders to consider which programs will best achieve the community’s vision.

On July 1, 2020, Los Angeles City Council voted to cut hiring at the LAPD, pushing the number of sworn officers well below 10,000 and taking LAPD police staffing to its lowest level in 12 years.

EXHIBIT 3
**Average Portion of Budget
Taken by Larger Programs in
Police Budgets in 80 U.S. Cities**

39.7%	Patrol
11.3%	Investigations
10.6%	Administration
9.4%	Dispatch
6.1%	Community-oriented policing, outreach
2.4%	Drugs, narcotics
2.0%	Special weapons (SWAT)
2.0%	Evidence, crime lab
1.9%	Training
1.8%	Records
1.8%	School resource officers
0.9%	Internal affairs
0.9%	Canine unit
90.8%	Total*

* Note that jails are excluded because many cities do not operate their own jails. The remaining budget is composed of smaller programs such as hazardous material response, bomb squads, gang units, etc.

Data, like that provided by a survey or a program inventory, **is the start but not the end** of a conversation.

Inventorying programs can produce some surprises. For example, people might be surprised how little is spent on programs like a bomb disposal squad or DARE.[†] Those weren't even big enough to make our list. Another surprise might be the size of "patrol." The patrol program typically includes a variety of police activities. This suggests the need to further disaggregate how police are spending their time so that the community can make informed decisions about this resource.

Have the conversation. Data, like that provided by a survey or a program inventory, is the start but not the end of a conversation. Data must inform a conversation. So how can a productive conversation take place? First, local government decision-makers must be sincere in their desire to hear from the public and be committed to using the public's input to shape decisions. Second, we must recognize that, like all controversial issues, there will be many different viewpoints. The format of the conversation must provide space for different views. Third, we must recognize that "public input," as it traditionally has been practiced, is an unsatisfactory experience for public officials and citizens. Therefore, we must design a better way of public engagement. Here are goals local governments should consider to guide the design of public engagement:

- **Deeper understanding of the public safety issue and the tensions within it.** Some tensions will be unresolvable, so it is important to know what those are. For example, in some cities, there may be concerns about some neighborhoods having a disproportionate amount of contact with police (e.g., arrests). The tension is that the neighborhoods having more contact with the police may be the same neighborhoods that generate more calls for police service.
- **Insight into different points of view.** The survey data we showed early in this paper highlights the different views people hold. This reveals the need to engage all members of the community, including historically marginalized members of the community. Marginalized community members may have lower trust in local government, especially on policing issues, so extra effort will be needed to bring them into the process and show them that their participation has been worth their while. Fortunately, there are many ways for doing this.³⁶
- **The trade-offs that people are willing to accept (or not).** Reaching a resolution will require compromise.
- **A starting point for citizen action, both individual and collective.** Citizens will need to be part of some of the solutions to public safety issues. For example, if trust needs to be rebuilt, then citizens will need to be part of that.
- **Effective guidance for policymakers.** Policymakers need information that will support decisions about how to allocate resources. If the information provided to policymakers is not clear or actionable, it will be hard for policymakers to follow through. The public will then be disappointed.

[†] DARE stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education. It is intended to provide children with skills to avoid drugs, gangs, and violence.



Fortunately, there are many public engagement methods that can help achieve the goals listed and accommodate different viewpoints. Examples include: The All-America Conversations Toolkit; Everyday Democracy; Living Room Conversations; and National Issues Forums. No matter which method you pick, there are principles you want the conversation to feature.

National Issues Forums (NIF) is a network of civic, educational, and other organizations, and individuals, whose common interest is to promote public deliberation in America. Forums can be used in virtual or in-person settings.

- **Have a good facilitator.** A good facilitator can help the participants work through disagreements.
- **Have a clear structure.** Participants should know how the process will work and what their role is.
- **Require trade-offs.** Participants must be asked to make compromises. That is the only way a resolution can happen.
- **Use small group interactions.** Small groups give everyone a chance to be heard and make the meeting less vulnerable to grandstanding and other disruptive behaviors.
- **Present questions and issues in a way that allows citizens to participate.** Citizens are well qualified to set goals and define problems. Asking citizens to set comprehensive and detailed spending plans may exclude many participants.
- **Have a clear outcome.** The outcome of participation must be meaningful to participants. Frustration, cynicism, or apathy can result if the participants' hopes for learning, working together, or accomplishing some goal is disappointed.³⁷ This requires setting clear expectations upfront for what might be accomplished. For example, much of the police budget is comprised of salaries and benefit costs, which are hard to change because of union contracts and other practical limits. If participants expect to make sweeping changes to these cost categories, they will probably be disappointed.

Participatory budgeting is a potentially powerful tool for getting marginalized communities involved in financial decisions.

These characteristics can be illustrated by the [National Issues Forums](#) approach to community dialogue. Appendix 2 provides a briefing on this method as it applies to public safety. Forums can be used in virtual or in-person settings. A technique like the National Issues Forums is not just about finances. It can provide guidance that local officials can use to help build a budget, but the participants in the Forum are not talking about dollars and cents. For instance, if the Forum participants feel that more should be done on violence prevention and are willing to trade off police presence, then that could be reflected in the budget. Local government officials should follow up with participants to show them what effect their participation had in order to build trust and encourage them to engage with local government in the future.

It is also possible for the public to be involved directly in financial decisions. One such approach is “participatory budgeting.” Participatory budgeting asks community members to decide how to spend a given amount of money for services in their community. Participatory budgeting identifies: 1) a particular issue and/or geographic area within the city and 2) an amount of money that will be the subject of participatory budgeting. Ideas are then generated by community members on how to spend the money. Leading ideas are developed in formal proposals for spending. The proposals are voted on by the community members and winning projects are funded. For example, Phoenix Union High School District, in Arizona, ended its school resource officer program and is using participatory budgeting to decide how to use the funds for campus and community safety.³⁸ Participatory budgeting is a potentially powerful tool for getting marginalized communities involved in financial decisions. After a pool of money is identified, the community has almost complete control of the decision-making process. This empowerment contrasts with the power dynamics that might otherwise frustrate marginalized communities in a more traditional budget.

Another way for people to engage directly with budget numbers is an online budget simulation. One of the most difficult parts of any budget is managing the complexity of decisions, helping participants understand what is at stake with funding options, and showing impacts. An online simulation can help people understand these implications by allowing them to consider a funding change and then instantly showing them how their proposal would impact police as well as the rest of local government spending.

Four characteristics of the most successful simulations are emerging.³⁹

First, a simulation will be most useful when it directly addresses the concerns of users. If there is interest in expanding 911 capabilities to enable operators to dispatch a wider variety of emergency personnel (e.g., mental health professionals), then the simulation must be capable of modeling what a change in budget to make that happen might look like (including changes to dispatch capabilities and increased capacity of the first responders).

Second, the simulation must model constraints. The most basic constraint is that revenues must equal expenditures. A more nuanced example might be that there are mandated service requirements that establish a de facto minimum amount that must be spent on a given service.

Third, the simulation must show the consequences of funding decisions for how services are provided. To illustrate, a cut in police patrol would likely lead to longer call response times.



Fourth and finally, the simulation should provide descriptions of the revenues and expenditures in the simulation. The purpose of these may not be obvious to nonexpert users. Further, performance information can be linked to spending information. To continue our earlier examples, the budget for police patrol or the 911 dispatch could be linked to a history of average call response times. The spending options on these services could be linked to projected changes in response times.

Simulations have been proven effective for helping nonexperts gain an intuitive understanding of the hard choices that are an inescapable part of public budgeting.⁴⁰ Simulation also provides a powerful tool to the finance officer for facilitating engagement and discussion around budgeting issues.

Institutionalize public engagement. It is important to have ongoing engagement with the community. In other words, community engagement should be *institutionalized*. More commonly, local governments engage the community ad hoc when a controversial issue arises. An institutionalized capability is important because high-quality public engagement is not easy, so making engagement a habit will allow best practices to become second nature to a local government. Imagine if it was necessary every two or four years to explain why voting is desirable and how to conduct elections. Elections would be a lot more difficult!⁴¹

An online budget simulation can help participants understand what is at stake with funding options, and showing how funding changes could impact other spending.

Regularly engaging the public helps local government leaders to keep in tune with the public's perspective.

Making public engagement an institution can remove much of the difficulty that arises if the public is only engaged at irregular intervals and with inconsistent methods. Also, regularly engaging the public helps local government leaders to keep in tune with the public's perspective and avoid unpleasant surprises. It also demonstrates to the public that local officials have an ongoing interest in hearing what the public thinks.

For some local governments, regular surveys of the public might be enough for keeping a finger on the pulse of the community. Other communities may need something more robust. For example, New York City has a program called NeighborhoodStat that invites residents of high crime areas to work with the city government to develop a public safety approach that fits the community's needs.⁴² Other communities have experimented with permanent community advisory boards, but in the words of The Policing Project, "too many of these [boards] are dormant, ineffective, or otherwise not well positioned to provide actionable advice. This is a serious underutilization of [the boards'] potential to connect law enforcement agencies with community perspectives. The simple fact is that unless [best practices are followed], it is probably better not to have a [board]—rather than an ineffectual or rubber-stamp one."⁴³ This reminds us that institutionalized community engagement needs to be well designed or it may do more harm than good.

Questions and Conversation Starters

- Are decision-makers sincere in their desire for public input and committed to using that input to shape decisions?
- Is there a forum for people to express concerns and make a change about issues related to their day-to-day, lived experience with police?
- Is there surveying of the community about attitudes on public safety and police? Is the survey representative of the population? Does it ask questions people can meaningfully answer?
- Can you produce meaningful data on how public safety funds are being spent? Are the categories of spending relevant to how the public experiences public safety? Is spending sufficiently disaggregated to understand the activities that are being funded?
- Have you considered online simulation to illustrate the available choices for public safety spending and to help people experience the trade-offs that must be made to balance the budget and achieve public safety goals?
- What is your strategy for opening up a direct dialogue about public safety with the community?
- What is your strategy for ongoing community engagement on issues of public safety?

Pillar 4

**CREATE
CLEAR RULES**

New approaches to public safety will take time to plan and implement. Making a connection between a long-term vision and the budget allows for **deliberate and steady progress**.

Above, a highway police officer assists motorists at the scene of a minor accident. Determining how patrol officers spend their time is essential to allocating resources most effectively.



A budget process must be guided by rules for how decisions will be made and how decisions will translate into action. As we discussed in the introduction to this paper, the traditional budgeting process will not be up to the task of dealing with the community's demands for public safety reforms and a local government's revenue shortfalls. In this section, we will explore new rules for budgeting that differ from the traditional budget process's written and unwritten rules. These new rules are better suited to the problems local governments are dealing with.

Rule #1—Historical precedent should not determine future spending. Instead, focus on how to cost-effectively achieve community goals. In the traditional budget, last year's budget is the basis for next year's budget. Over the years, patterns of spending build up and may no longer be relevant to the community's needs or may no longer be affordable. The new rule is to direct spending to programs that achieve the community's public safety goals at an affordable cost. This rule aligns with Pillar 1—Establish a Long-Term Vision. The long-term vision defines the public safety goals. The budget directs money to activities that achieve these goals. New approaches to public safety will take time to plan and implement. Making the connection between a long-term vision and the budget allows for deliberate and steady progress.

Rule #2—Departments and divisions are not the best decision unit for budgeting. Instead, more granularity is needed. Bureaucratic units, like departments or divisions, are useful for day-to-day management but have limitations as the unit of analysis for budgeting. One limitation is that they are too large and encompass too many activities to make thoughtful decisions about how to reallocate resources.

The new rule is to disaggregate spending and use granular decision units for budgeting. In Exhibit 3, we saw a program breakdown for public safety. An inventory of programs for use in budget decision-making can be generated in two to four weeks. A program inventory is a great basis for nontraditional budgeting methods that take a new look at how money is spent, including [priority-driven budgeting](#) and [zero-base budgeting](#).⁴⁴ You can learn more about building program inventories, the application of programs to budgeting, and the implications of program budgeting for financial reporting in [other GFOA publications](#).⁴⁵

Some programs may need to be disaggregated further. For instance, in Exhibit 3, we saw that "patrol" is almost 40% of a police department's budget. Understanding how patrol officers spend their time and the results they produce is critical to figuring out how to better use police resources.

Patrol takes up approximately
40%
 of the average department's budget,³⁵ yet only a fraction of that time is spent dealing with crime.⁴⁶

For example, one study showed that in a city widely thought of as “high crime,” police officers spent only about 11% of their time dealing with crime.⁴⁶ In smaller cities and towns, crime can take up around 2% or less of an officer's shift.⁴⁷ Most of an officer's time is spent on more mundane activities. Another study found that the top five problems officers deal with are disabled vehicles, traffic accidents (no injuries), domestic arguments, alarms (not fire), and medical assistance.⁴⁸ These findings illustrate that a large portion of police officer activity does not require law enforcement or the application of force, which are the core capabilities of police officers.

Unfortunately, there is not yet a common method for further disaggregating general police patrol into discrete units for budgeting. That does not mean progress can't be made, though. The City of Phoenix, for example, commissioned a detailed study of police operations several years ago and used the results to guide subsequent budget decisions. Although the city has not disaggregated the police patrol program, it does have enough information about how police use their time to make better decisions on how to allocate resources.

Rule #3—Think outside of department “silos” and look for multidisciplinary solutions.

Another limitation of using bureaucratic units for budgeting is that it tends to reinforce thinking about local governments in terms of those units. For example, “public safety” becomes synonymous with “police.” Or course, traditional policing plays an important role in public safety, but not the only role. A root cause behind the current public dissatisfaction with policing is that police officers are asked to deal with social problems for which they are grossly underprepared, such as substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness, domestic disputes, and even civil unrest.⁴⁹

For example, mental illness is a disease, not a crime, so traditional policing is often a poorly suited response. For that reason, some cities are taking a multidisciplinary approach, such as the “Memphis model” of critical incident training. This model blends social work skills with policing. Studies have shown positive outcomes, including large financial savings.⁵⁰

Similarly, a North Carolina city found that having dedicated social workers as part of the public safety response “virtually eliminated repeat calls from chronic problem homes” for issues such as domestic violence.⁵¹ As for financial impact, one North Carolina police chief said that “if we lost one Crisis Intervention Counselor, I would have to hire two police officers with less of an effect.”⁵² This is perhaps not surprising, given that 50% to 90% of an officer's time may be taken up by what are essentially social work functions.⁵³

Police, however, do not train for social work. Training in most departments is mostly focused on learning what the law is and how to use force.⁵⁴

Hence, the new rule for budgeting is to use the budget as a forum to bring other perspectives to the issues that make up public safety work. In the traditional budget process, departments (or divisions within those departments) make their budget decisions largely in isolation from one another. Under these conditions, it shouldn't be surprising that each department views problems through the lens of their functional specialization. A cross-departmental team may help people see things differently. One midsized city facing persistent financial distress used cross-functional teams: 1) to define the outcomes the city wanted to achieve as a result of public spending, and 2) to identify which programs would best achieve those outcomes and which would not, with the implication that the latter were the best candidates for cutbacks. This [priority-driven budgeting](#) process helped everyone to better appreciate what each department did and to

see the need for looking beyond departmental boundaries when considering the budget. It worked so well that the police chief advocated for funding bridge maintenance over hiring more police officers!

Cross-functional teams are not just useful for saving money. They can build stronger working relationships to address multifaceted problems. In the same midsize city, the police chief began “neighborhood walks,” where representatives from police, code enforcement, planning, recreation, and others would walk through the most challenged areas with neighborhood leaders. Together, they would identify the problems most important to the neighborhood, document them, develop a response plan, and then report back to the neighborhood. In one neighborhood, it may be improving the basketball courts or playgrounds for after-school activities. For another, it may be dilapidated housing that was a breeding ground for crime. Planned for early evening, residents would often be out on their porches or in their yards watching the city departments and their neighborhood leaders walking and talking about problems together—a powerful symbol of collaboration that helps build trust.

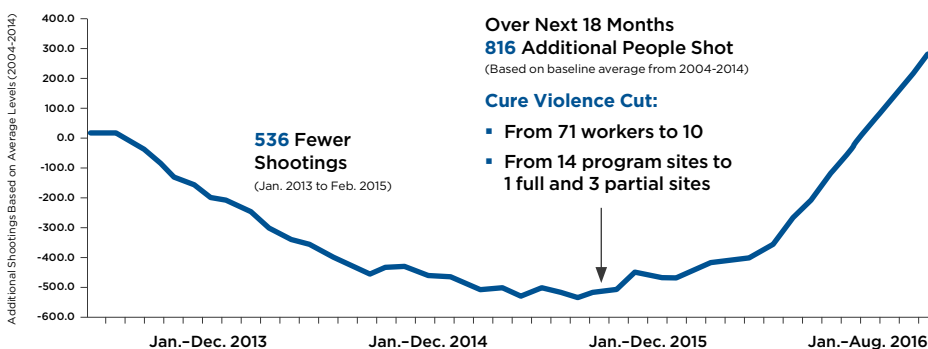
Rule #4—Give prevention a chance. The local government budget often prioritizes remedial services over preventative services. This is because a response to a problem is more visible than a problem that never happened. The new rule is to give preventative services a chance because they are often more cost effective and more humane.

A leading example is homelessness. In urban areas, homeless individuals often comprise a disproportionate share of citations and arrests.⁵⁴ Yet, it would be hard to argue that the problem of homelessness is best addressed by repeatedly cycling homeless people through the justice system. Preventative approaches have proven better and more cost effective.⁵⁵ The value of prevention is also apparent for major crimes. The total financial cost to society of a major property crime can reach tens of thousands of dollars and the cost of a violent crime can reach millions.⁵⁶ And, of course, the human cost of these crimes is incalculable.

A stark example comes from the Cure Violence program. One of the authors of this paper happened to meet the founder of Cure Violence at a civic event years ago. They got into a conversation about budgeting. The Cure Violence founder described how the program had trouble getting funding in one city because it was not a conventional, remedial policing approach to community violence. Unfortunately, this led to a loss of funding for the program. A rise in murders then followed, as Exhibit 4 shows.*

EXHIBIT 4

Fall and Rise in Murders With Funding and Cutting of Preventative Program



* It should be noted that the rise of murders in itself is not evidence of Cure Violence’s impact. However, the proven efficacy of Cure Violence has been discussed elsewhere in this paper.

Cross-functional teams can build **stronger working relationships** to address multifaceted problems.



Identifying What Works

What Works Cities (WWC) certification is the national standard of excellence for data-driven local government. The What Works Cities standard outlines best practices for cities in 45 criteria and the program evaluates how well cities are managed by measuring the extent to which leaders incorporate data and evidence in decision-making. It also helps all cities benchmark their progress and develop a road map for using data and evidence to drive effective change and deliver results for residents.

What Works Cities, a Bloomberg Philanthropies initiative, helps local governments across the country improve residents' lives by using data and evidence effectively to tackle pressing challenges.

There are many ways local governments can adopt a preventative mindset, as described by Dan Heath in *Upstream*.⁵⁷ Local governments can apply this thinking to the budget. For example, the traditional budget often uses “workload” or “input” measures to describe the value created by public services. For example, measure like the number of calls responded to, the number of citations issued, etc., assume a response to a problem that has already happened. To the extent that resource allocations are tied to these kinds of statistics, remedial services will get priority over preventative services. Instead, measures of whether the community is better off than it was before might open the door to thinking about how to prevent the problems that make the community worse off.

Rule #5—Identify what works. Few local governments explicitly tie data and evidence to the budget process. When allocating resources to “public safety,” local governments continue to fund programs that do not achieve intended outcomes and long-term goals.

The new rule is to fund what works. Local governments can start by asking departments to identify how the funding they request achieves the public safety vision and goals, and next, requiring data analysis and new funds (including setting aside funds for evaluation).

For example, police officer body-worn cameras (BWCs) have been promoted to improve police accountability. In Washington, DC, The Lab@DC partnered with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to conduct a randomized, controlled trial, comparing officers assigned to wear BWCs to officers who did not wear BWCs.⁵⁸ The goal was to test the theory that the presence of BWCs will change the behavior of officers and civilians if both were under the watch of a camera and as a result will affect documented uses of force and civilian complaint numbers. Ultimately, the evaluation did not find conclusive evidence that BWCs achieved their stated goals, suggesting that the city's resources might be better spent on other methods of reducing the misuse of force and citizen complaints. This type of information equips senior leaders to ask the right questions as they make decisions about funding allocation. This is one example of how data analysis and evaluation can inform decisions and maintain lines of communication with the community on why some programs are funded and others are not. In the case of Washington, DC, the evaluation of BWCs concluded that the city should not expect BWCs to produce large, departmentwide improvements in outcomes.* This, ultimately, asked public officials the question: “How much funding should be allocated to this intervention?”

* Note that this study doesn't necessarily mean that BWCs are ineffective. Other cities may see a bigger impact. For a review of studies on BWCs, see: <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/body-worn-cameras-what-evidence-tells-us>



Rule #6—Look for smart, strategic ways to save money. Saving money in the public safety budget is important for two reasons: First, many local governments simply have less money to spend now, period. Second, many public safety reforms require spending *more* money. For example, in order for local governments to be more discerning about what kind of assistance they dispatch in response to emergency calls (e.g., police, social workers, etc.), the dispatch function must become more capable and/or first responders must have a wider array of capabilities. The money to enhance public safety capabilities can come from reallocating funds from things local government can stop doing or start doing differently.

The traditional maneuvers for saving money include across-the-board cuts to services or cutting “nonessential” line items, like training. However, both strategies are arbitrary and “dumb down” all services, regardless of their value. For example, reducing investments in training could result in officers committing more mistakes, leading to litigation, and, ultimately, increasing costs! The new rule is to look for smart, strategic ways to save money.

Fortunately, the other rules we outlined for the budget process set a government up to find smarter, strategic ways to save money. You can see how thinking outside of silos, granularity in budget decision units, thinking preventatively, doing what works, and breaking from past precedents are reflected in the examples of money-saving opportunities below.

- **Centralize support services.** Efficiencies could be realized by centralizing maintenance of police vehicles, information technology, or other support services that police run separately from the rest of government.
- **Wider use of non-sworn staff.** Sworn officers may perform tasks that could be performed by lower-cost, non-sworn staff, like parking enforcement.
- **Share services with overlapping or contiguous agencies.** Services like animal control, city jails, warrant delivery, and more have the potential to be shared with other agencies, like a county sheriff.

Parking enforcement is one example of a money-saving opportunity, as it can be performed by lower-cost, non-sworn staff.



RJ SANGOSTI/THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

Research suggests that school resource officers are often **not effective for many of the roles they are asked to take on** and can have detrimental effects on students.

- **Prevent rather than remediate.** Prevention is often cheaper. For example, cycling homeless people through the justice system is more expensive than helping them get housed.⁵⁹ The financial impact on society of major property and violent crimes is substantial.⁶⁰
- **Divest of low-value services.** The classic example of this is the mounted police. These units are often the first to go under budget pressures.⁶¹ A more contemporary example might be school resource officers. Research suggests that school resource officers are often not effective for many of the roles they are asked to take on and can have detrimental effects on students.⁶²
- **Review special units.** For decades, the common response to a specific public safety problem (prostitution, crack cocaine, opioids, gangs, gun violence, and others) has been to create a special unit. Departments may find that they have as many as a dozen special units. These units may be inefficient because they fragment the response to what are multifaceted and complex problems. One police department was able to redirect resources to preventive patrol and community policing by combining multiple special units and cross-training officers.
- **Remove the barriers to doing the right thing.** Departments in municipal governments, not just police, have been known to do things like spend out remaining budgets at the end of the year or pad the budgets. These “budget games” are often rational responses to the rules of budgeting. Many local governments have found that a change in the rules can change the incentives to engage in these kinds of behaviors for all departments, including law enforcement.⁶³

Rule #7—Don’t budget “either/or,” “budget both/and.” Oftentimes, a budget is framed as a competition between two competing views and only one can win. In one police department, there was a division of opinion between focusing on law enforcement versus community engagement. Fortunately, this department realized that it didn’t have to choose; it could find a way to do both.⁶⁴ Hence, the new rule is to evaluate spending decisions in a way that encourages a balanced portfolio of public safety services. A balanced portfolio will usually be the best way to meet the local government’s goals in a cost-effective manner.

The seven rules for budgeting we described here can guide a local government budgeting process that:

- Achieves cost-effective reform of public safety.
- Prudently uses limited resources.
- Gives all stakeholders (the public, police, etc.) a voice in the process, especially when connected to the other pillars of Financial Foundations.

We are in an unprecedented moment of severe financial distress and calls for serious reforms to the largest area of municipal spending. There are no “ready-made” budgeting methods that incorporate all seven rules. However, budget officers can borrow techniques from budgeting methods like [priority-driven budgeting](#) and [zero-base budgeting](#) to design a process that gets their local government to where it needs to go.

The new rule is to evaluate spending decisions in a way that encourages a **balanced portfolio of public safety services.**

Questions and Conversation Starters

- Is your government willing to give up historical precedent as the primary determinant of future spending? Are you willing to direct spending to programs that best achieve the community’s public safety goals at an affordable cost?
- Are you willing/able to disaggregate spending beyond departments and divisions and identify more meaningful units of analysis than objects of expenditure (salaries, benefits, etc.)? Can you disaggregate enough to make meaningful decisions on how and where to allocate scarce resources between competing ideas for how to reach public safety goals?
- How will you get out of department silos? Is there a role for cross-functional teams in making decisions?
- How can you give preventative strategies a fair chance to succeed in the budget process?
- How does your budget process consider evidence of what programs work?
- What smart, strategic ways can you find to save money in public safety?
- Does your budget process fund a portfolio of approaches for reaching public safety goals rather than putting all your eggs in one basket?

Pillar 5

**TREAT
EVERYONE
FAIRLY**

If people feel they have been **fairly treated**, then they are often willing to accept outcomes other than their preferred outcome.



DAVID MCNEU/GETTY IMAGES

Up to this point, we have discussed budgeting for police largely as a dispassionate and rational exercise. It is not, of course. Emotions can run high. Perhaps the biggest risk of emotions getting out of control comes from perceptions of unfair treatment. If people feel unfairly treated by a decision, not only are they likely to reject the decision, but they may also reject the entire system used to reach that decision.⁶⁵

It is not possible for everyone to get what they want from a local government budget. That means there is a risk of people feeling unfairly treated. However, research shows that if people feel they have been fairly treated, then they are often willing to accept outcomes other than their preferred outcome.⁶⁶

Half of the fairness equation is the process that is followed. There are four features a process must have to be perceived as fair.⁶⁷ Let's review them. Because fair treatment must be applied across all aspects of planning and budgeting, you'll see that we've addressed most of the features as part of the previous four pillars of Financial Foundations.

Decisions are based on accurate information. We discussed ways in which local governments can give people confidence that decisions will be based on accurate information. Some of the most important include:

- Developing measures of public safety that speak to the community's biggest concerns and reporting performance against those measures. Communities must develop measures that align with local circumstances, but examples of measures with wide applicability include response to calls and the level of trust the community has in the police.
- Providing information on how much is spent on public safety. Ideally, this should be provided in more detail than departments/divisions or objects of expenditure (e.g., salaries, benefits, etc.). The goal is to use a unit of analysis that citizens can easily relate to.
- Using surveys to accurately gauge sentiments in the community.
- Ask community members about the trade-offs they are willing to make.

A transparent and consistent set of decision-making criteria is applied to everyone equally. In Pillar 4, we described several rules to organize the budget process that can be transformed into criteria. For example, cost-effectiveness, not historical precedent,



should be the main criteria for deciding how money is spent. Criteria can be defined to evaluate cost effectiveness (e.g., alignment of spending with community goals, likelihood that the desired impact will be achieved, etc.). It is critical the criteria are transparent to everyone. If the criteria are known only to the budget office and/or other decision-makers, then there is a good chance the criteria will feel capricious to others—regardless of how objective the criteria are or are intended to be.

All affected stakeholders are given the opportunity for input. Pillar 3, Collective Decision-Making, is devoted to giving affected stakeholders input. This could be through surveys, online interactive budget simulations, or in-depth community dialogs, like the National Issues Forums or Participatory Budgeting.

Mistakes are recognized and corrected. No process will produce perfect decisions. A process can recognize and correct mistakes, however. Examples include monitoring measures of performance to show if local government is living up to its commitments, using pilot projects to test new ideas before implementing them, and maintaining an ongoing capability to engage citizens so they have an outlet for their concerns. For example, we suggested several types of data local governments should share with the public. We also suggested that testing reform ideas on a smaller scale and using the test to refine the ideas (or abandon them if they don't work) could give police officers confidence in the reform process.

Having a fair process is half of the fairness equation. The other half is fair results.

First, we must recognize that different constituencies may have different needs. This means that “fair” results are not always “equal” results. Rather, fair results might be better defined as “equitable” results. This means that results might need to differ for one group versus another in the interest of achieving good public safety results for everyone. For instance, constituencies can be defined by geography and by populations (e.g., race, socioeconomic class). This distinction is useful because services can vary by the specific geography or population they serve.

A resident talks to a police officer about crime concerns during National Night Out (NNO) in Austin, Texas. Celebrated annually on the first Tuesday in October, NNO is a nationwide event during which residents spend the evening outdoors with neighbors, police officers and emergency personnel to strengthen relationships and raise awareness about crime prevention.

Local government can assess how well different constituencies are being served according to the **measures established in a community vision.**

For example, a policy on police use of force would be geographically neutral (all areas in a jurisdiction are subject to it), but it might be of greater value to Black people. This is because we saw survey results earlier that suggested Black people often have greater concerns with how police use force, and there is evidence to suggest that force is disproportionately applied to people of color.⁶⁸

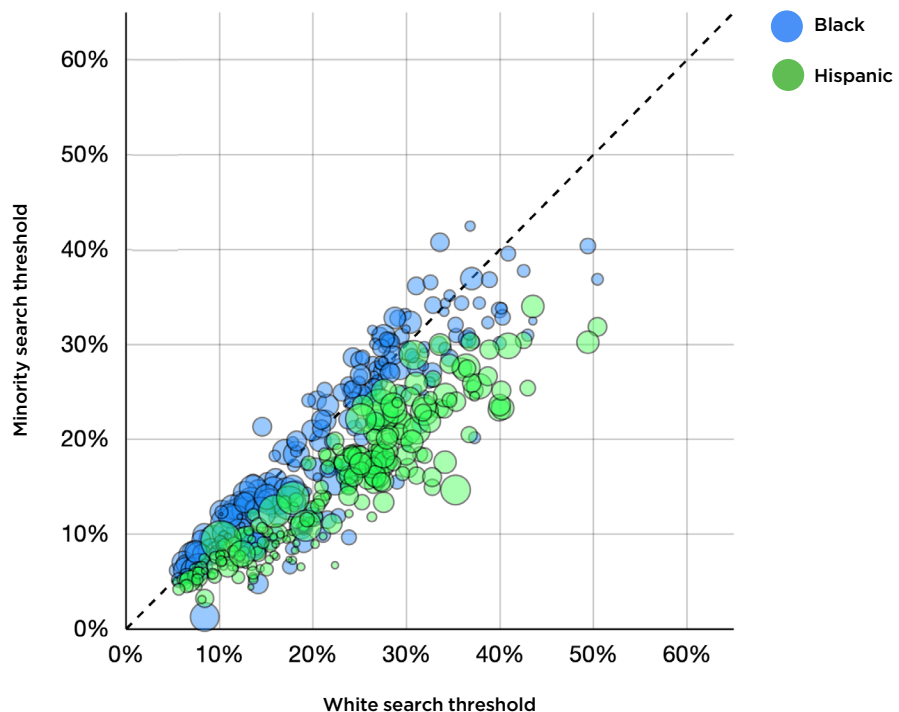
In another example, Exhibit 5 provides an example of racial bias in policing and traffic stops and searches from the Stanford Open Policing Project.⁶⁹ If there were no biases, we'd expect to see the blue and green dots clustered evenly on either side of the black dotted line. Instead, they are skewed to one side. There are ways to use data like this to identify unfair treatment and correct it.

A program like Cure Violence emphasizes geography. It serves neighborhoods where street-level violence is a problem. It would not make sense to provide the same capacity for Cure Violence in every neighborhood. Some neighborhoods may not need it at all; while in others, it could be a matter of literal life or death. This is a stark example, but it makes the point that applying the same, equal service standards to each geography or population may not be the best way to use limited resources.

Instead, a local government can assess how well different constituencies are being served according to the measures established in a community vision. For example, are there certain neighborhoods that suffer more from particular types of crime such that better preventative measures should be focused there? Or are there populations that are experiencing a larger trust deficit with police than others? The answers to these questions suggest how resources might be used to better and more fairly serve different constituencies. The budget can then reflect these choices to direct resources fairly.

EXHIBIT 5 | Racial Bias in Traffic Stops and Searches

Police require less suspicion to search Black and Hispanic drivers than White drivers.





CONCLUSION

Many local governments must contend with the dual imperatives of rethinking public safety services while balancing the budget in the face of, in some cases, large revenue declines. *Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities* is a proven way to address the potential for conflict that is inherent in public budgeting, including in high-stakes situations that cities and counties face now with public safety. Public safety is facing a watershed moment in the public's expectations. As a result, a well-considered and systematic approach is needed to better align expectations and budgetary reality. We encourage local government to think about their approach to public safety along the five pillars we presented:

- **Establish a long-term vision.** Define a long-term vision and goals for public safety. The vision and goals provide guidance for successive annual budgets.
- **Build trust and open communication.** Invest in building trust by giving people a forum for expressing concerns with their day-to-day, lived experience with police, promoting personal interaction between police and the community they serve, building a representative police force, and transparency of policing information.
- **Use collective decision-making.** Understand who needs to be involved in the conversation about public safety, provide the context for a productive conversation, and develop forums to engage people in the conversation.
- **Create clear rules.** Develop new rules for budgeting that transcend the limitations of the traditional budget process. We described seven new rules local governments should consider.
- **Treat everyone fairly.** Develop a budget process that is perceived as fair. Make sure the results of the process are fair by recognizing and correcting for inequities along racial and/or socioeconomic lines.

This approach will help local governments reach decisions that are acceptable to the greatest number of people, that enhance trust in policing and public safety, that produce better public safety outcomes, that are financially sustainable, and that position the community to thrive in the long run.

Public safety is facing a **watershed moment** in the public's expectations.

Above, Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen marches with the community during the fifth consecutive day of demonstrations in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd on June 1, 2020 in Denver, Colorado.

APPENDIX 1 Survey Results

This appendix contains results for the summaries of surveys that were discussed in this report.

June 11 YouGov Survey	Total	City	Suburb	Town	Rural
Police departments don't need to be reformed	17%	11%	18%	16%	26%
Police have a problem with race, but the problem can be fixed by reforming the system	59%	59%	57%	56%	62%
Reform hasn't worked; we need to defund the police	24%	30%	25%	28%	12%
We need more cops on the street	64%	61%	66%	51%	74%
We need fewer cops on the street	33%	39%	34%	49%	26%
Favor cutting funding for police departments	25%	32%	24%	24%	17%
Oppose cutting funding for police departments	53%	47%	53%	54%	61%
Not sure	22%	21%	23%	22%	21%

June 11 YouGov Survey	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Police departments don't need to be reformed	17%	21%	3%	13%	9%
Police have a problem with race, but the problem can be fixed by reforming the system	59%	56%	64%	66%	62%
Reform hasn't worked; we need to defund the police	24%	23%	21%	21%	29%
We need more cops on the street	64%	67%	50%	64%	60%
We need fewer cops on the street	33%	33%	50%	36%	40%
Favor cutting funding for police departments	25%	25%	31%	24%	20%
Oppose cutting funding for police departments	53%	57%	38%	44%	54%
Not sure	22%	18%	31%	32%	25%

July 22 Gallup	All	Black	Asian	Hispanic	White
Major changes needed	58%	88%	82%	63%	51%
Minor changes needed	36%	10%	17%	33%	42%
No changes needed	6%	2%	2%	4%	7%
In favor of abolishing police departments	15%	22%	27%	20%	12%

APPENDIX 2 National Issues Forum and Policing and Public Safety

An illustration of community dialog on public safety

Some problems require the entire community to collaborate in order to reach a resolution. These are issues where:

- Where there is no obviously “correct” answer that people can all agree on. Rather trade-offs and compromise will be necessary.
- It is important to overcome “us versus them” perspectives. People need to understand that theirs is not the only perspective and see other people’s perspective.
- Everyone has a part to play in getting to the resolution.

Policing and public safety is an issue that fits these criteria. Conversation is the only way we can make progress on such issues.

First, someone must convene a conversation. They must also create an atmosphere that is conducive to conversation. That convener may or may not be the local government itself. Many different organizations could play this role, but there are a few essential qualifications a convener must meet:

- **Wants to have a good faith discussion.** The conversation will be honest and not steered to towards predetermined conclusions.
- **Wants an inclusive dialogue.** Different voices are not seen just as welcome, but are seen as necessary for a successful conversation.
- **Can frame the issue successfully.** The framing must provide meaningful direction for the conversation, yet not be too limiting. For example, if the conversation is framed about “budgeting” for police, that might be seen as too limiting or maybe even too broad. Some people may feel that budgeting is something best left to “experts.” Instead focus on an aspect of problem that is universally recognized. An example of a framing that worked for one mid-sized city is “Preventing and reducing youth violence, especially against young African American men.”

Next, people must be persuaded to converse. The most important way of persuading is word of mouth from trusted sources. For example, if people hear of the dialogue from someone they know personally, then they are more likely to participate. One strategy in this vein is to borrow the credibility of a community leader. If someone with high standing in the community advocates for participating, then people are more likely to listen. Another strategy is to invite groups to participate. If a person knows that other members of a group that they feel comfortable with will participate, then they are more likely to participate too.

So, what does the actual conversation look like? To find out, we will use the [National Issues Forum](#) (or just “Forums”) as a model.

First, Forums are moderated to encourage positive interaction between people who are not expected to agree. Moderators are drawn from the community and given preparation to serve as moderators, including practice sessions. The National Issues Forum has found that faith-based groups and librarians are often two good sources of potential moderators.

Some people may feel that budgeting is something best left to “experts.” Instead focus on an aspect of **problem that is universally recognized.**

APPENDIX 2 National Issues Forum and Policing and Public Safety

The structure of the Forum itself also helps manage conflict. It is important that participants don't feel the need to "fight" their way into the conversation. Forums do this in a couple of ways. First, conversations take place in small groups. It is easier for everyone to talk in a small group. Second, the moderator emphasizes that different points of view are not just tolerated, but are *required* for the conversation to be successful. The moderator does not advocate for any particular point of view – they are neutral. Third, basic ground rules for respectful listening and conversation are established. Finally, the moderator remains mindful of time and managing it so that everyone gets a chance to talk.

A conversation will be more productive if there is a common set of facts that the participants share. Forums typically begin with information to ground the participants. For example, a [starter video on safety and justice](#) from the National Issues Forum provides context, such as people's concerns about violent crime, racial bias in policing, and police's feeling that citizens may underestimate the dangers police face in their jobs. The video then frames three ways forward for the participants to discuss: 1) enforce the law together (e.g., community involvement in policing); 2) apply the law fairly; and 3) de-escalate and prevent violence.

National Issue Forum also provides an issue guide that goes through the options in a bit more detail. The issue brief also: provides opportunities to add in local concerns; poses questions for participants to discuss; and encourages participants to consider tradeoffs. To illustrate, [an issues guide for the question of "what should we do to ensure equal justice and fair treatment in our communities?"](#) walks participants through three options:

- **Increase accountability.** Rethink how police are hired, trained, supervised, and disciplined.
- **Confront persistent racial discrimination in policing.** Deal directly with racial discrimination and biased thinking among police officers.
- **De-escalate to create new responses to nonviolent problems.** Provide alternatives to law enforcement to address social ills and nonviolent crime.

With this information as a basis for the conversation, the participants discuss the issues for about two hours. The facilitator manages the conversation, encourages the group to explore different perspectives and solutions, and makes sure people don't feel forced to "pick a side." The participants are, instead, encouraged to discuss trade-offs and consider the costs and consequences of each of the available choices. When people are required to think about what they'd be willing to give up in order to get something else they want and recognize that no choice is without potential downsides, it undermines the tendency for people to group themselves into competing factions.

Representatives of the local government's public safety function can also participate in the conversation. This will usually be most productive when the question is framed as: what can we (the community and local government) do together to solve a shared problem?

It is important that participants experience a valuable outcome from of any public engagement process. With National Issues Forum, some participants are satisfied just with being part of a thoughtful and civil discussion with other community members. Others may want to see action come out of the meeting. Therefore, part of the Forum is to provide opportunities for people who want to continue to work together after the meeting to advance ideas that the participants formed a consensus around or just getting involved in existing civic opportunities.

National Issue Forum and Social Distancing

Though in-person conversation will always be better for a tough issues like public safety, Issues Forums have also worked over standard video conferencing technology, like Zoom or WebEx.

END NOTES

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- ²Steve Crabtree. Most Americans Say Policing Needs “Major Changes.” Gallup. July 22, 2020.
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- ⁶Based on a personal interview with Charlie Ransford, Senior Director of Science & Policy, Cure Violence Global.
- ⁷Shayne Kavanagh. “Network Enterprises—An Information Age Solution to Enduring Problems?” Part 2 of a series on “Improving Local Government Coordination and Reducing Waste From Local Government Fragmentation.” Government Finance Officers Association. October 2020.
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- ¹¹An example of a study that suggests police headcount does not deter crime is: Gary Kleck and J.C. Barnes. “Do More Police Lead to More Crime Deterrence?” *Crime and Delinquency*. October 2010. An example of a study that suggests headcount does make a difference is: Aaron Chalfin and Justin McCrary. “The Effect of Police on Crime: New Evidence From U.S. Cities, 1960 to 2010.” National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper No. 18815. February 2013.
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- ¹⁴John Gramlich. “Voters’ Perceptions of Crime Continue to Conflict With Reality.” Pew Research Center. November 2016.
- ¹⁵Joe Hogsett, Barbara Poppe, and Mary Cunningham. “Housing Is How We End Homelessness, Not Police Sweeps.” Bloomberg City Lab. October 5, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com>
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- ¹⁷A general discussion of this issue can be found at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/advancing-diversity-law-enforcement>. An example of a study on this topic is: Souman Hong. “Representative Bureaucracy, Organizational Integrity, and Citizen Coproduction: Does an Increase in Police Ethnic Representativeness Reduce Crime?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. October 2015.
- ¹⁸Shayne Kavanagh and Vincent Reitano. *Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities*. Chicago, IL: Government Finance Officers Association. 2019.
- ¹⁹These two values are widely accepted in research literature as the basis for making social judgements. Some researchers replace the term “values” with “warmth.” Because this paper focuses on trust in institutions, we chose “values.” A fuller discussion of values and competence as the drivers of trust can be found in: “Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust.” OECD Publishing, Paris. 2017.
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- ²¹<https://cityspeak.org/2016/11/20/building-trust-between-the-police-and-the-communities-they-serve/>
- ²²The general psychological phenomenon underpinning this is called “homophily.” An example of a study linking personal physical characteristics to trust is: Lisa M. DeBruine. “Facial Resemblance Enhances Trust.” *Proceedings of the Royal Society*. July 2002.
- ²³<https://openpolicing.stanford.edu/findings/>
- ²⁴“Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department,” U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2015.
- ²⁵Maciag, M. “Skyrocketing Court Fines Are Major Revenue Generators for Ferguson.” *Governing*. August 22, 2014.
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- ²⁷Susan Lentz and Robert Chaires. “The Invention of Peel’s Principles: A Study of Policing Textbook History.” *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 35(1): 69–79, 2007.
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- ³² For a description of the anti-vaccine situation, see: Renee Diresta and Gilad Lotan. "Anti-Vaxxers are Using Twitter to Manipulate a Vaccine Bill." *Wired*. June 8, 2015. Diresta described that the bill was derailed despite public support in "The Information War: A Conversation with Renee DiResta" a podcast at SamHarris.org. GFOA could not find the survey that DiResta refers to in the podcast but did find a more recent poll that showed 80% support in California for stronger vaccinations provisions in state law in 2019. Presumably support was not drastically less in 2015. See: "Californians strongly back vaccine law in new statewide poll." Los Angeles Times. September 30, 2019.
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- ³⁵ Data provided courtesy of Chris Fabian of ResourceX.
- ³⁶ Besides the points overviewed in this paper, see chapters 6 and 7 for strategies and references to in-depth resources: Shayne Kavanagh and Vincent Reitano. *Financial Foundations for Thriving Communities*. Chicago, IL: Government Finance Officers Association. 2019.
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- ⁶⁴ <http://theilluminationproject.org/our-approaches>
- ⁶⁵ This is the lesson from a well-known psychological experiment called “the ultimatum game” that asks two participants to agree to division of resources. The first participant proposes a split of resources. If one participant finds the proposed split unfair, research shows that they are highly likely to not only reject the offer but are willing to incur costs to punish the other player for proposing the unfair split.
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