

Lessons from Merger Workshop

Case Study: City-County Police Merger

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

9:30 – 10:15 a.m.

Louisville merged most of its departments, including city and county police, on day one of merger. Metro's new Police Chief – Mr. Robert White – discussed his job and described the challenges associated with the new format for the department.

Robert White - Metro Police Chief, Louisville, KY

Why did he take this job?

- Attracted by the opportunity.
- Attracted by the dynamic Mayor's sales pitch
- It was a professional match with city of Louisville, his family and himself

Challenges of merger included:

- Of the two existing headquarters, which one do they use – county or city?
- Many county officers opposed merger because they had better benefits than the city officers, and so they viewed the merger as a possible set back.
- To some degree both the existing County and City departments had strained relations with parts of the community. Communication was not good, e.g. a lot of “No Comment” responses when challenged by the press (especially by the city). This was especially common around race issues.

Action Steps to merge the police departments:

- By statute both the executive and the legislative branches of the old city/county governments had to merge. The service departments did not. Merging the police departments was the Mayor's decision.
- Initially the structure of the police department was kept the same, i.e. a county and a city department. In the meantime, the merged policy and master plan was developed.
- The new command structure designated 3 assistant chiefs. Each assistant was tasked as follows:
 - Assistant #1 - addressed what needed to be merged, priority and cost. Recommendations followed within 90 to 120 days.
 - Assistant #2 - addressed proactive versus reactive police policy and mindset. E.g. prevent crime instead of react to crime.
 - Assistant #3 - led in creating a strategic plan, i.e. how many unions were needed, reestablish unacceptable police practices/policy, deal with internal and external police trust issues, race issues, respect issues, media issues, community relations and engagement issues.

Results/Learnings:

- The police department is “97%” merged. As it stands today 100% implementation is limited by the mindset of some of the older employees, and some of the communications systems. Time, further policy implementation and attrition will take care of these limitations
- Quick successes are important. Involve employees and stakeholders in decisions where possible. Also, find out what is important to employees and stakeholders. The

- uniforms, the colors of the police cruisers and the type of sidearm were all chosen with the input from the officers and staff. Chief White also made it a point to go on runs with the officers. “Face time” with the boss is important.
- The strategic plan is being further refined and broken down into action items and work plans. The assistant chiefs are being tasked accordingly.

Q& A/Comments

- How was the local sheriff department affected by the merger process? How do the police and sheriff departments work together? One participant noted that in his community they had a popularly elected sheriff, and to defy him or challenge his authority was “political suicide.” Answer: Chief White noted that the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department is primarily tasked with civil processes and the courts, and is not directly involved in the emergency response loop. This reduces overlap between the processes and inherently eliminates competitive turf wars. Chief White recognized that this is not the case in a lot of other communities, and noted that those communities would have to do a better job of informing the citizens of the advantages and disadvantages that the different departments present. Communication is key.
- What happens if there is a union disagreement? Answer: Chief White noted that he received a “no confidence” vote from the unions, so understands the challenges that the unions can present. His observations and recommendations included:
 - Keep the media informed and on your side. When possible, be the first to inform the media of issues that could be perceived as negative if not openly and quickly communicated.
 - Stay transparent, avoid “no comment” responses.
 - This community is bought in to the Mayor and his administration, and so it helps having his endorsement when union issues come up.
 - As long as you are “doing the right thing” there should not be discomfort in tough situations and/or decisions.
 - There is a merit board process for grievances, and appeals go to the court.
- How are seniority issues resolved? Answer: Chief White noted that they relied on the existing union contracts for guidance. Where the City and County policy was not consistent, they accepted the most favorable policy of all the contracts. There was pay disparity, and the mayor and his administration handled that.
- How were new district boundaries established? Answer: Chief White noted that initially the existing ten districts stayed in place (four city and six county). New commanders were selected for each. For the most part the pre-merger city commanders were reassigned to pre-merger county districts, and vice a versa. As the process has evolved they have gone from ten districts to eight. To do this the district maps were redrawn, and they paid special attention to neighborhood integrity. The stakeholders and communities were involved in the process, and it allowed give and take.
- Can you tell if crime will be reduced now with the greater flexibility that merger presents? Answer: Chief White stated “No, crime has not yet been reduced.” He noted that policy does not reduce crime, attitudes and relationships within the community do. This along with infrastructure and technology improvements will begin to reduce crime, and more time is needed.