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Strategic Advisory Boards for Local Police:
The Next Step in Real Community Involvement

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ABSTRACT

At a time when police agencies look for ways to engage their communities, both to increase public input and to bolster citizen trust, local governing bodies need to reconsider what tools are already available. Citizen advisory boards are common to the local government landscape, and are relevant to addressing local concerns within specific agencies or areas of expertise, but are very seldom utilized in connection with police services (Dougherty & Easton, 2011). Municipal governments within Texas should appoint local boards and commissions for police strategic policy advice and review. The use of boards and commissions is well practiced, members can be appointed from knowledgeable citizens, and they can be in place prior to times of turmoil to aid in communication. Their use allows a regularly scheduled venue for public discussion on police service and provides a common place for all members of the community to meet and be heard (Attard & Olsen, 2010).

Police departments commonly have the largest budgets and the most employees within a municipality structure. Police services are ranked among the highest prioritized services offered by local government. There is no doubt that they are also the most publicized. Local, direct public involvement and debate in their strategic direction and distribution of resources should be natural (Chambers, 2012). Current local government models, utilizing advisory boards as a normal course for business, are easily adapted to the recommendations from the *President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (2015). Advisory board establishment and use is another way to increase police legitimacy, to enhance public trust, to elicit public input for the allocation of resources, and to engage in procedural justice.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past several decades, city governments have utilized a business approach to government. Based on the stylized principles of the new public management movement, citizens have been referred to as customers, and the professional staffs within government engaged in redefining services and goods provided with an eye towards efficiency and productivity. Managers within local government were told, and exhorted, that business practices can solve all government problems, that the bottom line is what mattered, and that the way to get there was through lean practices and tailored service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). Among other things, this has led to a concern over local government's use of business network structures that provide a significant portion of decision responsibility to private sector organizations and diminishes the daily accountability of city leaders for government functions. This may even lead to a greater ability for persons and groups with resource advantages to hijack policy processes (Williamson, 2014). Running contrary to this is the idea of running a local government like a democracy, where citizens are actually citizens, instead of customers (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000), and they participate in and share responsibility for decisions.

When informed citizens consider the idea of running local government as a democracy, instead of following a professional staff model, it causes them to experience both excitement and confusion. The excitement centers on the use of a democratic model within the most responsive levels of governance, normalizing that use, and involving citizens as a means to both legitimize and direct the delivery of service. Perplexity, however, comes from the actuation of this democratic process (Lachapelle &

Shanahan, 2010). The new public service theory of public administration offers several tenets that are helpful to police departments' understanding of their communities, but one in particular stands out. Despite increasing diversity, the community itself is seen as a way of bringing about unity. Citizens are looking beyond a commercialized self-interest and involving themselves in the strategic direction and long term interest of their community (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

Direct citizen involvement in local governance is a cornerstone of American democracy, and it is argued that today it is even more important. Citizens have the ability and know-how to more fully shape the political and administrative services that affect them directly. Appointed boards and commissions allow for the placement of citizens, by elected officials, who are knowledgeable in the field, or who hold positions within the community as primary stakeholders of the service (Roberts, 2004). And, with this understanding, it becomes clear that municipal governments within Texas can utilize appointed local boards for many other service functions, policy advice, and budgetary review.

Citizen boards are already broadly utilized for a range of service activities within local government. And, closer to the question of police policy boards, there are already police civil service commissions that operate in a quasi-judicial fashion to ensure appropriate employment practices and citizen-police complaint review boards with administrative or investigative oversight (Hryniewicz, 2011; Stout, 2014), both of which affect police administrative operations. Simply stated, if local government is the most responsive to citizens (Dougherty & Easton, 2011), and one of the most import services provided by local government is public safety (Buren, 2007), then it is natural to assume

that most direct citizen political involvement would concern public safety topics. Unfortunately, the assumption is wrong. Fortunately, however, the remedy is plain to see. Municipal governments within Texas should appoint local boards and commissions for police strategic policy advice and review.

POSITION

Citizen advisory boards are already a viable and visible part of the local government landscape. Doughtery and Easton (2011) found that 75% of the 274 local governments within the counties surrounding Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania used some sort of volunteer appointed board. Board and commission use in Texas municipalities is commonplace. An internet search quickly shows that nine out of the ten largest Texas cities have civil service commissions for police, with four of those also engaging the citizenry with police complaint review boards of some fashion. It is noteworthy, though, that only one of those ten cities, Austin, has a strategic steering commission for it emergency services by way of its public safety commission (City of Austin, n.d.).

Understanding the historical roles of the civil service commissions and complaint review boards leads to a greater appreciation of how policy advisory boards can complement their presence. In an effort to put distance between police officers and partisan elected officials, laws were enacted to empower panels of citizens to hire municipal employees (Stone & Travis, 2011). Civil service boards were formalized and, in many cases, given quasi-judicial powers in direct conflict with the city's executive authority, in an effort to make personnel issues transparent and fair (Stout, 2014) and to provide for employment based on merit (Buren, 2007).

Complaint review boards can have many different organization templates and powers (Finn, 2001). And depending upon the specific locale and requirements of the citizens, they may involve several aspects of complaint review, use of force policy change, and early warning systems for officer misconduct (Walker, 2012). These boards are also often born of contentious incidents or questionable, highly publicized, actions on the part of the police (Chambers, 2012; Schaible, De Angelis, Wolf, & Rosenthal, 2012).

Taken together, these two styles of boards leave most of the day to day policy making and operational tempo in the hands of the paid managers of the police department. But it also leaves the strategic direction of the department out of the context of citizen public discussion. Spending priorities, mandates, crime patterns, service priorities, and long range plans should be open to public comment and subject to citizen review. And neither the civil service commissions, nor the complaint boards, have the authority to act in this capacity.

Establishing a police advisory board for departmental policy direction and review, prior to an angry hue and cry, can have a beneficial impact on both city staff and citizen confidence in the board's abilities. The elected leaders, along with police department management, can be proactive in its development of a board model that it believes is appropriate for its jurisdiction (Attard & Olsen, 2010). This proactive stance can also provide the time necessary to train appointed board members in their duties and responsibilities, statutory authority, open meeting laws, and conflict management techniques. The training provided to a police policy board is where department managers can leverage the experience of the board with specific, local knowledge of

departmental strengths and weaknesses. Board membership is more stable than the attendees at public meetings, and both training and the individual experience in the board members' increases over time (Lachapelle & Shanahan, 2010).

A proactive stance on board development can also allow time for the recruitment of citizens with knowledge in fields related to the board's activities. This idea of looking at a citizen as a partner allows the city government to leverage local knowledge through volunteerism, rather than paying commercial price. Research has shown that board membership requiring or benefiting from a certain expertise was usually drawn from persons known to, and convinced by, elected leaders or other board members. Those that self-recruit have been shown to do it out of a desire to share their experience. Appointed boards also allow for bringing multiple interests both to the table and in front of it (Dougherty & Easton, 2011). In a multi-stakeholder initiative context, it is this local expertise combined with interested stakeholders in a power sharing union that enhances the abilities of all to accomplish change (Halloran, 2015).

Being proactive in board promulgation can help avoid the pitfall of selecting board members with personal agendas. Dougherty and Easton (2011) noted that one of the driving factors behind self-recruitment to public boards was dissatisfaction with current policies and actions. Policy change in and of itself is not evil, but due to the very nature of police work, with its inherent dangers and potential long term socio-political impacts emanating from split second decisions (Wilson & Buckler, 2010), it is imperative that board membership consist of vetted community members with broad based social outlooks (Attard & Olsen, 2010). Because the very nature of a policy advisory board is

the discussion of the future, instead of the past, it may also self-regulate the volunteers it attracts.

The final, and most important, position point is that establishing a police advisory board for departmental policy direction and review can assist a local police department in gaining and maintaining legitimacy with its community. Research shows that greater citizen participation in deliberative government aids in gaining trust and confidence in the processes, and with the professional administrators involved (Dougherty & Easton, 2011). Stout (2014) even went so far as to argue that citizen advisory boards should be numerous and informal, to increase direct citizen participation in all manners of local public administration, due to their democratic influence. She suggested that local governmental agencies look for positive ways to engage the community, specifically looking at older administrative bodies in a new way, such as the citizens' advisory board.

Previous research supports the premise that both civil service commissions (Stone & Travis, 2011) and citizen complaint boards (Finn, 2001; Mazerolle, Bennett, Davis, Sargeant, & Manning, 2013) positively impact citizen trust in local police departments. And as chief executives of local law enforcement agencies look for further ways to engage community members in dialogue, advisory boards would allow police departments to discuss truly meaningful topics of concern publicly. Trust, built upon common experiences, relationships, and transparency, is a key part of the new public service public administration model (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). Advisory boards can be instrumental in assisting the strategic change process for departments attempting to embrace the new professionalism in policing model. The new professionalism model

can help citizens better understand individual police actions that are part of larger strategies. The model can help communities assess the requests and requirements that the police have for more public money, more legal authority, or more public engagement. The new professionalism is a strategy, and advisory boards that lead discussions on strategy priorities can help chief executives keep their departments centered on why they are doing what they do, how to prioritize their resources, and how they can improve services. The model encompasses four points of professional conduct: increased accountability, legitimacy, continuous innovation, and national coherence (Stone & Travis, 2011). These tenets have also been shown to both the academics and leading practitioners of police science, as through the label of community policing, since 1995 (Cordner, 1995). In his work, Cordner (1995) stated over 20 years ago, "Citizen Input: Community policing takes the view that in a free society citizens should have open access to police organizations and input to police policies and decisions. Access and input through elected officials is considered necessary but not sufficient" (p. 2).

Advisory boards can assist in the accountability of long term costs, conduct, and crime. They are able to draw citizens into the public communications necessary to earn legitimacy from democratic politics and professional standards, as well as explaining police legitimacy under the law. Boards can assist with issues of persistent distrust between the police and ethnic and racial minorities. Departments can be guided by citizens towards innovative ways of administration, education, and community acceptance. And boards can spearhead initiatives to collaborate nationally on standards for professional conduct and operations (Stone & Travis, 2011).

Legitimacy, as an inherent goal of a police department, is directly impacted by day to day police officer interactions with citizens. Mazerolle et al. (2013) undertook a mega-analysis in Australia to examine the impact of police led interventions on legitimacy. They concluded that police officers that encouraged citizen participation in governmental functions, expressed integrity, showed neutrality in their decisions, or that demonstrated dignity and respect in their personal interactions with citizens had a positive effect on legitimacy policing. The most positive factor was the use of dialogue in police interactions. Police advisory boards provide another opportunity for that public dialogue.

COUNTER POSITION

Police policy advisory boards, just like other local government boards and commissions, rely upon citizen volunteers. As previous research has shown, citizen volunteers for government processes do not necessarily depict the same cultural or socio-economic concentrations as the community at large, or age ranges. Volunteers may express opinions, and vote, in ways that do not align with the majority of citizens as well. Recruiting members who have the time to dedicate towards board functions may limit working class participation, and the very nature of the processes involved will limit the membership participation of citizens with lower levels of education (Roberts, 2004; Williamson, 2014).

Dougherty and Easton (2011) offered that the selection process for board membership can comprise of whatever steps the local community decides is fair and useful. Taken in the context of deliberative action, and using public input to reach stated goals of fair representation, along with adequate approachability from general

citizens, membership on the board can easily allow for the representation of all stakeholders. Stout (2014) also noted that, as advisory bodies without legislative authority, board membership composition could "easily include a variety of interested community members supported by administrative staff and a city council liaison" (p. 50). In short, a public board of any sort can be what the convening authority wants it to be. Local rules that establish for fair representation and mechanisms for appointment and removal are able to be custom tailored (Lachapelle & Shanahan, 2010; Stout, 2014).

There is also a real concern that a police policy advisory board could limit the department chief executive's ability to direct the day to day operations of the police department. Public safety is a field in which both rapid and accurate decisions have to be made daily on a myriad of legal and operational problems. Collaborative, public discussion and decision was never described as rapid in any cited source. Along the same line of thought lies the concern that a police policy advisory board, by way of politically appointed members, will extend the reach of political influence into the actions of individual police officer decisions (Roberts, 2004; Williamson, 2014).

Stout (2014) stated that it is important not to create boards that have authority over operational functions, as this would conflict with the executive function, whether held by a city manager or by a mayor. It is also noteworthy that citizen oversight boards, which in many cases do have some authority to act or compel action, still maintain an overall effect of community support for public police (Hryniewicz, 2011). This leads to the idea that the purpose of the board, in general, has nothing to do with operational intervention, but rather long term transparency (Stout, 2014). The community, through any combination of its elected representatives, professional staff, or

special review committees, can deliberate and decide on the exact means by which an advisory board will function. Past practice has shown that citizen involvement does not translate to citizen operational command. The community wants a professional police force that acts in the best interest of public safety, in a politically neutral manner. Boards that are formally organized in a fair manner, shown to be representative of the community at large, and possess a scope of power commensurate with its responsibilities will be viewed as legitimate (Attard & Olsen, 2010; Dougherty & Easton, 2011).

RECOMMENDATION

Municipal governments within Texas should appoint local police advisory boards for departmental policy strategic direction and public review. Such formations will add to their legitimacy through transparency, increase public trust in the police, and provide a forum for educated discussion on public safety. Boards and commissions already have a common history within the framework of local government in general, and have been utilized for citizen-police complaint resolution and as a means to ensure fair employment, promotional, and disciplinary practices within police departments. Advisory boards for police policy are another natural step in this direction (Stout, 2014).

Policy steering boards operate from the premise that it is a citizen's duty to participate in the public discussions of local government. They incorporate and signify democracy at work. They allow for local expertise to be brought to bear on local problems, and provide under-represented stakeholders a venue to be heard. Proactive implementation of policy advisory boards also allows for the training of members and

the avoidance of appointing members with prior personal agendas (Lachapelle & Shanahan, 2010).

Police policy advisory boards will help build trust within the community. Trust, built upon common experiences, relationships, and transparency, is a key part of the new public service public administration model. The board's actions can help the police department develop innovative ways to perform, allow for public accountability, aid in a department's maintenance of legitimacy, and may very well lead to a new national standard for local police governance (Stone & Travis, 2011).

There are points of concern that will need to be addressed during the formation and continued functioning of a policy advisory board. Among them is the requirement to properly recruit members who reflect the cultural, nationalistic, age, and socio-economic diversity within the community (Roberts, 2004; Williamson, 2014). Establishing appropriate membership requirements and providing for a fair and transparent selection process, while also allowing for public discussion during all meetings, is a simple way to overcome unintended procedural bias (Dougherty & Easton, 2011).

There will also be questions as to a board's scope of authority and responsibility with regards to police operational practices. It is imperative to delineate roles between the police department chief executive, the city manager, the city council, and the board by statute or ordinance. As democratic as the community wants the process of police policy discussion to be, they also want a politically neutral, professional police force, that acts in the best interest of public safety. A board that is fairly and formally seated, seen as being representative of the community, and that possesses a procedurally

adequate scope of power will be viewed as legitimate (Attard & Olsen, 2010; Dougherty & Easton, 2011). This can only reflect favorably upon the community's police officers.

Community members will participate in government decisions. And, either by conventional outlets provided by the people for the people, or through unconventional outlets of public protest, they will be heard (Stockemer, 2014). As members of the very communities they serve, politically neutral police departments should take the lead in providing for, and welcoming, police policy advisory boards.

In May of 2015, the *President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* published its final report. It consisted of recommendations and action items covering six broad topics on trust, policy, technology, community policing, training and education, and safety. A consistent theme throughout the report was the need for increased transparency, to be more inclusive of citizen input, and to include employee input as well. Law enforcement agencies were actively encouraged to engage and collaborate with the community. In two separate locations, the report specifically encouraged the use of advisory bodies. One was when developing policies for the use of a new technology. The other was when an agency needed to "develop policies and strategies in communities and neighborhoods disproportionately affected by crime for deploying resources that aim to reduce crime by improving relationships, greater community engagement, and cooperation," ("President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing," 2015, p. 20).

There is a need for the utilization of knowledgeable citizens when endeavoring to formulate policies and distribute resources. Using an appointed board in this fashion

allows for the police to interact regularly with citizens in a positive, public, non-

enforcement activity. It allows for the building of trust (Lachapelle & Shanahan, 2010).

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