How To TAKE BACK THE BUDGET

A GUIDE TO REVIEWING AND CHANGING THE POLICE BUDGET IN YOUR COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY RESOURCE HUB

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Titular typeface: Marsha by Vocal Type

Marsha is a typeface named after Marsha P. Johnson, an African-American, transgender woman whose activism in the 1960's and 1970's made her one of the most prominent figures in the Stonewall uprising of 1969, which began in response to an act of police violence and brutality, itself brought on by the criminalization of LGBTQ people. This typeface is directly inspired by the vertical sign that once hung outside of Stonewall.

Document design by Adele Ball of Brocade Studio.

Community Resource Hub

The Community Resource Hub for Safety and Accountability works to ensure all people have access to resources and tools to advocate for systems change and accountability in law enforcement.

The Hub accomplishes its goals in three main ways:

By providing and making available up-to-date research, reports, data, model policies, toolkits and other resources to the field

By supporting specific campaigns with technical assistance needs

By serving as a convener to bring advocates and organizers together for shared learning

Learn more at communityresourcehub.org

Civilytics

Civilytics Consulting is an independent data science firm with a mission of building inclusive public analytics for government accountability. Civilytics is building the tools communities need to understand, deliberate about, and change the performance of their local governments.

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Your voice matters. Public budgets are moral documents that institutionalize what a community values and how it carries out those values. As such, public budgets should reflect the values and the needs of the community they serve. To do that, public budgets need your voice.

This comprehensive guide to reviewing your city or county budget will explain how to argue for changes in police staffing and funding to your local policymakers. The advice in this guide is based on my experience doing in-depth budget reviews of police departments in cities and counties across the country as well as working as a budget analyst in state government.

I want to tell you right away that police department budgets are not like the other government agency budgets. Police budgets are full of inconsistencies, mistakes, and errors that do not stand up to public scrutiny. In contrast, school district budgets exhibit a much higher degree of professionalism, transparency, and care—because school districts are used to people examining and arguing about their budgets. Police departments in most cities have not had their budgets scrutinized before.

Using this document, you will change that.

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that public budgets, and the police budgets within them, are different in every community. While the location of all the information needed for your budget review may vary, you'll be able to find it using this guide. You'll also find practical strategies for getting the information you need accurately and quickly.

Whether you are in a major city, a smaller town, or a rural county - this guide was written to help you take action over how public funds are raised and spent in your community. So set aside a few hours over a couple of days, roll up your sleeves, and let's decode the budget together.

CONTENTS

1 Gather all the budget documents p. 5

2 Set expectations and goals p. 9

3 Gather comparisons to put the budget in context p. 12

4 Analyze the overall budget p.14

- Look at the big picture
- Read the Executive Summary
- Review overall city expenditures
- Review the police detail budget
- PAUSE

5 Analyze the details of each police unit p. 26

- Identify common budget cut opportunities

6 Propose alternatives p. 33

- Tricks to watch out for

1

Gather all the budget documents

The first step is to gather all of the necessary budget documents. It is important that you work from the published and publicly available budget documents on your city's website.

You will be recording the document and page numbers where you found specific information. By citing the city's own information and numbers, you force the city to treat your analysis as credible—even if there are flaws in the numbers the city provided. This will make it more difficult to dismiss your demands on technicalities and will force the substance of the issue to be considered.

The information you need will most often be located in two or three separate documents:

The Budget Executive Summary

Gives you the overview of the city finances and the priorities of city leadership.

The Budget Detail Book

Gives you all the information on the revenue and expenditures made by the city.

The Police Detail Budget
(sometimes separate, sometimes included above)

Gives you all of the publicly available detail on how the police department is funded and what it spends money on.

These documents will most often be published on the city's homepage under the budget section. Sometimes they will be combined into one "Budget Book," a PDF document with multiple sections. After you find the budget webpage that has these documents, you need to make sure you review the most current version. Cities run their budget cycle on fiscal years, which is a 12 month period like a school year, that corresponds to when the city switches from one budget to the next.

You can find the latest budget document because budgets are usually organized into three phases: Proposed, Amended, and Adopted. The Adopted Budget is the final budget that the city will operate under. The Proposed Budget is the first public proposed budget. The Amended Budget is published in between the two if there are significant revisions to a budget either by City Council or in response to outside changes like the fiscal impact of COVID-19.

Key Terms

Proposed Budget	The first draft of the city budget used to.
Amended Budget	The budget sent for final approval after the initial proposed budget.
Adopted Budget	The final budget for the fiscal year approved by the city council and governing spending and activity of the city for the year.

An example of how your city's budget might appear on their website:

2021 PROPOSED

- FY 2021 - Proposed Expense Budget
- FY 2021 - Proposed Revenue Budget
- FY 2021 - Prposed Budget Book
- FY 2021 - Propsed Ordinance Book

ADOPTED BUDGETS AND BUDGET ORDINANCES
2020

- FY 2020 - Adopted Ordinance Book
- FY 2020 - Adopted Budget - Expenditures & Revenues
- FY 2020 - Proposed Ordinance Book
- FY 2020 - Proposed Budget Book - Expenditures & Revenues

2019

- FY 2019 - Adopted Ordinance Book
- FY 2019 - Adopted Budget - Expenditures & Revenues
- FY 2019 - Proposed Ordinance Book
- FY 2019 - Proposed Budget Book - Expenditures & Revenues

2018

- FY 2018 - Adopted Ordinance Book
- FY 2018 - Adopted Budget - Expenditures & Revenues
- FY 2018 - Proposed Ordinance Book
- FY 2018 - Proposed Budget Book - Expenditures & Revenues

Fiscal Year — A period of 1 year that does not line up with the calendar year used in budgeting e.g. fiscal year 2022 will run from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Cities use different start and end dates for their fiscal years.

The budget process usually has three distinct phases:

1. Budget Proposal
2. Budget Amendment
3. Budget Adoption

Most budget hearings are based on the Proposed Budget for the upcoming fiscal year. If the proposed budget has not been published, you can use the Adopted Budget from the previous year to start gathering your information since city departments begin their budget development using the prior year budget as the starting point.

So, use the Proposed Budget for the upcoming year if it is available and the Adopted Budget for the previous year if it is not.

Sometimes, the Police Detail budget is a separate document, and other times it is included in the "Budget Book" for the whole city.

Using these documents, you can identify three key pieces of information that will anchor your budget analysis:

1. **How much of the total city budget is spent on policing?** This number will help put your demands in context.

2. **How much does the average police officer cost the city?** This will help you price out the savings from reducing the department size.

3. **How is the police department organized into units and what are their functions?** This will help you identify duplication, make demands regarding specific police functions and units, and pose tough questions to the city about the police department.

Additional documents that can be helpful if you can find them and have time:

- The city's Human Resources pay schedule, which will include salary ranges for police officers.
- Detail budgets for city programs you wish to fund.
- Organizational charts for the city and the police department, preferably with staffing numbers.
- The department-by-department staffing report showing how many positions every department has budgeted and how many of those positions are currently vacant.
- A citywide program inventory: some cities ask all departments to submit an inventory of their activities and the budgets for each activity—this provides more detail than a budget and asks departments to organize their spending by activity and provide a narrative and performance measures for each activity.

Position	Positions are the budget placeholder for jobs in a city.
Position Code	Positions are often classified by position codes that define the salary and benefit package associated with a position. Police officers have a different position code than a law clerk. Position codes can be used to find salary and benefit rates.

Set expectations and goals

Before you begin reviewing the budget, let's set your expectations about police budgets, and then set your goals.

Let's start with some facts about police budgets to frame your review of the budget for your city:

- Police departments are funded almost entirely by unrestricted city funds. Departments receive state and federal grants, as well as corporate gifts, but these are relatively small (often less than 15% of the department's budget)

- Police departments usually spend 90% of their budget on staffing—salary, benefits, pension contributions, overtime, etc. Defunding requires cutting jobs

- Highly visible (and controversial!) equipment purchases like military vehicles, weapons, and ammunition are often given to departments for free (no budget required), through programs like the Department of Defense 1033 program, and what they do cost is tiny compared to salary and benefits

- Surveillance tools like traffic cameras, body cameras, and tracking databases are often invisible to the public, more expensive than weapons, and hidden in the budget under contracted service agreements or IT expenses

Here are three questions to consider when defining your goals:

1. How much do you want to cut the police budget and why?

2. Which police activities do you want to stop or slow down?

3. How do you want to spend the money saved?

In setting your goals keep in mind:

To restructure or alter the police department, **positions (jobs) have to be cut**. Cuts to equipment or contracts are easily reversed in a future budget. Gaining positions back is harder.

Think bigger.
Police officers are expensive. Removing a few police positions can free up funding for many alternatives.

Think in round numbers and percentages.
Pushing for a "20% reduction in tactical and special assignment unit officers" is easier for city councilors to understand than asking for $2.7M in cuts to the Investigations Division.

Plan to **revisit your goals and adjust** based on what you learn about the budget, about the political situation, and how the police department responds.

Gather comparisons to put the budget in context

Cities have a love-hate relationship with comparisons. Cities love comparisons that make them look good and hold them up as models but are dismissive of unflattering comparisons and often plead that their city is too unique for comparisons to be valid. This is natural, but comparisons are still persuasive and helpful both to reset expectations of policy makers and to educate the public about how public dollars are spent.

Here are some ways you might want to compare your city to peer cities:

- Number of police officers per resident.
- Police spending as a share of the overall budget.
- Police spending compared to other social service spending.

Unfortunately good comparative information about police departments is still hard to find because police departments have resisted standardization and there is minimal state and federal oversight of police activity. Each comparison you make will likely be novel information to police makers.

When making comparisons, focus on cities of similar sizes and neighboring cities. These are often a natural comparison group for city leaders.

LINKED RESOURCES:

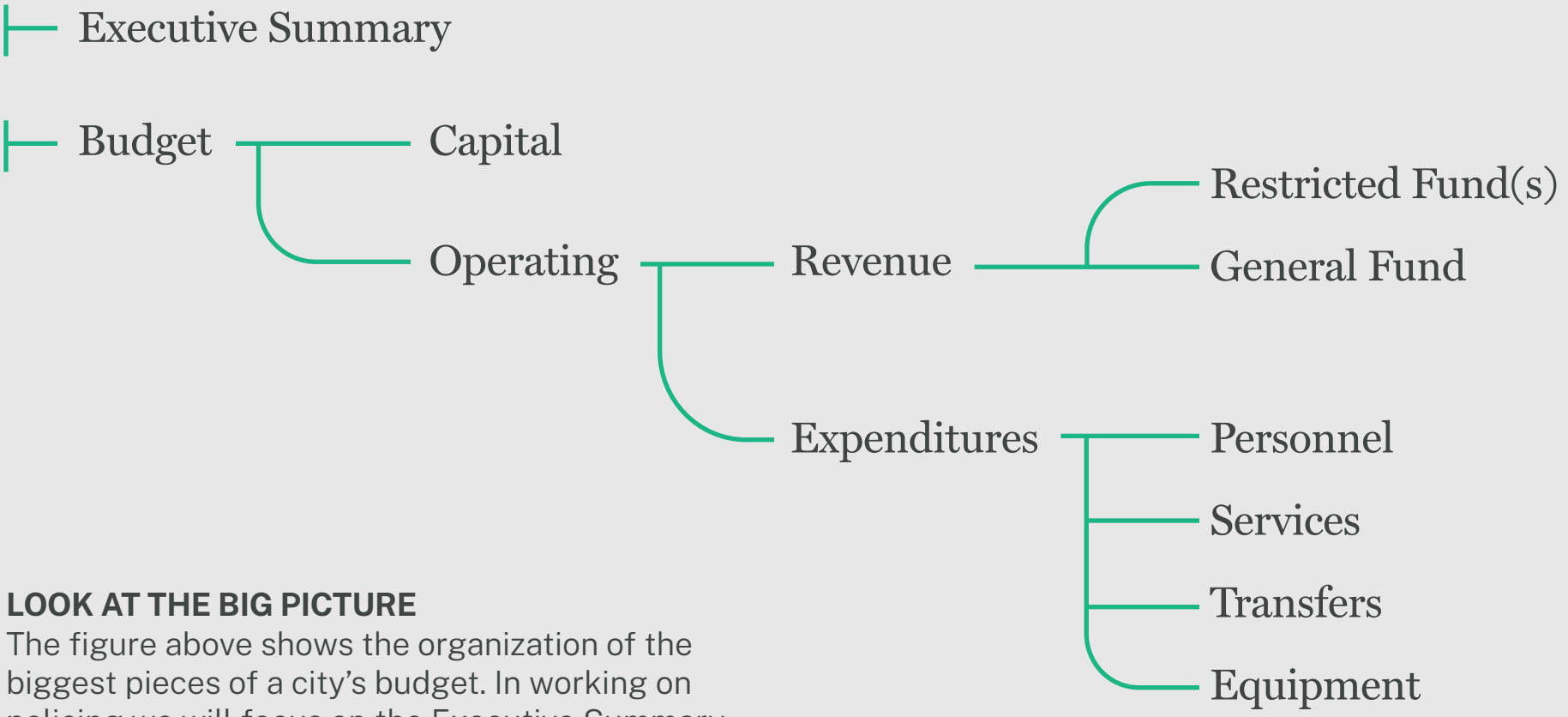
Police Department Size Comparison Tool
Use this to find out how many police officers per resident similar cities have.

Data For Police Abolition
Use this to find budget and reform proposals in similar cities

4

Analyze the overall budget

Now, it's time to review the budget. Using a system of steps, you can cover all relevant aspects of the budget as efficiently as possible. Following these steps will help you analyze, critique, and propose alternatives to your city budget quickly and accurately.



LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

The figure above shows the organization of the biggest pieces of a city's budget. In working on policing we will focus on the Executive Summary, operating budget, and expenditures, with a focus on the general and restricted fund revenues for context and to identify police department fines and fees.

Revenue	Money that the city brings in through taxes, fees, fines, and other means.
Expenditure	Money that the city spends on salaries, benefits, contracts, utilities, and anything else.
General Fund	Unrestricted revenues raised by the city to be spent on any city services. The bulk of police funding comes from the General Fund.
Restricted Fund	Restricted funds are revenues raised by the city to be spent on a specific purpose, e.g. water services.

READ THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every city budget has an Executive Summary from the Mayor or City Manager laying out the budget rationale, the context in which the budget was set, and the highlights from the city's past year. Read this entire document, even the parts about the water department. You want to look for three things in the Executive Summary:

- The political priorities of the Mayor/City Manager as expressed in the budget.
- References to the police department successes.
- The total budget amount (revenue and expenditures) and how it compares to prior years.

Focusing on these three things will help you:

1. Identify opportunities to tie your proposed alternatives to policing to the Mayor's/City Manager's priorities, if that fits your agenda.

2. Challenge the successes listed for the police department.

3. Identify how much of the budget policing costs.

Revenue and expenditures are important to review separately. Expenditures are what the city spends or plans to spend. Expenditures are a good way to understand how much a service like policing costs the city. When people talk about the budget for the police department, they are talking about the expenditures made by the police department.

Revenues are how the city brings in money. Cities get revenue from different activities (property taxes, grants from other governments, fees for services) and these revenues can either be unrestricted (also called general purpose) or restricted use (to be used for a specific service). A good example is water and sewage service — these services and the employees who work on them are paid for by restricted revenue raised through service charges to the customers who use the city's service.

In most cases, police departments are funded through unrestricted general revenue. Make sure you summarize all of these items in some notes you can refer to later and share with others.

REVIEW OVERALL CITY EXPENDITURES

After the Executive Summary, but before each department's budget, the city will publish an overall look at its revenue and expenditures. Generally, this is divided into the Operating Budget and the Capital Budget. This section focuses on the Operating Budget (often just called the budget), because this is where the majority of police spending is and is more standard across cities. Sometimes, the operating budget is further divided into the General (unrestricted) Fund and restricted fund(s). Most of the funding for police departments comes from the General Fund, so this is where your focus should be.

Your focus here should be on expenditures because expenditures tell us how much money the city and each department has spent, plans to spend, or is allowed to spend. Some cities report expenditures by revenue source as well as overall spending. For police budgets you should look at both the expenditures for the city across all revenue sources and you should also look at expenditures only from General Fund revenue. You will find tables of these numbers by major city department, which will include the police department.

This is the first introduction to true budget numbers so let's take a moment to get familiar with how budgets present these numbers.

Operating Budget The budget for ongoing annual expenses that a city has to maintain its services.

Capital Budget The budget for large one-time purchases like a new police headquarters. These purchases often span multiple years and require the city to borrow money. Look here for spending like this.

For each budget line, the city will typically report the actual (verified) numbers from the most recent fiscal year available, which will usually be two years prior to the proposed budget year. So, for FY21, they will be reporting actual spending from FY19. The budget will also report the budgeted amount for the last year (FY20), but since that year has not finished, the actual spending (which must be audited and verified) cannot yet be reported. Then the budget will report the proposed amount for the next fiscal year, FY21. Sometimes, there will be a final column noting the increase or decrease from the prior FY20 budget to the proposed FY21 budget.

In addition to writing down each of these numbers for all budget line items you care about, you also want to write down the total for the table. That way you can calculate both the **nominal** and **relative** changes in the budget in multiple ways. The example that begins on the next page shows how we can represent the nominal increase in police operations spending for FY21 in multiple ways.

Relative An adjusted number. A relative measure of change can be created by subtracting the prior year from the current year, and then dividing the difference by the prior year to measure the change as percentage of the prior year reflecting the percentage change over time.

Nominal The unadjusted number. A nominal measure of change can be created by subtracting the prior year from the current year representing a dollar amount change over time.

	FY19 Actual	*FY20 Budget*	*FY21 Proposed*	*Change, FY20—FY21*
Police Operations	$173,231	$178,210	$220,182	+$41,972
Total Spending	$350,120	$345,220	$338,220	-$7,000

Take the hypothetical Fiscal Year 2021 budget expenditure table above. Using just three numbers—the FY19 actuals, FY20 budgeted, and FY21 proposed spending—we can represent the change in the budget tons of different ways. And each of these ways can be useful in messaging and framing budget decisions.

This year's budget is 27% higher than police spent in FY19

($220,182 *FY21 Police* — $173,231 *FY19 Actual*) / $173,231 *FY19 Actual* = .27 or 27%

This year's police budget is 24% greater than last year's budget

($220,182 *FY21 Police* — $178,210 *FY20 Police*) / $178,210 *FY20 Police* = .24 or 24%

The proposed PD budget increase for FY21 is 8 times larger than the increase the PD received in FY20

($220,182 *FY21 Police* — $178,210 *FY20 Police*) / ($178,210 *FY20 Police* — $173,231 *FY19 Actual*) = 8.4

	FY19 Actual	*FY20 Budget*	*FY21 Proposed*	*Change, FY20—FY21*
Police Operations	$173,231 ●	$178,210 ●	$220,182 ●	+$41,972 ●
Total Spending	$350,120 ◆	$345,220 ◆	$338,220 ◆	-$7,000 ◆

The proposed PD budget for FY21 is $47,000 more than the PD budget from 2 years ago

($220,182 *FY21 Police* ● — $173,231 *FY19 Actual* ●) = $46,951

Two years ago the PD budget was 50% of the total budget, in FY21 it is proposed to grow to 65%

$$\frac{\$173{,}231\ \textit{FY19 Police}\ ●}{\$350{,}120\ \textit{FY19 Total}\ ◆} = 49.4\%$$

$$\frac{\$220{,}182\ \textit{FY21 Police}\ ●}{\$338{,}220\ \textit{FY21 Total}\ ◆} = 65.1\%$$

From FY19 to FY21 the city's total spending decreased 3.4% while at the same time police spending has grown 27%

$$\frac{\$338{,}220\ \textit{FY21 Total}\ ◆}{\$350{,}120\ \textit{FY19 Total}\ ◆} = 96.6\%$$ *(96.6% - 100% = -3.4%)*

$$\frac{\$220{,}182\ \textit{FY21 Police}\ ●}{\$173{,}231\ \textit{FY21 Police}\ ●} = 127.1\%$$ *(127.1% - 100% = 27.1%)*

READ THE POSITIONS BUDGET

Most cities track not just spending, but the allocation of positions (city jobs). Positions are measured as full-time equivalents (FTE), with 1.0 FTE being equal to one full-time city job for the course of the entire fiscal year. Positions are important for identifying where city jobs are allocated. Since policing expenses are 80-90% personnel, knowing where the staffing of the police department is located is important and can help draw distinctions between how the city invests its other precious resource—full-time jobs—in different services it provides.

The positions allocation can often be found near the organizational chart. It usually, but not always, is formatted like the expenditures table, showing the prior actual, prior budgeted, and proposed position counts for the whole city and by department.

You can use the same calculation strategy we used above on expenditures to calculate changes in staffing. A final note we will discuss in detail below is that often budgets will make a distinction between "sworn" law enforcement employees/positions and "civilian" positions. This information can be useful in calculating the cost of police officers or in ensuring budget cuts are targeted at decreasing the number of cops in a department, and not just its spending.

	FY19 Actual	*FY20 Budget*	*FY21 Proposed*	*Change, FY20—FY21*
Police Operations	2.0	3.0	5.0	+2.0
Total Spending	8.0	7.0	7.0	-0.5

Record the city's overall expenditures, unrestricted general fund expenditures and revenues, and the overall number of city positions

Record the police department's expenditures, any revenues from fees, fines, forfeitures, and the overall number of positions in the department

Note down the budget numbers for the prior actual fiscal year, prior year budget, and the proposed budget for each category

Get General Fund or unrestricted fund revenue and expenditures for the city and the police department

REVIEW THE POLICE DETAIL BUDGET

Next, you can skip to the police detail budget, often found in the table of contents in the budget PDF or by searching within the PDF for "police." Most cities will ask each department to provide a narrative describing their accomplishments in the previous year and their goals for the coming year. This is a much shorter version of the Executive Summary that is specific to each department. In this section you will find quotes and language you want to use to put pressure on the police department. You will also find self-reported performance measures and declarations of success that you will want to be ready to ask the police department about. Read this section closely using the same strategy as your review of the Executive Summary.

Next there will be an overview of the department's entire budget. You will want to capture some key numbers from the department's overall budget to use in explaining the magnitude of the city's spending on policing and setting the context for your proposed cuts. Capture the following numbers:

- Spending on personnel
- Spending on equipment
- Spending on contracts or services
- Revenue generated by the department from fees, fines, and forfeitures

Most departments will list their overall spending and overall revenue before giving more unit-by-unit detail or detailing their staffing. An example expenditure report might look something like:

Expenditures by Category

Budget Category	*FY19 Actual*	*FY20 Budget*	*FY21 Proposed*
Personnel	$3,121,240	$3,255,210	$3,740,000
Equipment	$110,000	$100,000	$95,000
Supplies & Services	$500,000	$450,000	$400,000
Contracts	$250,000	$200,000	$200,000

These broad categories are common in many cities. Personnel most often includes salary, benefits, and other costs related to personnel. Equipment typically includes things like police radios, body cameras, crime scene investigation tools, and even vehicles. Supplies and services covers day-to-day operations like office supplies, paper, stamps, janitorial and laundry services, and others. Finally, contracts covers contractual relationships with outside vendors for everything from police training to information technology support.

You may find a revenue table in this section as well. This is less important to review, but it may be a place to identify the amount of state and federal grants the department receives, which you can use to learn about the department's projects and granting agencies.

Next, you'll want to identify the staffing or position plan for the department. At a minimum the department should list the overall number of employees for the entire department, but hopefully the department will also publish a breakdown of employees within the department. The most transparent departments will also identify the difference between budgeted and filled positions. Unfilled positions are known as vacancies.

Vacancies can result from the department being unable to hire qualified workers or keep them employed, and they make an excellent target for budget cuts.

Here's an example of what a position table might look like:

A Sample Positions Budget

Division	*FY19 Actual*	*FY20 Budgeted*	*FY21 Proposed*
Administrative Services	**201.2 sworn** (197.5 filled) **185.3 civilian** (184.5 filled)	**202 sworn** **183 civilian**	**213.5 sworn** **183 civilian**
Investigation	**105.9 sworn** (104 filled) **23.8 civilian** (23.8 filled)	**106.5 sworn** **31.5 civilian**	**110.2 sworn** **33.5 civilian**
Patrol	**1602.5 sworn** (1492.3 filled) **15.5 civilian** (15 filled)	**1680 sworn** **15.5 civilian**	**1710.5 sworn** **15.5 civilian**
Patrol Support	**84.5 sworn** (81.25 filled) **5.3 civilian** (5 filled)	**84.5 sworn** **6.3 civilian**	**88.7 sworn** **6.5 civilian**

Sworn Police department jobs held by law enforcement officers with legal power of arrest are classified as sworn, referring to the oath officers swear when receiving their badge.

Civilian Police department jobs held by city employees that do not have the power of arrest.

PAUSE

If you are in a hurry, you can stop here and make some default recommendations using only this information. For example, you can recommend:

Staffing the department at a percentage of the last actual staffing level—for example, reduce the number of employees to 90% of the FY19 actual staffing level

Reduce the department budget to the percentage of the city budget it was in FY19—for example, if your city like most cities has increased this percentage you can propose returning department funding to the share of city spending it was in FY19

Reduce the department budget by the same percentage that the whole city budget decreased from FY19 to now

These types of default proposals are quick to produce, easy to understand, and can generate a lot of savings to be spent on public safety programs that don't rely on policing. Coupled with information about what police do or do not do in your city (see below) and a menu of less expensive and more effective alternatives, this can be enough of a proposal to build consensus on the city council.

However, there are benefits to knowing more. For example, with more information, you can give city council members tough questions to ask the police department at public hearings. You can provide public comments asking the police department to defend specific details of the budget that they have not had to publicly discuss before.

Analyze the details of each police unit

Not all cities require or publish a “program level” or “unit level” budget within departments, but most provide some detail.

A unit-by-unit or even a division-by-division review of the budget is useful for two reasons. First, usually these documents will include "performance measures" where the department describes its accomplishments in the past year. These measures are hand-picked by the department to present their successes and are a good place to look for information about the department and to ask questions. Second, the unit-by-unit detail allows you to identify questionable spending and duplication.

The unit-by-unit detailed budget can be long so it helps to read it with an eye on specific types of budget cuts to identify. Police department budgets almost always contain a few of these inconsistencies or flaws which you can highlight. You can use duplication, inconsistencies, or other issues to inform policy makers about the need to look at the police budget more closely.

IDENTIFY COMMON BUDGET CUT OPPORTUNITIES

As you read the detail unit-by-unit or activity-by-activity budget for the police department, here are four categories of budget cuts to consider:

1. Duplication
2. Civilianization opportunities
3. Staffing reductions by unit
4. OT and secondary employment

To identify additional types of cuts to make you may want to review the equipment and capital budgets and identify state and federal grants as well as corporate gifts that are supporting your police department.

DUPLICATION

If the police department budget includes unit-by-unit detail you will find duplicated activities across units, vacant positions, and inconsistent logic (like touting increased efficiency in processing evidence but asking for more staff to do it). Often inconsistency and duplication go hand in hand—it is not uncommon for multiple units in a department to declare responsibility for narcotics enforcement and drug trafficking arrests while at the same time the department touts a new low in narcotics activity within the city. Note down every time you see more than one unit involved in the same activity and note the size of each unit. And note every time the department asks for more resources to police a problem that it has declared success in addressing.

Duplication is not where you will find big savings in a PD budget. However, these items are important to identify because they signal your seriousness and authority as a commenter on the budget. City managers, budget directors, and city council members will appreciate the work you put in to identify these items and it will increase your credibility. It also puts the police department on the defensive by having to justify budget line items that have received little scrutiny in the past.

Pros

Establishes your knowledge and understanding of the budget, can build political consensus, makes the PD defend their own budget

Cons

Dollars saved are small, department may not be meaningfully changed by eliminating duplication

Example

This article in The Appeal details the analysis of the Phoenix Police Department budget and highlights inefficiencies and duplication.

CIVILIANIZATION OPPORTUNITIES

Civilianization is the process of replacing sworn law enforcement officers with civilians for functions in the police department that do not require an armed law enforcement officer. Policing efficiency experts make a living recommending ways that police departments could be run more efficiently and one of their main recommendations is to stop assigning police officers to complete administrative tasks that civilians could do.

In many departments normal administrative roles like organizing and managing documents, processing contracts, and reviewing and authorizing grant spending are handled by sworn law enforcement officers instead of civilians. These administrative positions are often used to place officers removed from active duty for different reasons (under investigation, injury, illness, a complaint) to allow them to continue to accrue service time. But in most cases, these are tasks that can be done by civilians outside of the police department.

Pros

Can generate substantial savings and and can move certain functions to more appropriate agencies

Cons

May not sufficiently reform or structurally change the PD, civilians may be replaced with sworn officers in a future budget

Examples

Read this article and the linked efficiency study by consulting firm KPMG about ways to change staffing in the Dallas Police Department, as well as this article from The Appeal on the Phoenix Police Department budget.

Most police departments are staffed at around 20-25% civilians. If your city has a lower rate of civilian employees you can recommend that the city direct the department to replace sworn officer positions with civilian positions for administrative functions. You can estimate the savings made by this proposal by using the following calculation, which uses 40% as a ballpark estimate of civilian savings:

Total PD positions × 25% – existing civilian positions = PD positions that could be civilians

New civilian positions × cost per officer × 40% (savings per position) = Savings from converting to civilians

For example, in a city with 1,400 total positions in its police department, 275 of which are civilians, and an average cost of $102,000 per officer (salary and benefits), this translates to:

350 positions could be civilians

1,400 × 0.25 = **350**

75 additional officer positions that could be civilians

350 – 275 = **75**

$3,060,000 in savings

75 × 102,000 × 40% = **$3,060,000**

STAFFING REDUCTIONS BY UNIT

Your goal in shrinking the police budget is likely not just to exercise responsible fiscal management during an economic crisis. Your goal is likely to dramatically alter the police department and the role it plays in your community. To do this, you must cut positions.

Cutting positions can be a place where budget analysis gets stuck. It can be tempting to get into the weeds and find specific jobs that are no longer needed and add them up to a big enough cut, or to target specific units or specific position classes in the PD.

The argument to shrink the PD by cutting positions can be made easier with these five strategies:

1. Stop recruitment (suspend recruitment activities).
2. Eliminate cops with worst disciplinary records (e.g. eliminate 50 worst cops).
3. Eliminate units known for committing violence or engaging in discriminatory, abusive, and unlawful policing tactics.
4. Offer early retirement (as in past fiscal crises, e.g., 2008).
5. Leave vacant positions empty and shrink staffing (hiring freeze).

Pros

You can make big cuts here and permanently change the department.

Cons

Requires some clear assumptions and is more math intensive.

Example

A proposal to cut specific funds in Louisville, which includes examples from other cities as well.

OVERTIME (OT) AND SECONDARY EMPLOYMENT

Here is an item you should always cut. Many police departments use overtime (OT) and secondary employment opportunities (police details) as an internal reward system, and such systems are often rampant with waste, fraud, and abuse.

Overtime is usually listed separately in the budget, and I find it is most straightforward to recommend a 25% reduction (or more!) in the budget for OT.

Secondary employment can be harder to find. Many police departments charge other city departments (public works, water, fire, etc.) for police officer presence at job sites or to route traffic. This is known as a "police detail" and is done by officers not officially on duty, working outside of their regular shift for extra pay. Police details are expensive to the city and also contribute to an increased police presence even in situations where it is not necessary. You can find these lines often by searching within the entire budget for "police detail" or "police assistance."

Pros

Police overtime is unpopular. This is a good punitive cut which will send a clear signal to the PD.

Cons

Does not structurally reform the PD. Positions remain intact. This could be reversed mid-year with a special exemption granted to the PD to restore the funds.

Example

Many newspapers publish stories on outrageous police officer compensation. Here's an example from Boston.

Propose alternatives

You should package your cuts to city council with proposed alternatives. There are many alternatives to armed police officers that are more safe, effective, and worthwhile.

Below are some examples from the FY21 budget season that have been proposed:

- **Unarmed traffic units** (like parking enforcement) to monitor traffic safety and respond to vehicle accidents.
- **Homeless shelters**. Replace patrol officers with homeless shelters and homelessness prevention services like emergency rent assistance, water bill assistance, and counseling services.
- **Domestic violence shelters**. Creating safe spaces for survivors of domestic violence to access shelter, services, and counseling services can reduce calls to police for domestic violence incidents.
- **Eliminate school resource officers** (SROs). These are often not in the police department budget, but in the school budget. SROs are an expensive and ineffective school safety strategy and can actively contribute to violence rather than prevent it.
- **Mental health first responders**. For example, Eugene, OR, has long had a system where, when you call 911 with a mental health crisis, an extensively trained non-law enforcement mental health urgent response team called CAHOOTS responds before it ever gets to police dispatch. They field almost 20% of all 911 calls!
- **Civilian first responders** to respond to other common police calls for service like wellness checks, domestic violence incidents, and noise and nuisance complaints.
- **Civilian investigators**. Many police calls are driven by the need to have a police report to make an insurance claim for damage or lost property. These non-urgent calls can be responded to by an unarmed civilian investigator.
- **Education, education, education.** After school programs. Recreation programs.

These alternatives are hard for the public to imagine. Defunding the police will not mean that, if you call 911, no one comes. Instead, it means that when you call 911 instead of an armed police officer responding to every situation, a trained professional with the specific skills and training you need most will respond.

TRICKS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Finally, even once you get your alternative reinvestment proposal, the city council may find ways to claim a victory by "defunding" the police without changing the police department or committing to any community reinvestment.

Be on the lookout for these budget tricks to **defund without divesting**:

- Reorganize the PD by moving a unit like crossing guards, but keep the number of sworn officers constant.
- Move the 911 call center to a new agency, still managed by the PD, without changing how calls are responded to.
- Defer maintenance on vehicles or cancel IT or other contracts for one year without changing the department.
- Create a civilian jail diversion program within the police department and controlled by the police department.

Because of this, you need to prepare for your budget advocacy to occur all year. Local officials have to be held accountable for the decisions made in the budget, even outside of the budget period. Over time more resources will be published which will help you identify the key times and ways to successfully monitor the budget process and ensure the changes you fight for are carried out.

The budget is an annual cycle and budget work should be done in each quarter to sustain successes from the previous budget and prepare for the next budget. A budget is a plan and the city will revise that plan throughout the year as new information about the city's revenue and spending becomes available. There will be regular, but less frequent, budget hearings where this information is shared.

This makes it important to review the successes in each budget cycle and monitor how the city is implementing them throughout the year. It also means there are multiple periods in the budget cycle you may be able to intervene to make progress, outside of the big budget debate at the end of each fiscal year. For example, if you secure an agreement to pause recruitment of new officers in the coming fiscal year, you will want to monitor that the city and the police department follow through on this throughout the fiscal year.

Q1

- Respond to the adopted budget in the press.
- Make a list of wins and losses in adopted budget to monitor.

Q2

- Get a staffing report. for the police department
- Get updated revenue and spending numbers.
- Participate in mid-year budget meetings.

Q3

- Price out any new programs to be proposed.
- Do background research for budget responses.
- Get a timeline update on budget process.

Q4

- Respond to the city's proposed budget.
- Get the budget calendar and attend. relevant hearings
- Take back the budget.

LINKED RESOURCES:

People's Budget Calculator
Use this to find out how much a program costs in terms of the budget for policing in your city.

#DefundPolice Toolkit
Use this toolkit from the Interrupting Criminalization Initiative to identify concrete steps toward divestment from policing, and investment in community safety.

COMMUNITY
RESOURCE HUB