

Roundtable Overview

Topic: Data & Performance Measurement

Event: Connect & Share: Public Safety Forum

Format: Peer-to-peer roundtable discussion

This roundtable explored how districts collect, interpret, and use data to guide strategy, communicate impact, and influence funding decisions. Participants shared candid perspectives on which metrics truly matter, which ones are misunderstood or distrusted, and how data can both support and complicate public narratives.

Executive Summary: What Attendees Should Know

Participants agreed that data is most powerful when it drives decisions, not just reports. While many districts collect large volumes of information through tools like SMART, Placer AI, and internal tracking systems, the challenge lies in translating that data into insights that boards, stakeholders, and the public can easily understand.

The discussion highlighted a recurring tension between data and perception. **In many cases, metrics show measurable improvement, yet public sentiment lags behind reality.** Successful districts pair quantitative data with narrative, visuals, and context to tell a clearer story—while also acknowledging that not all data points are equally reliable or meaningful.

Why This Topic Matters

Data increasingly shapes how districts justify budgets, adjust deployments, pursue grants, and communicate value to stakeholders. However, when metrics are poorly defined or inconsistently collected, they can undermine credibility rather than strengthen it. This roundtable reinforced the need for districts to focus on **quality, relevance, and clarity** over sheer volume of data.

Scenarios or Challenges Discussed

- Using data to adjust staffing, deployment, and service hours
 - Communicating impact to boards and stakeholders who interpret data differently
 - Reconciling data that conflicts with public perception
 - Leveraging data for funding, assessments, and grants
 - Managing inconsistent or unreliable data entry
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Key Discussion Themes

1. Data That Drives Strategy

Participants shared examples of using data to make tangible operational decisions, including adjusting dispatch hours, expanding service areas, reallocating staff to field operations, and refining deployment based on hotspots and call patterns. Data was most effective when it directly influenced how and where teams showed up.

2. When Data Conflicts with Perception

Many districts experience frustration when data shows improvement—such as reductions in crime or homelessness—while public perception suggests otherwise. Participants emphasized the importance of pairing metrics with storytelling tools like maps, photos, and before-and-after visuals to bridge this gap.

3. Trust, Accuracy, and Data Quality

A recurring theme was skepticism around certain metrics, particularly those reliant on manual input. Inflated counts, inconsistent definitions, and lack of auditing can erode trust. Districts stressed the importance of training, supervision, and regular audits to ensure data reflects reality.

4. Knowing Your Audience

Not all stakeholders care about the same metrics. Boards may focus on outcomes, ratepayers on visible change, and partners on compliance or safety indicators. Successful reporting tailors data presentation to the audience and avoids overwhelming stakeholders with metrics that lack context.

Lessons Learned & Opportunities

- Focus on metrics that influence decisions, not just activity counts
 - Pair data with narrative, visuals, and context
 - Audit and train consistently to improve data reliability
 - Be selective about which KPIs truly represent impact
 - Acknowledge limitations and uncertainty in certain data sets
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Key Concerns Looking Ahead

- Overreliance on metrics that are poorly understood or inconsistently collected
 - Data fatigue among boards and stakeholders
 - Misalignment between city, district, and media data boundaries
 - Ensuring data systems evolve alongside program goals
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Practical Takeaways for Attendees

What to Borrow:

- Using data to actively guide deployment, staffing, and strategy

What to Avoid:

- Reporting metrics that lack clarity, consistency, or decision-making value

One Question to Keep Exploring:

- If you could measure only one outcome that truly reflects impact, what should it be?