

# Indianapolis' possible public safety budget woes

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The current economic crisis has had a major impact on public safety agencies across the country, and many departments are racing to find innovative ways to reduce costs while maintaining current operations. One major concern is the cost of maintaining personnel, and cities need to determine whether they can afford to keep staffing requirements up or reduce officer count needed for crime control.

The city of Indianapolis, Ind., has been plagued with a growing budget deficit and has estimated about a \$30 million budget gap for the upcoming fiscal year. The mayor has forecasted major cut backs over the next year, which could directly impact public safety departments. The city has expressed a need to cut tens of millions of dollars from public safety agencies, which would lead to possible hiring freezes and reductions in new recruitment classes. The cuts could also lead to a reduction in the amount of patrol officers in the field, which could then lead to an upsurge in crime. This is a gamble the city may not want to take since current crime statistics report an overall upward trend in both violent and property crimes within the past 10 years.

At the wake of FY 2012, Indianapolis was presented with a challenge to mitigate a downturn in revenues, including a steep income tax decline. According to the [Indianapolis 2012 Budget Book](#), income tax revenues are down about \$85 million from a peak in 2010, which calculates to a drop of more than 30 percent. The proposed FY 2012 public safety budget was down about \$8 million from FY 11. The 2013 budget is expected to be introduced on August 13, but estimates reveal it is likely that departments, including public safety, may have to continue to reduce costs.

The city has proposed tapping into its rainy-day fund along with obtaining possible grant funds to alleviate some financial woes and prevent cutting too deep into departments, but this may only be deterring tough decisions for the years to come. Some options presented have been to cut a 3 percent cost-of-living raise for officers, which has raised concerns around the stagnation of officers' ranks. A lack of promotions may jeopardize the ability of the department to obtain grant funding. Departments may also require some officers to pay for some of their gas and cell phone use. Other cost-cutting options include the consolidation of HR staff for sheriff, prosecutor and courts departments, and the merger of law enforcement training academies.

## Analyst's Take

In a new budget cycle for most states and localities, it is not uncommon for agencies to forecast major reductions as departments determine how to best allocate their money and implement better planning practices. Cities like Indianapolis, with a growing budget deficit, may be more cautious with IT spending and may only focus on projects that they have an immediate need for. Indianapolis may also be waiting on an upcoming grant cycle to determine what type of funds to request before they finalize any major cuts to public safety.

In addition, the procurement process can be long and expensive for agencies to endure. Many are now looking to partner and/or consolidate with neighboring jurisdictions for public safety projects, as well as developing plans to build out their own systems in house.

As always, agencies need to fully assess needs in order to not waste money on technology that will not be utilized. Further, the need to reduce personnel costs may actually lead to an increase in public safety IT projects. Vendors should work closely with agencies and departments to determine how to curb costs. They should also make sure all needs are addressed and make recommendations for certain grant programs that may be of assistance.