



# PSO Perspective

May 2026

Vol. 3, No. 3

## From Intelligence to Strategy: A Leadership Perspective

Tara Hall

This PSO perspective draws on leadership experience at the Mesa Police Department and broader trends in data integration, analytics, and evolving public safety practices, reflecting how agencies are aligning intelligence with strategy, operations, and community priorities to support more informed decision-making and better organizational outcomes.

### The Shift to Data-Driven Policing

Industries across all sectors increasingly use real-time data and integrated systems to improve performance and guide strategy. In policing, every call and interaction produces data, creating opportunities to connect information and insights across the department. As data grows, agencies must focus not just on collecting it, but on organizing and using it to inform decisions. This shift toward unified systems enables visibility, coordination, and strategic alignment, making data truly actionable, as highlighted in the IACP Police Chief Magazine article [\*The Quiet Revolution: Data in Policing\*](#).

### Connecting Intelligence

Traditionally, policing has relied on different levels of intelligence:

- Tactical intelligence supports investigations and enforcement by providing information on specific incidents or criminal activity
- Operational intelligence supports daily deployment and resource alignment through trend and workload analysis

- Strategic intelligence guides long term planning through forecasting, research, and integrated information to set direction and priorities

Tactical Intelligence → Immediate Response

Operational Intelligence → Ongoing Coordination

Strategic Intelligence → Long-Term Direction

When these levels work together, intelligence becomes central to decision making throughout the organization, not just a tool for reviewing activity.

### Advancing Proactive Leadership

Strategic intelligence enables agencies to move from reactive responses to proactive direction. By examining long-term trends and connecting insights, departments can anticipate challenges and realign priorities for calls for service, staffing, and growth. This also helps agencies understand evolving community expectations and adapt services. When used well, intelligence supports both operations and strategy.

### Bringing Intelligence into Decision-Making

Many agencies now integrate planning, research, and analytics into leadership processes more

intentionally, with [National Institute of Justice](#) research highlighting the importance of data integration in supporting informed decision making. Mesa, a large suburban city with a growing technology and business sector, continues to see evolving community needs and operational demands. In response, Chief Dan Butler with the Mesa Police Department is enhancing this model and established the Office of Strategic Initiatives to unify planning, research, analytics, and program implementation with a focus on community outcomes. This centralized approach connects strategy to execution, strengthening coordination, improving visibility, and supporting decision making across the organization.

#### Building the Capability

Developing this capability requires alignment across the agency, including:

- Breaking down data silos to improve information sharing
- Overcoming resistance to change through education and engagement
- Strengthening technology and analytical capacity to support better insights

Building a consistent approach means bringing strategic functions together using operational and community-informed data to guide decisions and connecting insights to performance.

#### What Comes Next

As policing continues to evolve, the use of integrated data, analytics, and technology will become increasingly important. The most effective agencies will connect data, analysis, and leadership in a unified approach, focusing not on the volume of information, but on using it to guide decisions, allocate resources, and shape strategy. The vision is to create a clearer connection between intelligence, decision making, and execution, helping leadership better align priorities, resources, and action across the organization.

Tara Hall leads the Office of Strategic Initiatives at the Mesa Police Department in Arizona. She serves on the NAPSPS Board of Advisors and was named NAWLEE Professional Staff Leader of the Year in 2025. Tara earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Northern Arizona University.

## About the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory

The [Police Staffing Observatory \(PSO\)](#) is a global collaborative of academics, scholars, practitioners, and students working with Michigan State University to promote evidence-based police workforce research, strategy, and operations. It aims to advance police workforce knowledge and its application through research and its dissemination, including practitioner partnerships.