



HOW TO PLAN

FOR A JOINT PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITY

IS A SHARED SPACE FOR YOU?

The rewards—improved efficiency, updated facilities, better allocation of resources, and a more user-friendly system—are well worth the effort.

It's a scenario that plays out at almost every police department, sheriff's office, crime lab, and public safety facility. Over time, the building becomes outdated, the space is inadequate for current needs, and the question lingers—**"How are we going to pay for this?"**

More and more, nearby agencies are opting to join forces and create joint facilities to better utilize their resources and eliminate duplicated services. Some joint facilities are created as part of a larger plan to integrate all public safety services in a given area, but sometimes the shared buildings are simply a way to solve a space and funding need.

Many communities, from small towns to larger cities like Colorado Springs and Indianapolis have taken steps to combine aspects of their public safety facilities, such as evidence warehouses, crime labs, or a combination of functional areas. While planning for a shared space can be daunting, the rewards—improved efficiency, updated facilities, better allocation of resources, and a more user-friendly system—are well worth the effort.

PLANNING **CONSIDERATIONS**

Determining whether your Community is a fit for a joint facility

Is integration really beneficial for your agency and situation? Many considerations factor into the decision to create a joint facility, but the following questions can help guide the discussion.

How big are the agencies and the communities involved?

Consider population, geographic area, and number of employees. Small to upper-mid-size municipalities are typically a better fit for a joint facility because there are fewer resources to commit to any specific area. For example, a number of smaller communities may form a group or a multiple cities may partner with the county sheriff.

How urgent is your need for a new facility and need for funding?

If your current facilities are extremely outdated, provide insufficient space, or need so much renovation that a new facility is more logical, you may be a good fit. Similarly, if the agencies involved have access to different funding sources and need the ability to pool resources, a joint facility can be helpful.

Do you have a good relationship with other nearby public safety agencies?

Such as city police departments or county sheriffs? Can you work to form these relationships? The process of creating a joint facility requires high levels of cooperation and open communication between the agencies involved. Often, the more urgent the need, the more likely agencies are willing to collaborate.

TYPES OF INTEGRATED FACILITIES

Depending on the most urgent needs and the available resources, joint facilities can take a number of forms. Your facility will also depend on the nature of your relationship to the other agencies involved.

The most common ways to structure combined services are:

Merge multiple agencies into one government entity before or after the creation of the joint facility. This option is desirable when one city's population comprises the majority of a county. Costs are then taken on by the merged entity.

Create a separate Joint Services entity that exists separately from the other agencies involved, governed by a board with representatives from each agency and civilians. Joint services functions can include fleet maintenance, records, property and evidence, communications and dispatch, and more.

Strictly share a facility. Each agency retains their own equipment and personnel, and only shares a building and some shared spaces within it.

County or Regional Crime Labs

BENEFITS:

- Significantly reduced evidence processing time vs. bringing evidence to a state crime lab with a longer backlog.
- Money paid and time spent to transport the evidence can be re-budgeted toward more impactful work.
- Simplified chain of custody as evidence has less distance to travel and fewer hands to pass through.

Tip: Many crime labs are now adding a working weapons library or catalog so that crime lab technicians can study and test firearms to support investigations. Consider setting aside space for a weapons library in your updated facility.

Shared Off-Site Evidence Storage

BENEFITS:

- Creates ample space and organization for property and evidence storage, even if downtown agencies are landlocked or cannot expand.
- Off-site warehouse space is often less expensive than in-town locations or leased space.
- Reduced overall operational costs from eliminating duplicate services.

Tip: Consider establishing a specific purge rate to ensure your new space is sustainable long term.

SPOKANE, WA

With a city population of 200,000 and a county population of 600,000, Spokane combined property and records from four agencies - including sheriff and police - into one facility. Expenses are split based on number of items booked into the room, and all employees work for the City of Spokane. The agency rents the building from the county, and all records, dispatch, and property and evidence are shared. All evidence uses the same bar code and case numbering system, which can be accessed by all agencies.

Integrated Facilities (Property and Evidence, Communications, Fleet Maintenance, Crime Lab, etc.)

BENEFITS:

- Reduced operational costs from eliminating duplicate services
- Convenience of having all services in one location
- Pooling resources allows for adequate staffing of understaffed departments and creation of a more efficient, ideal facility for all agencies involved.

Tip: Make sure you're considering all possible areas of storage, including records, tools, supplies, evidence, and found property such as bikes.

KENOSHA JOINT SERVICES

Kenosha Joint Services was established in 1982 as a separate government agency to provide support services for the Kenosha City Police and Fire Departments, Kenosha County Sheriff's Department, and various other law enforcement and emergency services agencies. Kenosha Joint Services' functions include Communications and Dispatch, Records, Property and Evidence, and Fleet Maintenance for the agencies involved. Today, Kenosha Joint Services is housed in a public safety building, along with the sheriff's department, police department, the county jail, and other administrative offices.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Funding and Return on Investment

Like any major building or renovation project, a joint facility requires a significant capital investment from all agencies involved. However, sharing costs with other agencies is one of the primary benefits of a shared facility. In some cases, money budgeted for maintaining an outdated facility can be re-budgeted for operational costs at the new facility.

Initial building costs and even some operational costs can be handled a number of ways, including:

- Bond Initiatives
- Federal and State Grants
- Special Taxes

Despite high initial costs, consolidating services and facilities is a good way to get more out of limited funding in the long-term.

Tip: Consider outcomes of your project when applying for grant funds. For example, there may be funding available for clearing sexual assault kit backlogs or upgrading the efficiency of your facility.

Dividing Costs

The building and operational expenses can be divided among the agencies in many ways depending on funding, local government structures, and the type of facility being combined. A few examples of budget structures that have been successful other municipalities

- One agency (typically the county sheriff) owns the facility and contracts out space and/or services to other agencies involved. Cost for contracting can be based on a per-item basis (for property and evidence/crime lab) or a percentage of overall operations.
- Split building and operations costs based on use. For example, costs of a joint evidence warehouse for a county and city could be split 40% - 60% based on the number of items taken in.
- If a separate joint services entity is formed, all involved agencies fund a portion of the joint services budget.

PROCEDURES

As you move forward, you'll want to discuss and draft a plan for the procedures that will be followed at the joint facility.

Shared Resources

- Will one agency (for example, the sheriff's office) oversee the facility and the other agencies utilize the resource on contract?
- Will you solely be sharing the facility and retain separate personnel and separate storage areas?
- Will all or some resources and employees be shared?

Process & Accountability

- Do all agencies currently use the same processes for evidence handling and tracking?
- If not, whose process will you follow? Will you combine elements from multiple processes?
- Who will be accountable for what pieces of evidence?

Location

The location of your joint facility should ideally be easily accessible by all agencies and in an area with space for potential future expansion. While building new may be necessary, consider what existing county- or city-owned buildings could be renovated or expanded to fit your needs.

NEXT STEPS

While all of these considerations are a great starting point, creating a plan and opening a dialogue are key to moving forward.

- 1 Reach out to other local agencies with whom you have a relationship. Understand their needs and concerns, and gauge their interest in partnering.
- 2 Form a committee or task force with representatives from key parties. This could involve city council members, county board members, chiefs of police, sheriffs, mayors, city/county clerks, administrators, and procurement specialists.
- 3 Outline the goals and mission of the integration project, and have each agency involved fill out a survey regarding their current practices (for example, evidence intake processes, tracking systems used)
- 4 Contact other municipalities who have already completed the process of integrating similar facilities to gain insight from their experiences and get your questions answered.
- 5 Form recommendations and begin looking for architects and vendors who have experience with similar projects.

READY TO GET STARTED?

Spacesaver's extensive network of local distributors employs design consultants, sales specialists, and service technicians with years of experience tackling public safety storage projects. While storage is our specialty, we can help you identify the right resources and tools to help you move your integration project forward. We frequently work with both end users and architects to provide assistance with floor loading, architectural constraints, building codes, and a wide range of other considerations.

From complimentary space assessments, to project design and coordination, to installation and ongoing service, our storage experts pride themselves on service that goes above and beyond. We encourage you to contact us with your questions and ideas.

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