



SHSO/Law Enforcement Executive Engagement Self-Assessment Tool

A Traffic Enforcement Services program is a critical component of every State Highway Safety Office's (SHSO) comprehensive highway safety program. The enforcement of a state's traffic laws and ordinances may represent the single most effective component of influencing and changing driving behaviors.

Highly visible enforcement creates both general and specific deterrence of potential offenders and reinforces the concept of highway safety as a priority goal in the state as well as in local jurisdictions. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Highway Safety Program Guideline #15 states:

The State Highway Safety Office should provide the leadership, training and technical assistance necessary to:

- *Develop and implement a comprehensive highway safety plan for all traffic enforcement service programs in cooperation with law enforcement;*
- *Generate broad-based support for traffic enforcement programs;*
- *Coordinate traffic enforcement services with other traffic safety program areas including commercial motor vehicle (CMV) safety activities such as the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program; and*
- *Integrate traffic enforcement services into traffic safety and other injury prevention programs.*

[\(Uniform Guidelines for State Highway Safety Programs, NHTSA\)](#)

SHSOs have a number of tools at their disposal for engaging, training, and coordinating with law enforcement officials at all levels of staff and command and also provide funding for a variety of safety-related activities.

The highest levels of executive command within a law enforcement agency are what determine the agency's priorities and culture. Numerous responsibilities and demands compete for a law enforcement executive's attention and he or she is often constrained by resource and staffing challenges. And although safe highways have always been a top desire for communities across the country, comprehensive and effective traffic safety programs may occasionally get lost in the day-to-day priorities of a law enforcement command team.

Law enforcement program managers, traffic safety enforcement coordinators and law enforcement liaisons can address many of these challenges through partnership with staff and line operations within law enforcement organizations, but without top-down guidance and support from both the SHSO director and the chief executive of the law enforcement agency, the effectiveness of such partnerships on highway safety may be somewhat limited.

It is incumbent upon the SHSO director to develop and maintain active relationships with senior law enforcement executives from individual agencies, as well as through high profile engagement with statewide law enforcement leadership associations. These relationships provide valuable opportunities to involve law enforcement executives in the development of the state’s strategic plans for highway safety and gain their buy-in and active support of these plans as they manage the priorities of their individual agencies.

About this Tool

This self-assessment tool is intended to be used internally by SHSO management to evaluate their efforts in developing relationships with and engaging law enforcement leadership within their state as well as to provide suggestions and ideas for strengthening those relationships. This assessment is based on best practices across the country and input from members of an expert panel of fellow SHSO directors, law enforcement executives, NHTSA officials and members of national partner organizations.

Using this Tool

The tool has been designed so that SHSO management may conduct a self-assessment of their interactions and relationships with law enforcement leadership through a systematic review of recommended touchpoints between SHSOs and law enforcement. Many of the actions include footnotes with associated references and best practices, along with explanations and suggestions for consideration. Included for ease of use is a column to allow the SHSO to develop an Action Plan that captures ideas related to the recommended touchpoints for state-specific implementation. Although reviewing the document and conducting the initial self-assessment may be done in a relatively short period of time, it must be kept in mind that since several strategies build upon themselves as they are achieved, SHSOs should revisit this tool as their outreach plans mature to continue to evaluate their activities and plan next steps.

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Section 1: Strategic Planning

Involving law enforcement executives on the ground floor of strategic highway safety plans facilitates their buy-in and ownership and furthers their understanding of the collective efforts of other diversified partners. In addition to the customary law enforcement partners who have traditionally demonstrated their experience and interest in highway safety matters, SHSOs should reach out to law enforcement executives who are not as active in traffic safety efforts. This outreach is an opportunity to inform and engage key law enforcement officials on the importance of traffic safety as a major component of public safety within all communities, along with the existing statewide plans to address highway safety in general. Law enforcement executives involved in this process should represent a broad spectrum of agencies within the state including state police (Highway Patrol), as well as county and local jurisdictions and tribal agencies where appropriate. Moreover, information from law enforcement helps to inform other partners of the strategies they are willing and able to employ as well as possible challenges they might face within their communities and/or agencies. This level of engagement improves communication and collaboration.

	Activities	Action Plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	In addition to law enforcement executives with strong traffic safety backgrounds, have other less experienced executives been recruited to engage in the planning, management and oversight of the state’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP)?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there representation on SHSP planning committees from the leadership (e.g. Chair or President) and/or Executive Directors of Chiefs of Police and Sheriff’s associations?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are senior LE executives with assorted traffic safety backgrounds members of the SHSP Executive Committee?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are senior LE executives actively involved in developing the state’s Performance Plan as part of its annual Highway Safety Plan?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the engagement of senior LE executives include staff members with traffic safety expertise from agencies of all sizes and jurisdictional type? (i.e. state, county, city, tribal and municipal agencies large & small)	

Related Resources

- [State-by-State List of Law Enforcement Associations](#) (GHSA membership required)
- [A Guide for Effectively Partnering with State Highway Safety Offices](#) (GHSA)

Section 2: Reaching Out to and Engaging Statewide Law Enforcement Organizations

Statewide Chiefs of Police and Sheriff’s associations provide numerous opportunities to connect with law enforcement executives in your state. Many states have regional or municipal Chiefs of Police associations in addition to larger statewide groups. These smaller organizations may be helpful in targeting messages to special areas of need.

	Activities	Action Plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the SHSO Director and/or Deputy Director an active or associate member of the state’s Chiefs of Police and Sheriff’s associations? ¹	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Does the Director/Deputy Director regularly engage with these organizations by attending meetings and conferences? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do opportunities exist at these meetings for the Director/Deputy Director to provide a brief high-level summary of major highway safety trends & activities that would be important for the LE executives in attendance? 	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Do these statewide organizations have Training Committees? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, is the Director and/or Deputy Director eligible to become a member of these committees? 	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Do these statewide collective organizations have Traffic Safety Committees? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, is the Director and/or Deputy Director eligible to become a member of these committees? • If SHSO leadership is not eligible for committee membership, does the Director or Deputy Director have the opportunity to regularly address committee members and/or provide updates & information at committee meetings? 	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are grant funds available to assist the committee in developing highway safety projects under the name of the statewide Chiefs of Police and/or Sheriff’s associations? ²	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are officials of these statewide organizations (Chair or President) invited to participate in and speak at highway safety media events and mobilization kickoffs?	

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<input type="checkbox"/>	Are officials of these statewide organizations (Chair, President or Traffic Safety Committee Chair) invited to participate and speak at LE award events sponsored by the SHSO?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are grant funds available to provide travel and registration scholarships to key LE executives and/or statewide organization officials to attend high-level national highway safety conferences such as GHSA's Annual Meeting and/or NHTSA national summits or forums? ³	

Related Resource

- [State-by-State List of Law Enforcement Associations](#) (GHSA membership required)

Notes:

¹ This should be in addition to any membership by the SHSO's Law Enforcement Program Manager and/or Law Enforcement Liaison(s).

² Highway Safety Projects developed within the Traffic Safety Committee should be distributed under the co-sponsorship of both the SHSO and the statewide organization. These projects may include:

- Resolutions of Support endorsing highway safety concepts, plans and/or policies for consideration, approval and distribution by the Executive Board. (Resolutions of support from statewide collective LE organizations can be extremely useful in demonstrating the legitimacy and importance of highway safety plans and activities such as the state's SHSP and/or specific state concepts such as "Toward Zero Deaths," etc.)
- Traffic safety trainings for senior management as well as for supervisors and line officers.
- Highway safety newsletters for LE Command Staff and/or for patrol officers within LE agencies.
- Toolkits for LE Command Staff for specific highway safety strategies and or activities. Examples of toolkits include: law enforcement's role in the state's SHSP; processes to obtain available grant funding (from an executive's perspective); and/or Executives' Guides for High Visibility Enforcement. (Maryland's [Law Enforcement Executive's Guide to High Visibility Enforcement](#) was published by the Maryland Chiefs of Police and Maryland Sheriff's Associations with funding and technical support provided by the Maryland Highway Safety Office.)

³ Attendance at conferences not only provides opportunities for executive LE personnel to obtain important highway safety information but also provides the opportunity for the SHSO director to build stronger relationships with these officials in a more informal way. Fully sponsored travel and registration scholarships might also be leveraged by requesting the attending official(s) to provide a briefing to his/her respective statewide organization on the information obtained at the conference/meeting.

Section 3: Highway Safety Training

Statewide executive organizations often provide training seminars for new Chief Executives (Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs and/or Sheriffs). It is important to keep in mind that an LE executive’s perspective of highway safety (and the context of what he or she needs to know) is likely different from that of a supervisor or a line officer. Highway Safety training modules for new Chief Executives might include:

- General data points from a statewide perspective and the importance of highway safety as a critical component of overall public safety
- Information on the state’s SHSP
- Principles of strategic planning and project evaluation
- Best Practices and model traffic enforcement projects being conducted across the country and/or state
- High level information on the availability of grant funds for individual agencies

Although training hours for Police Recruits/Cadets are devoted to understanding vehicle laws, completing crash reports and learning basic traffic functions such as radar and SFST, little training is usually provided on the background of highway safety and the strategies utilized in effective traffic enforcement. For example, crash investigation is an almost daily duty of any patrol officer, yet many officers have a misunderstanding of what the report is actually for and the critical nature of ensuring the report has accurate and complete information.

	Activities	Action Plan
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Chief Executives</p> <p>Have agencies or organizations been identified that offer training and/or mentoring seminars for “new” chiefs & sheriffs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, is the SHSO Director and/or Deputy Director one of the instructors? 	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Patrol & Field Training Officers</p> <p>Has the SHSO Director explored the opportunity to address the state’s Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission?</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Patrol & Field Training Officers</p> <p>Are possible opportunities available, and/or been explored, for influencing the content of Basic Recruit/Academy training relative to highway safety?</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Patrol & Field Training Officers</p> <p>Are possible opportunities available, and/or been explored, for influencing the content of In-Service training relative to highway safety?</p>	

Section 4: Interaction and Outreach with Tribal Authorities

Facilitating open communication and fostering trust are critically important in establishing productive relationships with tribal authorities and can be obtained through a gradual process of regular attendance at tribal council meetings to better understand local issues and to better know tribal officials. Providing data, support and information may help tribal leaders develop appropriate strategies for dealing with traffic safety issues on sovereign tribal lands. Working with tribal authorities will likely be different from state-to-state and tribe-to-tribe. Nevertheless, many of the basic principles of personal interaction remain similar when working with tribal authorities although there are subtle differences, nuances and sensitivities to consider.

	Activities	Action Plan
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Does the state have “Government-to-Government” trainings relative to relationships with tribal governments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, has the SHSO Director and/or Deputy Director attended? 	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Has the SHSO been able to identify gaps in crash data obtained from tribal lands? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, has the SHSO identified possible ways to assist and support tribes in providing better data? 	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the SHSO been able to provide relative crash data to tribal governments for their use in identifying specific problem areas?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the SHSO Director identified tribal liaisons and been able to establish strong relationships?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are tribal representatives involved in the development of the state's SHSP and do they actively participate in its implementation on their lands?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the SHSO considered the formation of a Tribal Traffic Safety Advisory Board to facilitate the development of active traffic safety partners on tribal lands?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the SHSO have available outlets to provide traffic training to tribal enforcement officers, and/or funding for appropriate equipment needs?	

Section 5: Statewide Assessment of Police Traffic Services and Traffic Enforcement

Following completion of this self-assessment tool, an SHSO may need to consider conducting a comprehensive assessment of its police traffic services program. Such an assessment could follow the format of NHTSA program assessments but examine and evaluate the spectrum of services offered by the SHSO to its law enforcement partners including areas such as strategic perspectives involving executive engagement, planning and coordination, traffic safety training, data availability and distribution, traffic safety communication plans, and more.

- An assessment might also include components to gauge prevailing law enforcement attitudes toward traffic enforcement (culture?).
- This assessment could have a variety of formats, from convening focus groups to a more formal evaluation by a panel of state officials/law enforcement executives or possibly even an evaluation by a panel of out-of-state experts.
- The assessment could identify specific strengths that might be enhanced and/or gaps that might be addressed with short and long-term strategies.

	Activities	Action Plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the SHSO considered the possibility of conducting a comprehensive assessment of its overall Police Traffic Services Program?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the SHSO have a Law Enforcement Liaison program?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, has the SHSO conducted an objective assessment and evaluation of its LEL program? ⁴ 	

Related Resource

- [Consulting Services Initiative](#) (GHSA membership required)

Notes:

⁴ Such an assessment should consider both the administrative/process aspects of the program as well as its outcomes and impacts. Questions to cover include:

- Are the LELs full-time or part-time?
- Are the LEL’s only responsibilities SHSO functions?
- What is working?
- What gaps exist?
- Are data collected to indicate the number and types of law enforcement agencies contacted?
- Are data collected to indicate the number of law enforcement executives (e.g. Chiefs, Sheriffs) contacted?