Chief and Sheriff Feedback Survey: Their Platform Experience
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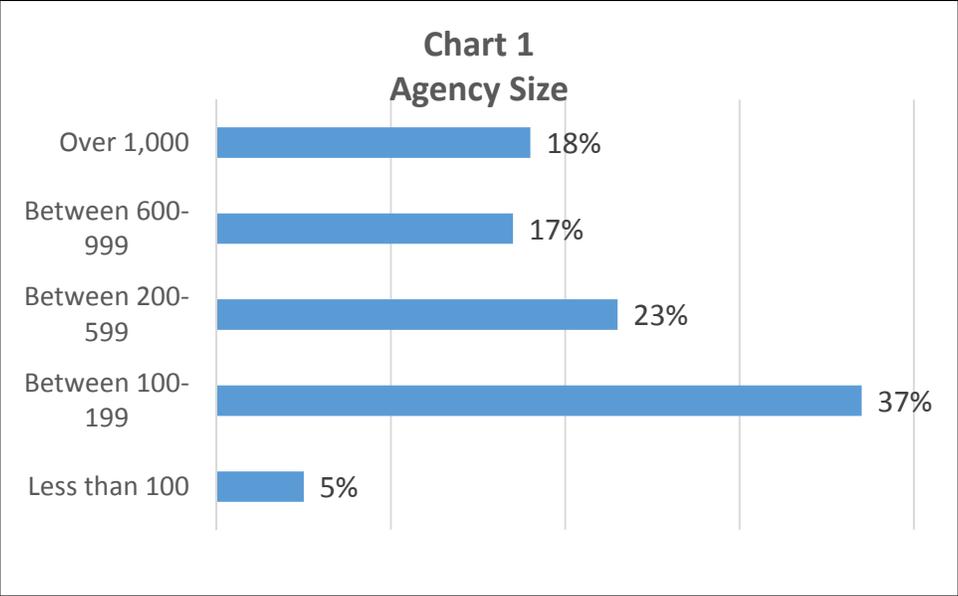University of Illinois at Chicago

Purpose

A sample of 100 police and sheriff agencies participated in the National Police Research Platform over the course of two years. With varying levels of agency participation, the Platform collected data via multiple survey methods: three Law Enforcement Organizational (employee) surveys, a Chief Executive Officer survey, a Departmental Characteristics survey, and a Police-Citizen Interaction (community) survey. For most of these surveys, the Platform provided each agency a feedback report that summarized how their agency responded and how these responses compared with all other agencies and similar agencies in our sample. At the completion of this two-year period, the Platform research team sought feedback from the chiefs and sheriffs regarding their experiences as Platform participants and their assessments of the overall utility of the Platform of police agencies. We also believed that this type of feedback was important in terms of understanding which components of the Platform were the most beneficial to agencies and, thus, may influence the future content and direction of the Platform. Additionally, we sought to assess the level of interest in future participation.

Methods

To garner this feedback, participating chiefs and sheriffs were invited to take an on-line survey. Chief executives from all 100 agencies received the invitation. The survey period ran from mid-March through the end of April, 2015. The participation rate was 77 percent. Of that 77 percent, 64 percent provided enough data for meaningful analysis. Hence, this report is based on responses from 64 chiefs and sheriffs.
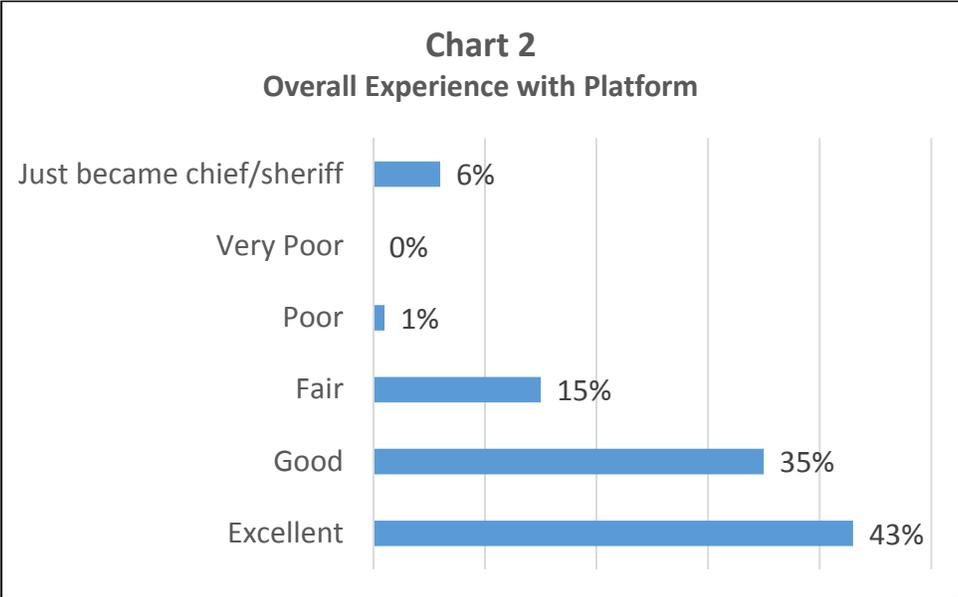
The survey asks chief executives for feedback on their overall Platform experience and specific data collection components. The survey also queried chiefs and sheriffs about whether and how the findings were distributed and/or used to make changes within their organizations. A number of open-ended items were included to seek suggestions and recommendations, as well as to gauge estimates of the likelihood of future participation in the Platform.

To help us interpret the findings, up front we asked participants whether they had been the chief or sheriff since the beginning of the Platform and the number of sworn officers were employed by their agency. Nearly three quarters (73 percent) of the participants were the chief or sheriff for the entire duration of the Platform project. Chart 1 presents a breakdown of the sample by agency size, with the largest numbers (37 percent and 23 percent) coming from agencies with between 100 to 199 and 200 to 599 sworn employees, respectively. However, a substantial percentage of respondents were serving as the chief executive of larger agencies with 600 to 999 sworn employees (18 percent) or more than 1000 (17percent). Only a few agencies were smaller than 100 sworn employees, and their agencies were grandfathered because of their prior participation in the developmental stage of the Platform.

Chart 1
Agency Size

Agency Size	Percentage
Over 1,000	18%
Between 600-999	17%
Between 200-599	23%
Between 100-199	37%
Less than 100	5%

Overall Experience with the Platform

As shown in Chart 2, the large majority (78 percent) rated their overall experience with the Platform as excellent or good. Only 15 percent rated their experience as fair, and only 1 percent rated the experience as "poor." No agency rated the experience as very poor, and 6 percent of the chiefs reported that they had not been in their position long enough to make an informed judgment about the Platform experience.

Chart 2
Overall Experience with Platform

Rating	Percentage
Just became chief/sheriff	6%
Very Poor	0%
Poor	1%
Fair	15%
Good	35%
Excellent	43%

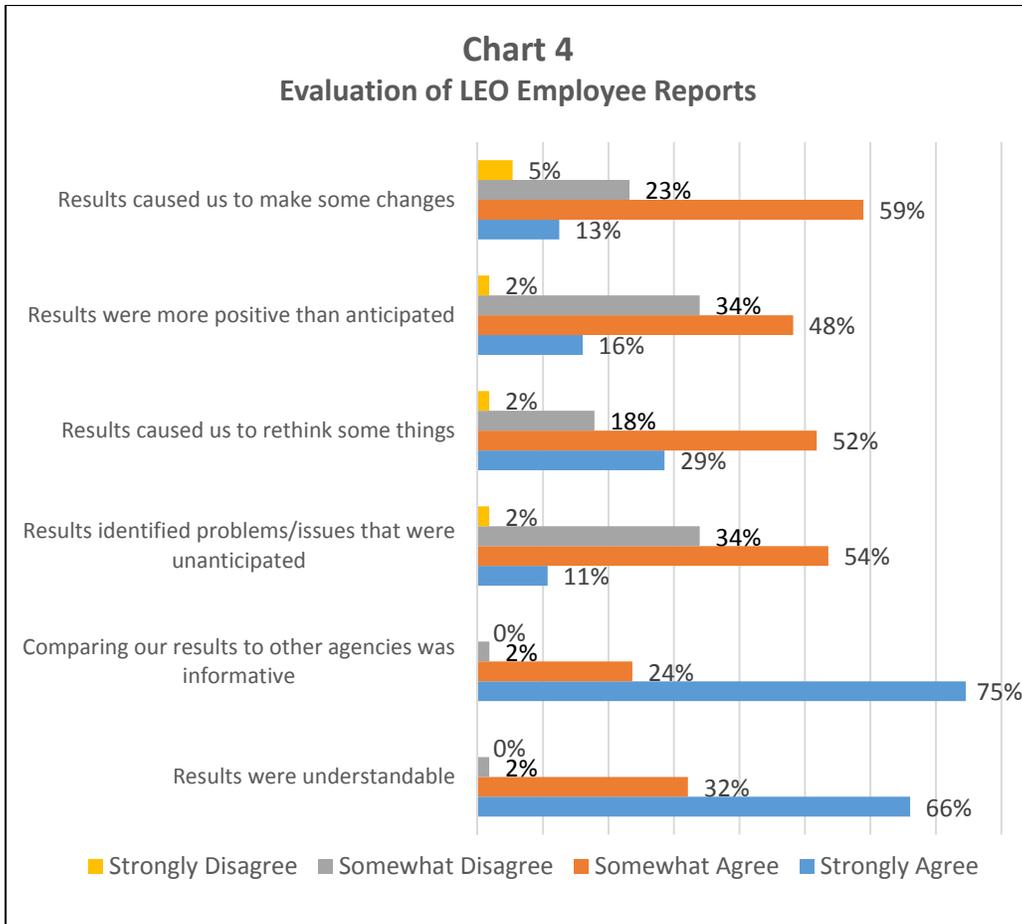**Usefulness of the Feedback Reports**

As noted earlier, each agency was provided with feedback reports, including comparisons to other agencies, from the PCI Survey, LEO survey, and CEO survey. When asked about the usefulness of these individual reports, the great majority found the reports to be very useful or somewhat useful (see Chart 3). The LEO survey of employees was judged most useful (89 percent), followed by the CEO survey (82 percent) and the PCI survey (68 percent).

Chart 3
Usefulness of Survey Reports

Response	LEO (blue)	PCI (orange)	CEO (gray)
Very Useful	51%	37%	45%
Somewhat Useful	38%	31%	37%
Not very Useful	4%	9%	3%
Not at all Useful	0%	1%	0%
Agency did not Participate in this Survey	0%	16%	6%
I have not viewed this report	6%	6%	9%

■ Law Enforcement Organizational Surveys (LEO A,B,C) – the employee surveys
■ Police-Citizen Interaction Survey (PCI) – the community survey
■ Chief Executive Officer Survey (CEO) – the chief/sheriff survey

We asked the chief executives to evaluate each report in greater detail. These findings are summarized below.

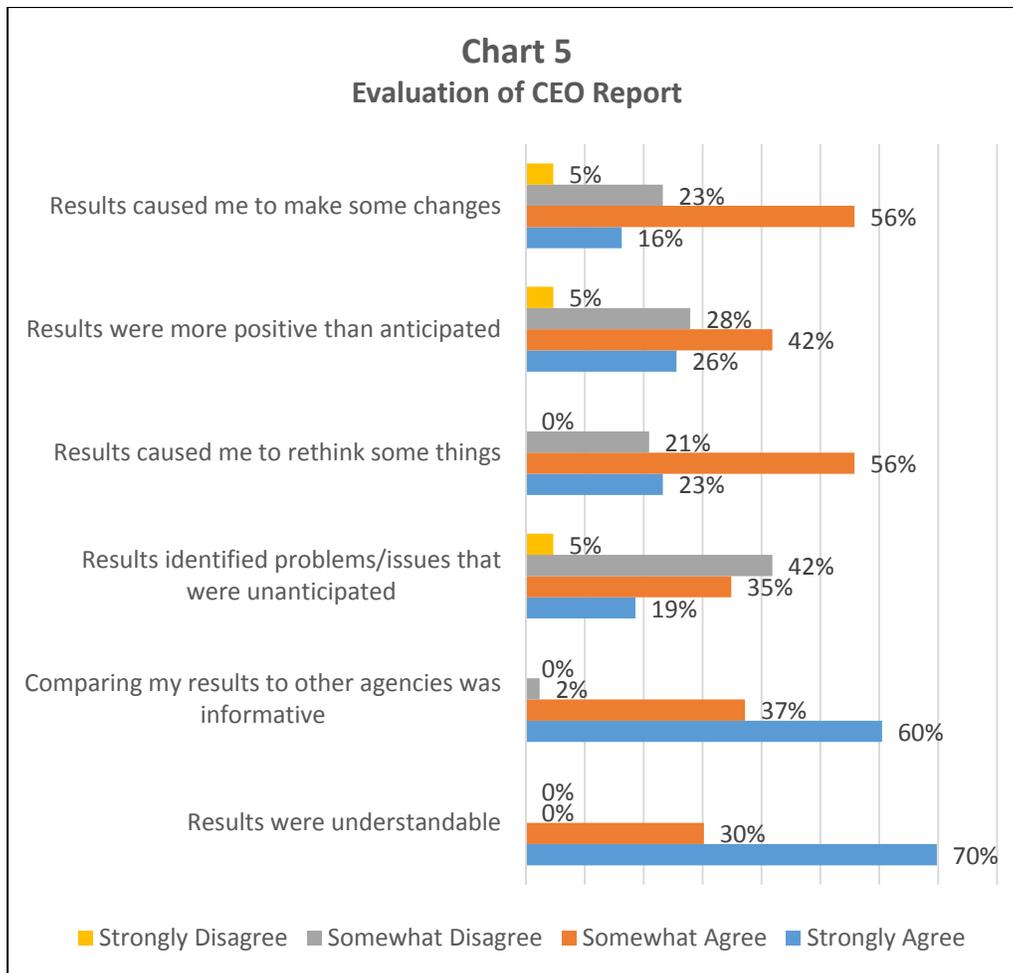**Law Enforcement Organizational (employee) Survey**

As shown in Chart 4, chief executives agreed ("somewhat" or "strongly") that the feedback reports from the LEO (employee) survey were informative when comparing their results to other agencies (99 percent) and were understandable (98 percent). A strong majority also agreed that the results caused them to make change (72 percent), were more positive than anticipated (64 percent), caused them to rethink things (81 percent), and identified issues that were unanticipated (65 percent). Seventy-nine percent of CEOs distributed their results to their employees or others outside of the organization. Overall, 91 percent reported the findings were either "very positively" or "somewhat positively" received by those who were given access.

Chart 4
Evaluation of LEO Employee Reports

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Results caused us to make some changes	5%	23%	59%	13%
Results were more positive than anticipated	2%	34%	48%	16%
Results caused us to rethink some things	2%	18%	52%	29%
Results identified problems/issues that were unanticipated	2%	34%	54%	11%
Comparing our results to other agencies was informative	0%	2%	24%	75%
Results were understandable	0%	2%	32%	66%

When CEOs were asked whether they would recommend any changes to the Law Enforcement Organizational (LEO) survey (for employees), 75 percent said no. For the 25 percent that did have recommendations, there was no clear pattern to their responses. CEOs commented on a range of issues, including the tone of some questions, length of the survey, and wanting more detailed feedback or more guidance on how change should be implemented in their department.
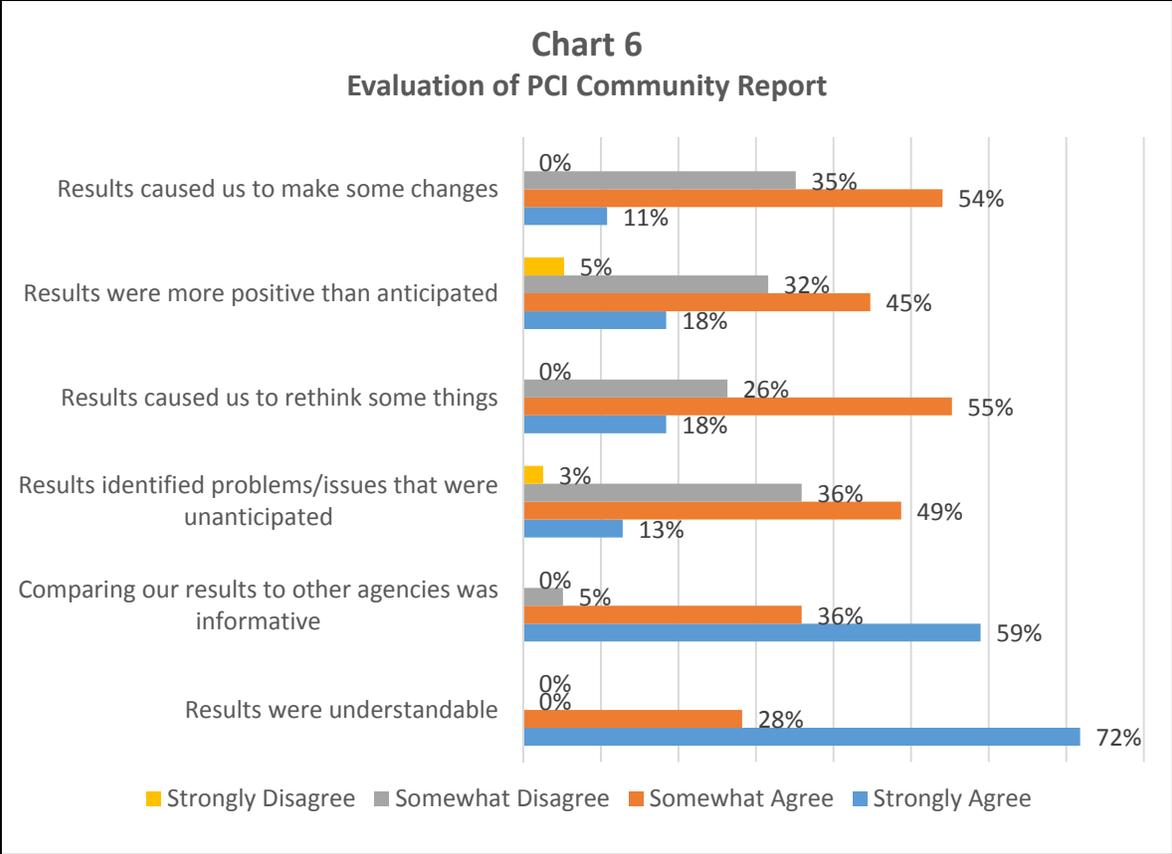
Chief Executive Officer Survey

Chief executives were asked to evaluate the feedback report they were given pertaining to the CEO survey findings. The survey was administered only to the chief or sheriff in in each agency; however, they were provided with information allowing them to compare their own responses with those of other participating CEOs. The findings did not identify any specific agency and were presented as "all agency responses" and "agencies similar to your own." As shown in Chart 5, the same pattern found in the LEO survey (noted above) was present in these findings as well. The majority of chief executives reported that the CEO survey results caused them to make some changes and rethink some things, and the results were understandable and informative.

Chart 5
Evaluation of CEO Report

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Results caused me to make some changes	5%	23%	56%	16%
Results were more positive than anticipated	5%	28%	42%	26%
Results caused me to rethink some things	0%	21%	56%	23%
Results identified problems/issues that were unanticipated	5%	42%	35%	19%
Comparing my results to other agencies was informative	0%	2%	37%	60%
Results were understandable	0%	0%	30%	70%

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Somewhat Disagree   ■ Somewhat Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

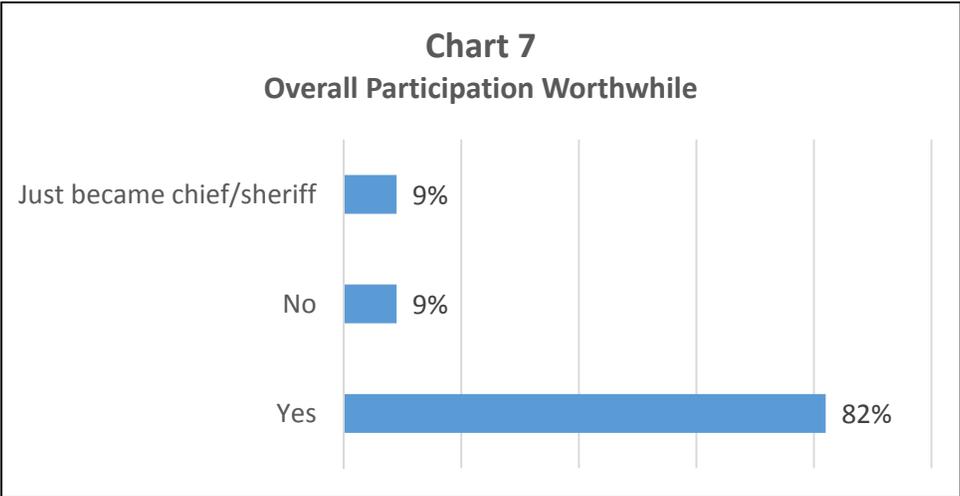**Police-Citizen Interaction (community) Survey**

More than half of the national sample of agencies participated in the Police-Community Interaction (PCI) Survey that served as a customer satisfaction survey for residents who had a recent (within the previous two weeks) contact with a local law enforcement officer. Consistent with their evaluations of the CEO and LEO surveys, participating chiefs and sheriffs gave high marks to the feedback report they received regarding the PCI survey. As shown in Chart 6, high scores were given for the informative nature of comparing their results to other agencies, as well as the overall understandability of the report. Fifty-nine percent of CEOs distributed their results to their employees or others outside of the organization. Overall, 95 percent of CEOs reported that the recipients of the PCI survey results responded either very positively or somewhat positively.
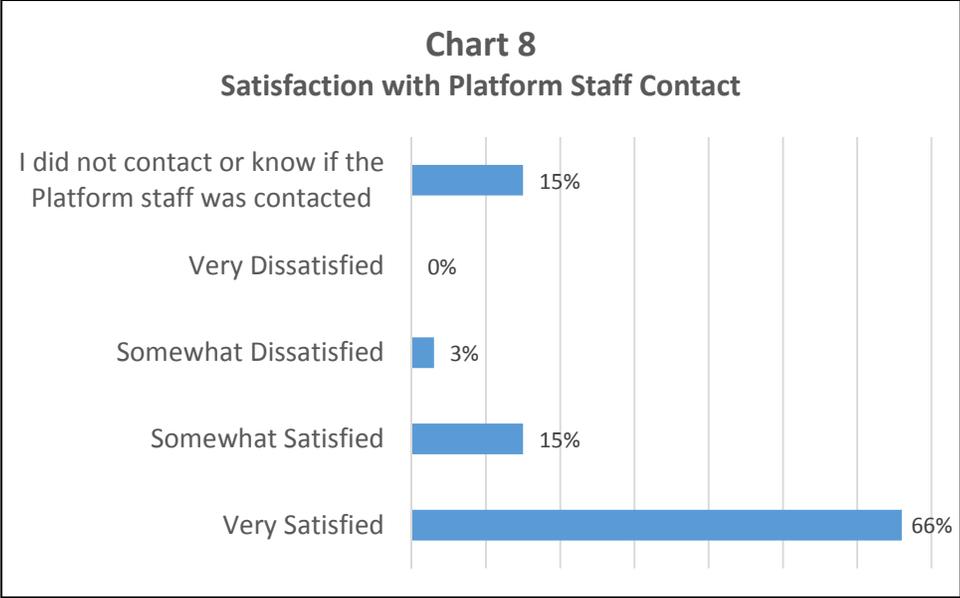
When CEOs were asked whether they would recommend any changes to the PCI survey, 85 percent said no. The 15 percent who did have recommendations mainly indicated that they preferred that an increased number of citizens would responded to the survey. While the feedback has proven to be very useful to these agencies, future modifications to the methodology are expected to increase response rates.

Chart 6
Evaluation of PCI Community Report

Results caused us to make some changes
- 0%
- 35%
- 54%
- 11%

Results were more positive than anticipated
- 5%
- 32%
- 45%
- 18%

Results caused us to rethink some things
- 0%
- 26%
- 55%
- 18%

Results identified problems/issues that were unanticipated
- 3%
- 36%
- 49%
- 13%

Comparing our results to other agencies was informative
- 0%
- 5%
- 36%
- 59%

Results were understandable
- 0%
- 0%
- 28%
- 72%

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Somewhat Disagree   ■ Somewhat Agree   ■ Strongly Agree
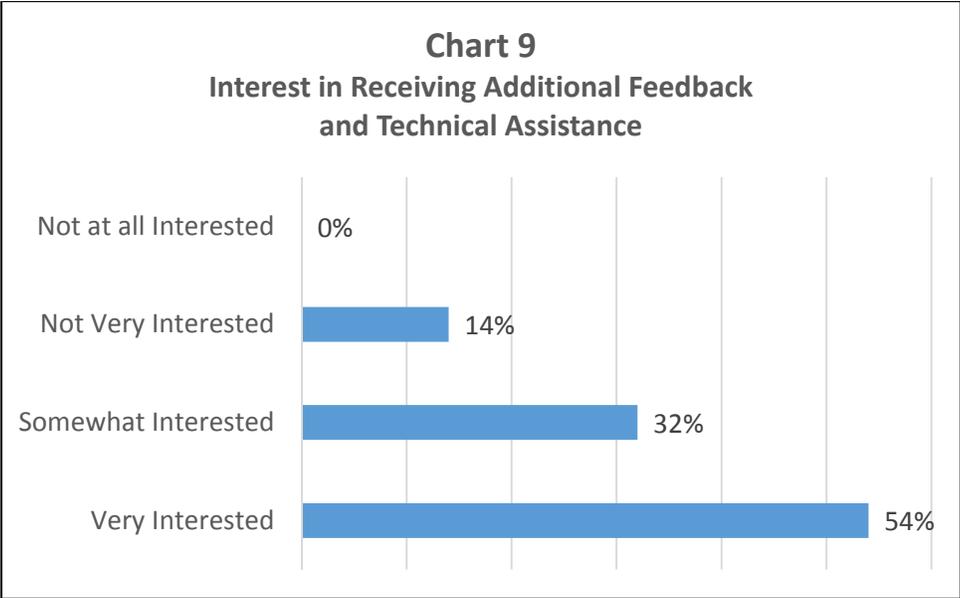
Overall Evaluation of Platform Staff

When asked if the overall participation in the Platform was worthwhile, more than eight of 10 chief executives (82 percent) reported yes (see Chart 7). The majority of agencies (66 percent) that had contact with the Platform staff were very satisfied, and another 15 percent were somewhat satisfied (see Chart 8), bringing the total satisfied with Platform contact and services to 81 percent.

Chart 7
Overall Participation Worthwhile

- Just became chief/sheriff: 9%
- No: 9%
- Yes: 82%

Chart 8
Satisfaction with Platform Staff Contact

- I did not contact or know if the Platform staff was contacted — 15%
- Very Dissatisfied — 0%
- Somewhat Dissatisfied — 3%
- Somewhat Satisfied — 15%
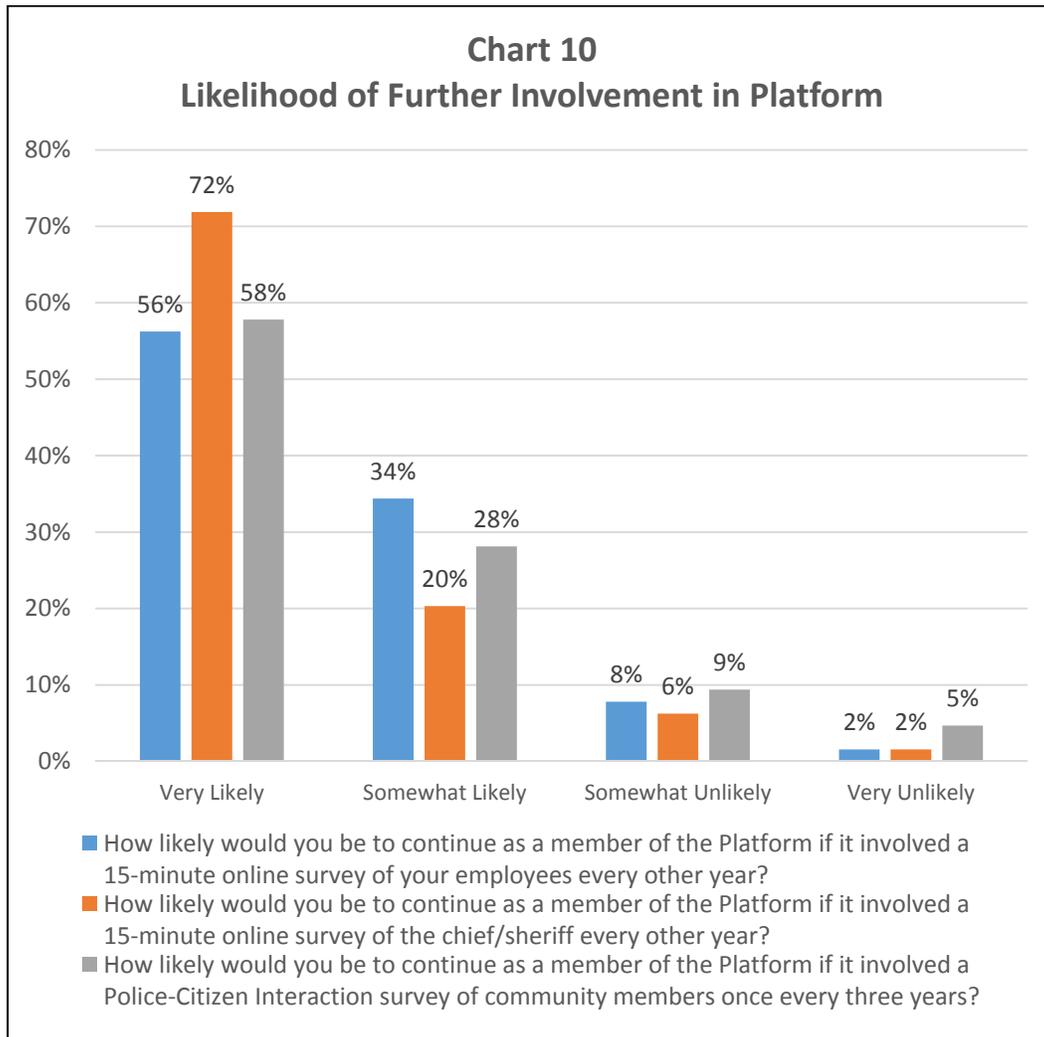- Very Satisfied — 66%

In addition to providing feedback, the Platform provided technical assistance at various stages of data collection. However, we wanted to know whether CEOs were interested in receiving additional feedback and technical assistance in the future. As seen in Chart 9, 86 percent reported they were either very or somewhat interested" in receiving this type of information and assistance.

Chart 9
Interest in Receiving Additional Feedback and Technical Assistance

- Not at all Interested — 0%
- Not Very Interested — 14%
- Somewhat Interested — 32%
- Very Interested — 54%

Finally, we asked how likely their agency would be to participate in the Platform should it continue. We asked about their interest in specific data collection components of the Platform. As seen in Chart 10, the majority of agencies reported being interested in further involvement for all three data collection components. Of particular note, while some agencies reported

earlier that the Police-Citizen Interaction survey was labor intensive, 58 percent still reported they would be very likely to continue with this type of data collection.

Chart 10
Likelihood of Further Involvement in Platform

Legend:
■ How likely would you be to continue as a member of the Platform if it involved a 15-minute online survey of your employees every other year?
■ How likely would you be to continue as a member of the Platform if it involved a 15-minute online survey of the chief/sheriff every other year?
■ How likely would you be to continue as a member of the Platform if it involved a Police-Citizen Interaction survey of community members once every three years?

Final Thoughts and Recommendations by Chief Executives

We asked some additional open-ended items, including whether CEOs or their staff had any recommendations to improve the Platform, what was the most important thing they learned from the Platform, and whether they had any final comments about the Platform.

Thirteen percent provided at least one recommendation. A few mentioned shortening one or more the surveys, the desire to better understand the causative nature of the survey responses, the desire to have a wrap-up conference, help with providing future direction for their agencies, and having best practices provided at the end of the project. Additionally, there were a couple of comments on the need for supplemental funding for the Police-Citizen Interaction survey, which did have cost implications for the agencies.

When asked to discuss the most important thing that they learned from the Platform, 70 percent provided a comment. The comments fell into the following categories: 1) results were more positive than expected; 2) results were less positive than expected; 3) the survey targeted specific areas that need improvement; 4) having the data provided the impetus to implement change in the agency; 5) the Platform allowed us to hear the voices of the officers; and 6) the Platform allowed us to hear the voices of the community.

When asked if there was anything else they would like to comment on, 22 percent provided a response. All of the responses were positive; almost all of the responses had to do with expressing their appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the Platform.

Conclusions

Based on the feedback provided by the CEOs, the Platform appears to have been an overwhelmingly positive experience that provided useful information to the participating agencies. While some data collection components were more task-intensive than others, we learned a great deal about how these components could be made more "user friendly" in future Platform initiatives. Thus, the Platform was a learning experience for both the participants and the researchers.

In addition to generating new and timely knowledge about police practices in the United States, the Platform was able to provide useful feedback at the local level. Feedback systems were well received and seemed to encourage reflection on organizational practices and a desire to introduce change. However, as stated above, these chiefs and sheriffs expressed a desire for more guidance on how to interpret the findings and implement desired changes within their organizations. While the research team created these feedback systems, the current NIJ project did not include funding to translate the research findings for the law enforcement community or provide technical assistance. (The primary objective was to create a sustainable set of standardized metrics on organizational performance.) Hence, translation of the findings for the law enforcement community and technical assistance should be an important consideration when planning future Platform projects. In sum, the Platform has created a solid research foundation on which to build future partnerships with law enforcement organizations and bridge the gap between science and practice.