

How to Prioritize Competing Needs

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

Given that resources are limited even in the best of times, in recent years public safety leaders have found it increasingly difficult to obtain even those that are necessary for keeping their communities safe. The process of allocating resources is fraught with all kinds of perils, such as navigating internal and external political waters. Competing needs must be prioritized within the organization as well as within the city, county, state, or other relevant political entity.

Below is a versatile tool that helps to clarify choices and set priorities. It provides four relevant criteria for making choices when there are competing interests and needs. Importantly, it also incorporates an objective way to view risk, which is an element that often is either missing from political discourse, or is wildly over-emphasized.

Weiss’s Gravity-Urgency-Trend-Probability Grid

Source: Weiss, A. (2007). *The SECOND Great Big Book of Process Visuals*.

	Gravity	Urgency	Trend	Probability
Program/Issue 1				
Program/Issue 2				
Program/Issue 3				

Note: Use objective data, not arbitrary numbers or categories.

Gravity: What is the seriousness or impact of the issue?

Urgency: What is the need for rapid action?

Trend: Is this issue stable, growing, or decreasing?

Probability: What is the likelihood of this issue’s happening or continuing?

Risk is addressed in the probability category. Realistic answers about the likelihood that something will or will not happen helps put an issue into perspective, allowing leaders to make more informed choices than those based merely on speculation or perception.

This tool can be used for any number of competing issues. Try it out the next time you need a way to make an effective, defensible, and persuasive case for obtaining the resources you are requesting! Let me know how it works for you.

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting firm that helps first responders maximize their performance by removing or mitigating obstacles that prevent them from achieving their mission.