



# Case Study: Tri-City Police Joint Air Support Program

*Category: Partnerships*

[California Jurisdictions: Cities of Glendale, Burbank, and Pasadena]

[A case study highlighting an innovative helicopter program between three municipalities using cooperative flight scheduling in order to save taxpayer money and increase service levels.]

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# SYNOPSIS

## *Background and Intent of the Program:*

The Cities of Glendale, Burbank, and Pasadena are located within the County of Los Angeles and cumulatively cover over seventy square miles (thirty-seven, seventeen, and twenty-three respectively), and collectively serve over 430,000 residents. Each municipality has its own police department and together they employ 677 sworn police personnel, with the City of Glendale being the third largest within the county at a level of 255 peace officers.



In the early 1970s all three cities were faced with the need to expand their services in order to keep pace with the climbing crime rates. Many larger police departments across the country began utilizing helicopters as a means to stem this growing trend and in order to create a police force multiplier built on an aerial law enforcement platform. Consequently, Glendale, Burbank, and Pasadena decided to create air support units that have been in place and highly successful for the past forty years. Yet, while Glendale and Burbank acted in unison through joint operations efforts that were formalized in 1979, it was not until a couple years ago that the Glendale/Burbank Police Air Support Unit began a test program with the Pasadena Police Department, extending its reach to several other partner and contract cities. As aircraft technology and helicopter speed have increased over the past several decades, it has become possible to fly between the furthest apart cities, Burbank and Pasadena, in less than four minutes; however, it was not until recently that the cities decided to overlap and schedule their patrol flights to benefit these service delivery and public safety efficiencies.

## *Costs and Savings:*

In 2007, Glendale and Burbank officially merged their air units into one and began splitting the associated costs in half. This resulted in a reduction of total up in the air flight time by one-half and a net savings of over \$600,000 per year. It also allowed personnel to be freed up and transferred to other assignments within their respective departments, which had a positive impact on human resources management. In 2010, Glendale approached the Pasadena Police Department's Air Support Unit and suggested ways that the cities could work together for mutual benefit and expanded savings to residents, business, and local community entities.

### *Innovative Characteristics:*

Deploying helicopters, maintaining aircraft infrastructure, and ensuring pilots are trained in the most up-to-date procedures requires extensive labor and financial capital. While police helicopters are an advantageous resource because of their unparalleled and quick response times, to be effective they must be in the air when the calls for service are dispatched (meaning they cannot respond from the ground). Thus, bringing Pasadena into the cross-jurisdictional arrangement allowed the cities to increase the number of flight hours for each city without increasing costs. The three cities are geographically located in a way that enables a law enforcement response from anywhere within the region in less than four minutes as long as the police departments are working in coordination with one another. This was the impetus for the partnership that ultimately arose in 2010.

Collectively, the three police departments assessed crime statistics to determine the highest and best use of the helicopter services. A flight schedule was designed around those days and times that were most active based on calls for service and initiated police efforts. Moreover, the flight times were staggered so that when a Glendale/Burbank helicopter was airborne the Pasadena helicopter was grounded and when the Glendale/Burbank helicopter landed the Pasadena helicopter launched. In order to accomplish this, all helicopters needed to be able to communicate with one another, which was done through the programming of existing radios and by adding a talking group or air support frequency that allowed any dispatcher to reach any helicopter on “Air Tac” to summon their services.

As an innovative operational component, the departments agreed to a ninety-day evaluation period focused on two days per week that were selected for helicopter deployment and analysis, and which informed decisions about program modifications before a full implementation was rolled-out. Over time, the two-day schedule was expanded to a four-day model and eventually established as an everyday resource for the cities, which remains in effect today.

By working collaboratively, and scheduling flight times in response to the demands of each city, the amount of flights have been doubled at zero additional cost to the departments and have more importantly yielded human capital and annual financial savings of over \$600,000.

*Outcomes and Applicable Results:*

Although the largest obstacle to launching this successful program was the reluctance among the three police departments to give up day-to-day administrative control and agree to work together under new conditions, spanning boundaries and breaking down silos, a sit-down, face-to-face, informal meeting was the starting point. Understanding that the ‘new normal’ of government planning, budgeting, and service provision is dependent on working across jurisdictions and with other sectors, Glendale, Burbank and Pasadena have come together to save money and lives. This joint air support model has practical applications for the management of dispatch centers, jails, K-9 units and SWAT teams, and when coupled with ingenuity and problem solving can have profound effects.

*Presentation Style:*

For the presentation, PowerPoint, images, and videos would be utilized to showcase police air units and demonstrate the abilities and benefits of helicopter tactics when deployed within a multi-jurisdictional or joint municipal operational framework.