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Bridging the Gap: A Proposed Leadership Training Framework for Civilian Managers of Non-Police Enforcement (NPLE) Personnel

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As municipalities expand their use of Non-Police Law Enforcement (NPLE) personnel—such as bylaw officers, community peace officers, and special constables—civilian managers with little or no law enforcement experience are increasingly responsible for leadership. This trend introduces risks related to legal compliance, operational effectiveness, and public accountability. Drawing on the author's own Alberta-based research (Young, 2022), public safety consultant and criminal justice instructor Dean Young proposes an innovative leadership development framework tailored to municipal managers overseeing NPLE personnel. Young's article outlines training priorities, leadership responsibilities, and educational requirements for both enforcement staff and the civilian leaders who guide them. With practical guidance rooted in three key pillars—organizational policies, strategic hiring, and professional development—Young emphasizes the importance of bridging knowledge gaps to strengthen equitable, community-based safety. His proposed framework responds to a national need for leadership readiness as Canada's reliance on NPLE continues to grow.

INTRODUCTION

Community safety in Canada is undergoing a quiet but significant transformation. There are many exciting developments in how we are growing local government's abilities to provide community standards and safety. The number of Non-police law enforcement (NPLE), such as Bylaw Enforcement Officers, Community Peace Officers, Municipal Law Enforcement Officers, and Special Constables, is growing at an unprecedented rate. Such employment provides both a stepping stone into policing careers and a sustainable career path in its own right, an effective early training ground for up-and-coming policing professionals, while adding a layer of community safety to the public that is independent from the contemporary challenges of police staffing.

This trend toward engagement of non-police law enforcement (NPLE), community peace also reflects an evolving shift toward community policing in Canada, where prevention, local engagement, and alternative enforcement models are increasingly emphasized. Alberta's adoption of Community

Safety Teams — such as Edmonton's Community Outreach Transit Team and Calgary's Community Outreach Team — further reflects this shift, integrating Transit Peace Officers with outreach specialists from diverse professional backgrounds. All of these models prioritize proactive support and community engagement and are part of a broader national movement toward community safety in public spaces.

However, a critical challenge is emerging: municipal government managers without law enforcement experience are increasingly put in charge of NPLE personnel, often without a requisite understanding of the complexities of policing, legal frameworks, or court requirements. While these managers may bring administrative expertise, their lack of firsthand knowledge in law enforcement may lead to challenges in decision-making, policy development, and the provision of operational leadership. This disconnect may create unintended risks, from compliance issues to operational inefficiencies, ultimately impacting public safety and the effectiveness of these specialized officers. As local

governments rely on peace officers, who do not have the broader powers of police officers, to bridge gaps in community policing, it is crucial to address this growing concern to ensure informed leadership and effective public safety strategies. This article presents a structured leadership model based on the author's Alberta-based research (Young, 2022), offering practical recommendations to guide hiring, training, and leadership skills for civilian managers of NPLE personnel.

Recent Alberta-based research by the author (Young, 2022) found that over three quarters of NPLE managers lack law enforcement experience. Notably, a quarter of the sample reported that Fire Chiefs were being appointed to manage NPLE personnel, despite differences in operational mandate and enforcement training. This illustrates a need for an applicable leadership framework to be used as a valuable resource by elected officials and chief administrators when hiring or transferring inexperienced managers to oversee NPLE personnel. Understanding the field is essential—both when new managers are onboarded and throughout their professional development, especially if they lack firsthand experience.

While leadership development in Canadian policing is well-established for sworn officers, no national or provincial framework currently exists to guide the onboarding and training of civilian managers tasked with effectively leading NPLE personnel. Drawing from his own Alberta-based research, the author (Young, 2022) proposes a structured, practical leadership framework that may be the first designed specifically for this emerging area of municipal governance. The model addresses the unique challenges of managing NPLE personnel and emphasizes domain familiarization, mentorship, and performance accountability—elements frequently overlooked in current municipal hiring and training practices. As the reliance on NPLE solutions continues to expand across Canada, this contribution highlights the urgent need for informed civilian leadership to ensure effective, lawful, and equitable community safety.

While not the focus of this framework, it is worth briefly noting Alberta's adoption of Community Safety Teams—such as Edmonton's Community Outreach Transit Team and Calgary's Community Outreach Team—as examples of proactive,

What Is Non-Police Law Enforcement (NPLE)?

Non-Police Law Enforcement (NPLE) refers to uniformed personnel who perform law enforcement duties but are not sworn police officers. They typically operate under municipal or provincial authority and address specific public safety, compliance, or community standards roles.

Examples of NPLE personnel include:

- Bylaw Enforcement Officers (e.g., parking, property standards)
- Community Peace Officers (particularly in Alberta)
- Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) (Ontario and other provinces)
- Transit Enforcement Officers
- Special Constables (e.g., court security, university or transit police)

NPLE roles often involve enforcing local bylaws or provincial statutes, engaging with the public, and supporting community policing efforts—without carrying full police powers.

community-focused models. These teams pair Transit Peace Officers with outreach professionals to address safety and social concerns on public transit. Because these initiatives operate through partnerships with established social agencies and public safety divisions, they may be less exposed to the leadership risks outlined in this article. However, they reflect the same national shift toward hybrid enforcement models, further underscoring the need for informed, multidisciplinary oversight in evolving public safety environments.

Ultimately, this proposed framework not only enhances operational success but also strengthens community safety by ensuring that enforcement actions are carried out with informed leadership, legal precision, integrity, and sensitivity to the needs of the public.

THREE PILLARS OF A PROPOSED LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR CIVILIAN MANAGERS OF NON-POLICE ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL (NPLE)

Leadership frameworks built to serve the purpose of transitioning managers into this field repose on the following three pillars: organizational policies, the job description and interview, and professional development. The overarching needs involve identifying competencies that align with the unique role of leading NPLE staff. Standard leadership competencies required for most manager positions are expected to effectively transfer across roles in municipal government. Modeling servant leadership—by prioritizing the needs of staff, the community, municipal interests, and making decisions based on collective benefit rather than hierarchy or efficiency alone—can be challenging, but it is achievable with a strategic and well-informed leader.

Performance management and accountability are vital to the operational success of any local government. To set a newly appointed manager responsible for leading NPLE personnel up for success, clear performance expectations and measurable goals are also essential. It is equally important that the manager be evaluated fairly on their capabilities and progress. To support the attainment and application of necessary knowledge of the field, roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined in job descriptions along with clear performance expectations.

Standard human resource approaches, such as mentorship programs, typically rely on experienced staff to support the development of new team members. A thoughtful innovation would be to engage NPLE staff in mentoring their new manager. This reverse mentorship can support the manager's understanding of the role and help them conceptualize the law beyond the confines of municipal regulations, fostering deeper knowledge of the spirit and intent behind its enforcement.

Whether this proposed framework is built into the job description or delivered during an in-service training session focussed on field familiarization, it is essential that the following topics be considered for inclusion in roles, responsibilities, and qualifications (education and/or experience): use of force, critical

incident stress management and mental health, and evidentiary and court requirements for a broad spectrum of offences under both municipal and provincial legislation. Non-policing law enforcement personnel are required to undergo specialized training to ensure that the law is enforced legally, judiciously, and equitably, and in a manner that complies with the protections granted under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As such, those responsible for managing these professionals must develop an understanding of the nature of legal authority and its limitations, as well as a working knowledge of court processes — codified or otherwise — and the concept of social justice. Municipal leaders, regardless of their professional background, must adhere to standards that sustain public trust. A municipality that fails to ensure the equitable application of fairness and necessity, or neglects to ensure appropriate leadership of its enforcement personnel, risks eroding the public trust necessary to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of its ratepayers.

Pillar One: Organizational Policies

Organizational policies should clearly define when and how managers are expected to engage NPLE personnel in decision-making processes. Codifying these expectations removes ambiguity and elevates them from informal norm to formalized practice.

Pillar Two: Interviews

The first step in the framework involves identifying competencies in the job description, including those required and those listed as assets. Implementing strengths-based approaches is ideal for any hiring practice, and the selection of managers to lead NPLE personnel is no exception. Behavioural descriptive interviewing techniques provide a strong foundation for assessing relevant strengths in those applying for such positions. Hiring managers with a demonstrated history of collaborative leadership is critical, particularly when overseeing specialized roles beyond their own technical expertise.

Pillar Three: Professional Development

This is where the fundamental skillset must be developed, particularly for those applicants who do not have direct experience. Any leadership training framework for civilian managers, in local government, for NPLE personnel should include the following six key focus areas.

Together, these areas offer a structured approach to building the confidence, credibility, and competence that a manager needs to provide effective leadership for Non-Police Enforcement Teams (NPLE).

KEY COMPETENCY AREAS FOR NEW CIVILIAN MANAGERS

Focus Area One: Understanding the Role of Civilian Managers in Law Enforcement

Civilian leadership in local government requires a strong understanding of ethics, accountability, and transparency to ensure integrity in enforcement practices. Leaders must develop a multidisciplinary perspective on municipal enforcement to effectively manage bylaw officers, peace officers, and special constables.

Key learning objectives include recognizing the responsibilities of leadership in local governance, understanding the role of enforcement personnel, and implementing strategies for effective service delivery. By fostering ethical decision-making and operational efficiency, leaders can enhance public trust and community safety.

Focus Area Two: Law Enforcement Operations and Organizational Structure

Understanding the distinctions between bylaw enforcement officers, peace officers, and special constables is essential for effective municipal leadership. Each role has unique legal authority, jurisdiction, and limitations that shape its responsibilities within the community. Leaders must also recognize how enforcement teams collaborate with municipal departments and external agencies to ensure coordinated and efficient service delivery.

Key learning objectives include differentiating these roles, comprehending their legal frameworks, and fostering interagency cooperation to enhance public safety and compliance.

Focus Area Three: Legal and Policy Frameworks for Local Enforcement Management

Effective municipal leadership requires a thorough understanding of the regulations governing law enforcement personnel at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Leaders must be familiar with use-of-force policies, public complaint processes, and officer accountability to ensure ethical and lawful

enforcement practices. Additionally, compliance with workplace safety, human rights, and labour laws is essential in maintaining a fair and professional work environment.

Key learning objectives include navigating regulatory frameworks, upholding accountability standards, and ensuring legal compliance to support effective and responsible enforcement operations.

Focus Area Four: Leadership and Effective Team Management

Effective leadership in municipal enforcement requires strong management skills to build credibility as a non-law enforcement leader. Developing strategies to motivate and manage enforcement personnel is essential for maintaining morale and operational efficiency. Leaders must also implement effective performance evaluation methods, address disciplinary issues, and resolve conflicts to ensure a professional and accountable workforce.

Key learning objectives include establishing leadership credibility, fostering team motivation, and applying best practices in personnel management to enhance enforcement effectiveness.

Focus Area Five: Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

Strong communication skills are essential for municipal enforcement leaders to effectively engage with officers, municipal leadership, and the public. Leaders must navigate difficult conversations, address workplace culture challenges, and foster a positive work environment. Additionally, managing public expectations and responding to citizen complaints with transparency and professionalism is critical to maintaining public trust.

Key learning objectives include developing clear and effective communication strategies, handling workplace challenges, and ensuring responsive and accountable interactions with the community.

Focus Area Six: Risk Management and Decision-Making in Enforcement Leadership

Municipal enforcement leaders must be skilled in identifying and mitigating operational risks to ensure safety and efficiency. Managing high-stress situations and emergency responses requires quick decision-

making and strategic coordination. Additionally, balancing enforcement priorities with community concerns is essential for maintaining public trust and fostering positive relationships.

Key learning objectives include conducting risk assessments, managing crises, and aligning enforcement strategies with community needs to promote effective and responsible service delivery.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as local governments increasingly rely on non-police law enforcement personnel (NPLE) to maintain public safety, it is crucial that their management be entrusted to leaders who possess both administrative acumen and a foundational understanding of the complexities of law enforcement. The leadership framework introduced in this article, grounded in the author's original research conducted in Alberta, provides a robust approach to ensuring that civilian managers are well-prepared to guide NPLE personnel.

By emphasizing field familiarization, competency development, and comprehension of the spirit—as well as the letter—of the law, local governments can better equip their civilian managers to oversee NPLE personnel effectively, safeguarding public trust and promoting efficient, equitable law enforcement practices.

Ultimately, the author's innovative framework not only enhances the operational effectiveness of local enforcement teams but also supports the legitimacy of municipal governance by ensuring that enforcement actions are carried out with legal precision, ethical leadership, and a deep understanding of community needs. As the field of non-police law enforcement continues to expand in Canada, so too must the leadership capacity of those entrusted to guide it.

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RÉSUMÉ

Bridging the Gap: A Proposed Leadership Training Framework for Civilian Managers of Non-Police Enforcement (NPLE) Personnel

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Alors que les municipalités élargissent leur recours au personnel d'application de la loi non policier (ALNP)—comme les agents de réglementation, les agents de la paix communautaires et les constables spéciaux—des gestionnaires civils non policiers sans expérience en matière d'application de la loi sont de plus en plus chargés de leur direction. Cette tendance comporte des risques liés à la conformité juridique, à l'efficacité opérationnelle et à la reddition de comptes. S'appuyant sur sa propre recherche menée en Alberta, le chargé de cours en sécurité publique, Dean Young, propose un cadre innovant de développement du leadership adapté aux gestionnaires municipaux responsables du personnel ALNP. L'article précise les exigences en matière de formation, de responsabilités et d'éducation. Fondé sur trois piliers—politiques organisationnelles, embauche stratégique, et perfectionnement professionnel—le cadre vise à combler les lacunes de connaissances des gestionnaires civils non-policiers pour renforcer une sécurité communautaire équitable. Il répond à un besoin national croissant en matière de leadership civil dans ce domaine.