

How to Speak to City Councils About Public Safety Technology

Building Trust, Demonstrating Accountability, and Preparing for Tough Questions

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The conversation around public safety technology has *changed*.

A few years ago, agencies introducing a new technology program were primarily asked whether it ***worked.***

Could it help solve crimes? Would it improve investigations? Could it help officers respond more effectively?

Those questions still matter. Today, however, they are joined by another set of concerns.

- Who has access to the data?
- How is the technology governed?
- Drivers make mistakes
- How can the public verify that those safeguards are working?



For law enforcement leaders, this shift represents a new reality. Public safety technology is no longer evaluated on performance alone. Councils and communities increasingly **expect transparency, oversight, and accountability alongside public safety outcomes.** The agencies earning long-term support are not avoiding those conversations. They're leading them.

As Chris Colwell, SVP, Customer Experience at Flock, explained during the How to Speak to City Councils webinar:

> "The agencies that fare best aren't the ones with the best talking points after the fact. They're the ones who walked into council meeting chambers first, before there was anything to react to and said 'here's ***what*** we're using, here's ***why*** we're using it, and here's ***how*** you can hold us accountable."

That final point has become the **foundation of successful public safety technology programs.** Not trust alone, demonstrable accountability. The agencies building durable support understand a simple truth: if you do not tell the story of your program, someone else will.

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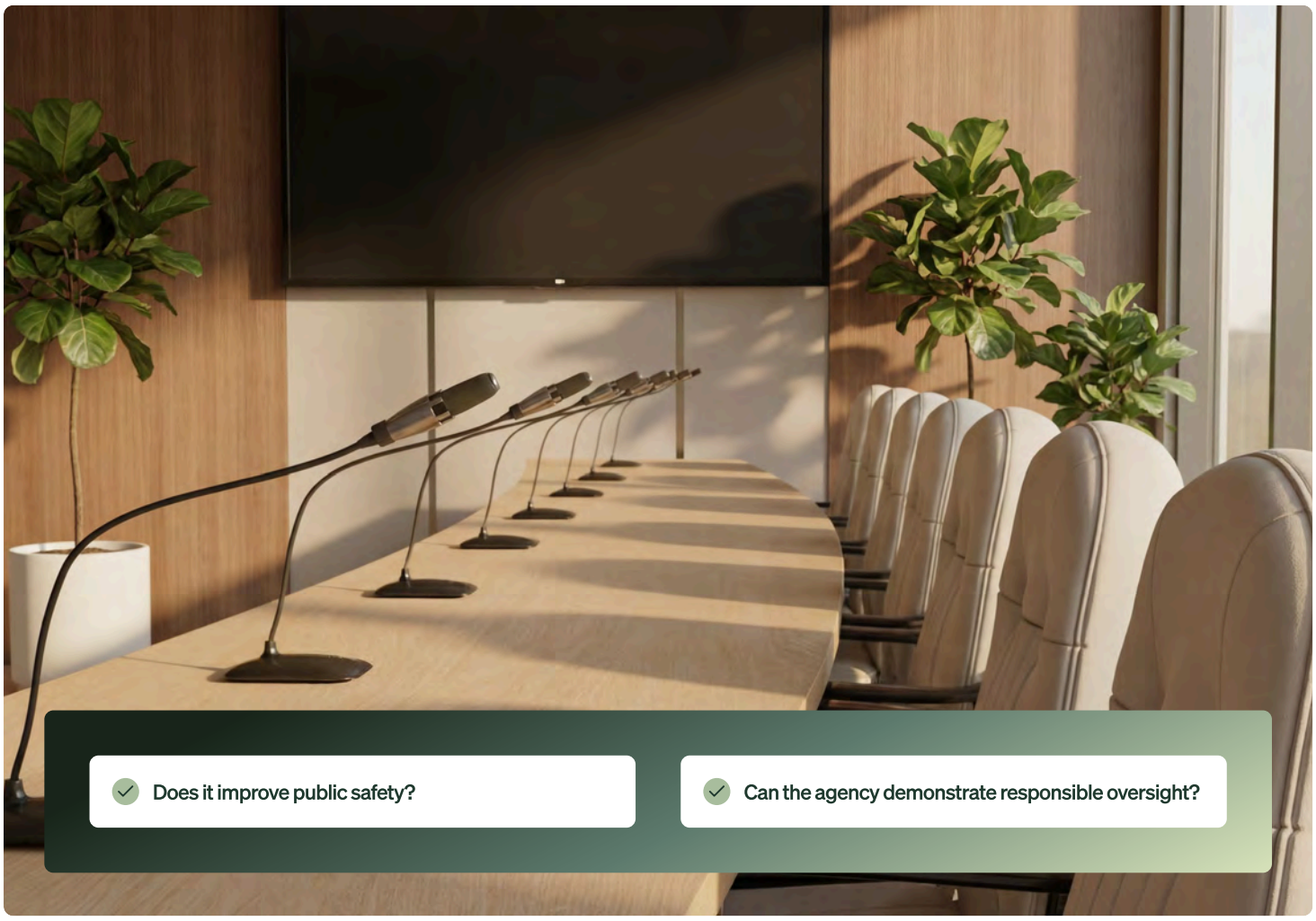
CHAPTER 01

Trust is now part of the job.

Every law enforcement leader understands operational readiness. Policies are reviewed. Personnel are trained. Systems are tested. Outcomes are measured. **Increasingly, trust has become part of operational readiness as well.**



A program can generate *strong investigative outcomes* and still encounter opposition if stakeholders do not understand how it works or how it is governed.



Across the country, councils are evaluating technology through two lenses at the same time.

Those questions are deeply connected. Flock's Real Time Strategist, Jamie Hudson, has spent decades working in law enforcement and real-time public safety. One pattern stands out when agencies struggle in council discussions. The challenge often begins **long before the meeting** itself.

Opponents have a very carefully scripted narrative. They come prepared. You should also have a carefully scripted presentation that addresses those concerns ahead of time.

The agencies that navigate these conversations successfully rarely wait until a council meeting to educate stakeholders.

They brief city managers early. They meet with council members before votes occur. They share policies proactively and answer questions before public comment periods become the first introduction to the program.



CHAPTER 02

Moving the Conversation from Surveillance to Governance

One of the most common questions agencies hear today is whether license plate recognition (LPR) technology constitutes mass surveillance. Many leaders instinctively respond by attempting to refute the claim. Flock's Jamie Hudson recommends a ***different approach.***



Instead of debating terminology, **successful agencies focus on governance.**

- Who controls the system?
- Who can access it?
- How is information used?
- How is use reviewed?
- What safeguards help ensure policies are followed?

Those are questions agencies can answer clearly.

The strongest council presentations spend less time describing technology capabilities and more time explaining the policies that surround them. They show **how searches** are tied to legitimate investigations.

They explain retention policies. They describe auditing requirements. They demonstrate oversight rather than simply promising it.

Most importantly, they bring the conversation back to local priorities.

You care about your community. That's why you're bringing this in. Bring it back to your local need, your local community, the effect it's going to have on quality of life and crime reduction.

"Don't avoid the concept of mass surveillance because you're not going to convince opponents that it's not."

Jamie Hudson, Real Time Strategist, Product Consulting & Training at Flock

Oakland, California offers a powerful example of what that looks like in practice.

140+	Split	7-1
Public comments submitted during review	Privacy commission opposed; safety committee deadlocked	Final council vote in favor of the program



When Oakland's City Council considered its LPR program, the discussion became one of the most scrutinized public safety technology debates in the state. **More than 140 public comments were submitted.** The Privacy Advisory Commission opposed the proposal, and the Public Safety Committee deadlocked before the issue reached the full council.

The discussion was no longer about whether the technology worked. It was about whether the city could govern it responsibly.

Rather than focusing solely on crime reduction, city leaders centered the **conversation on oversight.** They demonstrated live audit logs, explained approval requirements, outlined independent compliance reviews, and showed how accountability would function in practice. The result was a **7-1 council vote in favor** of the program.

The lesson is instructive. The conversation shifted when officials stopped asking the public to trust the technology and started showing how the technology could be audited, reviewed, and held accountable. **Trust moved from assumption to evidence.**

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CHAPTER 03

Accountability Is Stronger When It Is Visible

One of the most effective ways to build confidence is to show safeguards rather than simply describe them. That is where Flock's governance tools become **important.**

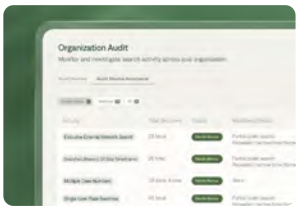
Ashley Haber, who leads Flock's Trust & Compliance products, describes her team's mission as helping agencies demonstrate accountability, transparency, and compliance in ways that are visible and easy to understand.



Modern oversight requires more than policy documents. It requires systems that support those policies in practice. Flock builds accountability tools right into their product, with features including;



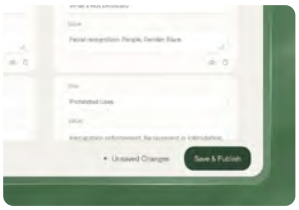
Agency-Controlled Sharing gives departments control over who can access their data and when. Sharing relationships can be enabled, restricted, or revoked by the agency itself.



Audit Assistance helps administrators surface and review atypical search patterns, document findings, and maintain a clear record of oversight activities.



Offense Type Analytics provides visibility into how searches are being conducted across the organization, allowing command staff to compare search activity against local crime trends and operational priorities.



Transparency Portals allow agencies to publish policies, usage information, and program details directly to the public through an agency-managed website.

Together, these tools help transform accountability from an abstract concept into something that can be demonstrated. This shift from policy to proof is becoming increasingly important.

In Oakland, a former skeptic ultimately cited the accountability framework surrounding the program as a key reason for supporting it. **Oversight mechanisms became as important as the technology itself.** Audit trails, independent reviews, and documented governance practices helped move the discussion from speculation to verification.

Communities rarely ask for perfect technology. They ask for accountable technology. The ability to demonstrate who searched what, when they searched it, and why they searched it allows agencies to answer those questions with facts rather than assurances.

We recommend sharing these videos for more information around how **Flock builds safeguards** into our products:

- How Flock is Helping Agencies Improve Transparency and Accountability with Audit Assistance
- What Flock License Plate Readers Actually Do (and What They Don't)
- Inside a Flock LPR Search: How Investigators Actually Use the Tool
- Who Can See Flock Data? How Sharing Controls and Audits Really Work



CHAPTER 04

The Strongest Budget Argument Is Local

Questions about funding appear in nearly every council conversation. When elected officials ask whether a program is worth the investment, they are rarely asking for a technical explanation. ***They are asking whether it creates meaningful value for their community.*** Max Weinstein, Director of Public Trust and Technology, encourages agencies to avoid abstract ROI discussions.

> "When a council member asks if this is the best use of public safety funding, what they're really asking is: convince me that it matters here."

The most persuasive answers begin with **local outcomes**. Community members want to hear about:

- Recovered stolen vehicles.
- Missing persons located.
- Investigative leads generated.
- Officer hours saved.
- Cases cleared more quickly.

Many agencies have found success by reframing the financial discussion itself. The comparison is rarely technology versus nothing.

The comparison is technology versus the cost of unresolved crime.

Max encouraged agencies to compare technology investments against the costs of unresolved crime and noted that **a single recovered vehicle can often exceed the annual cost of a camera.** He frequently points agencies toward tools like CrimeGrade, which estimate the annual cost of crime per household. That perspective changes the conversation from what technology costs to **what inaction costs.**

Everett, Washington provides a useful example. Following a temporary pause related to public concerns and evolving state legislation, Everett reactivated its program under updated legal requirements. The discussion was not framed around technology features. **It was framed around outcomes.**

250+

Arrests supported

Since launching its LPR program, Everett Police Department credited the system with supporting ***more than 250 arrests, helping recover stolen vehicles, and assisting with missing persons investigations.*** Rather than debating theoretical value, city leaders were able to point to results occurring within their own jurisdiction. That is often where the strongest ROI conversations begin.

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CHAPTER 05

Local Control Matters

Questions about data sharing often generate the strongest reactions during public meetings. Will information be shared with federal agencies? Can outside entities access local data? Who ultimately controls what happens to information collected within the community?

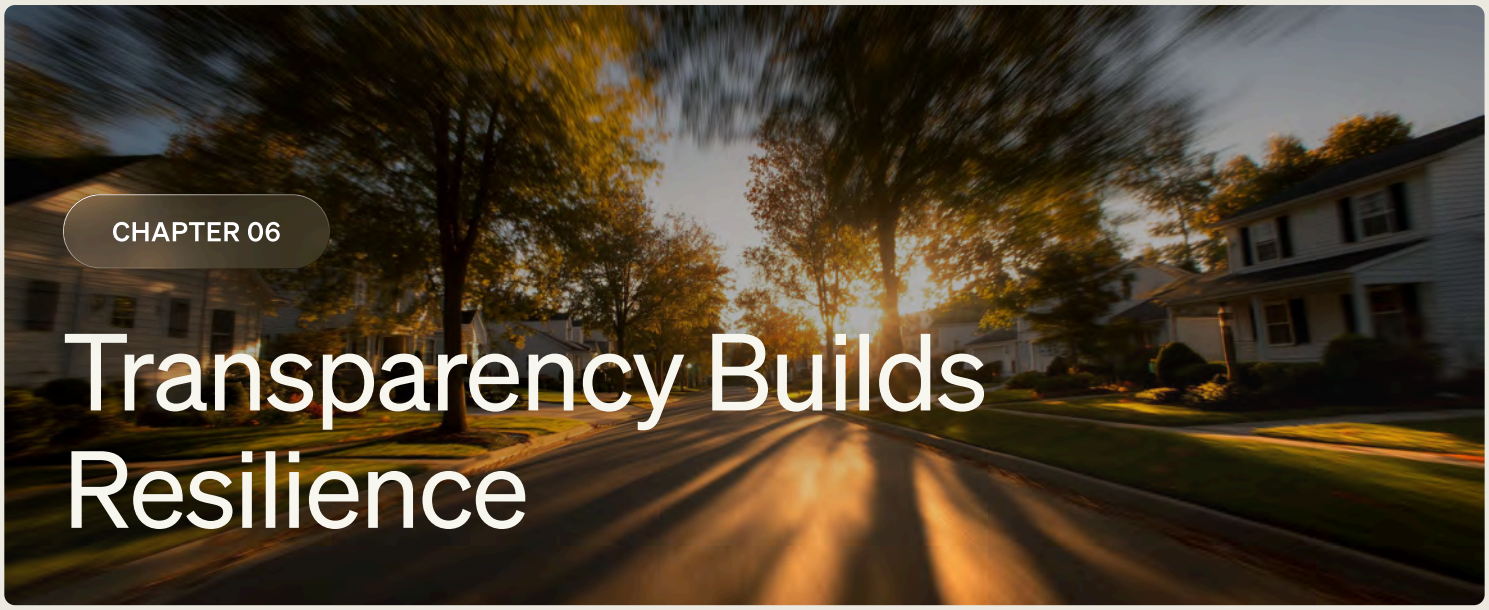
Flock's Max Weinstein believes the answer should be simple and direct.

The customer, the agency, controls their own data. That principle is central to successful governance conversations. Sharing relationships are agency-controlled. ***Participation is opt-in.*** Agencies can revoke sharing relationships whenever they choose. In many states, legislation further limits how information may be shared across jurisdictions.



"Flock does not own data, period. We don't own your data. The agency does. The customer, the agency, controls their own data."

Max Weinstein, Director of Public Trust and Technology, Customer Experience at Flock



CHAPTER 06

Transparency Builds Resilience

No technology program is immune from scrutiny. The agencies that maintain public trust are not necessarily the ones that avoid challenges. They are the ones that ***respond to those challenges with transparency and discipline.***

One CA law enforcement agency recently faced this reality firsthand. As public concerns around data sharing gained attention across its region, agency leadership **conducted a review of historical audit activity and identified a configuration issue** that had unintentionally created access during an early setup process.

Rather than waiting for the issue to surface publicly, the agency initiated a full review, investigated the circumstances, worked closely with Flock to understand exactly what had occurred, and shared its findings directly with elected officials.

As the Chief involved in the process explained:

> "We wanted to be the expert in the room about what happened, why it happened...."

The result was not the collapse of the program. Council support continued. Oversight increased. Public accountability strengthened.

That outcome highlights an important reality. Trust is not built by avoiding difficult conversations. ***Trust is built by addressing them directly.***

Richmond, California provides another example.

After concerns emerged around data sharing and sanctuary city policies, the city's program was paused and subjected to intense public scrutiny.

Rather than relying on generalized claims about effectiveness, department leadership presented two and a half years of local results, **including 274 arrests and 259 vehicle recoveries** connected to the program. The council ultimately voted 4-3 to reinstate the system. The deciding factor was not a new technology feature. It was a clear connection between **governance, accountability, and measurable public safety outcomes.**

Richmond California

2.5	274	259	4–3
Years of local results presented	Arrests connected to the program	Vehicle recoveries on record	Council vote to reinstate the system

CONCLUSION

Own the Narrative Before Someone Else Does

Every community conversation about public safety technology eventually comes down to the same question. ***Can this program improve safety while remaining accountable to the public it serves?***



Trust is not built through promises.
It is built through transparency, oversight, and outcomes that communities can see for themselves.

- Lead early.
- Show the guardrails.
- Demonstrate accountability.
- Measure what matters.

The agencies succeeding today are answering that question before they are asked. They are publishing policies, they are demonstrating oversight, they are sharing outcomes, they are explaining governance, and they are inviting scrutiny.

As Flock's Chris Colwell reminded attendees:

> "This story is going to get told either way. The only question is whether you're going to be the one telling it."
>
> Chris Colwell, Director, Product Consulting & Training at Flock

The strongest technology programs are **not defined by cameras, software, or investigative tools.** They are defined by **how responsibly those tools are governed.**

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Resources and *next steps*

Continue the conversation.
Ways to keep building accountable support for your program:

- Explore the **Flock Trust Hub** to learn more about privacy, transparency, data governance, and accountability.
- Book a council preparation call to review your upcoming presentation, stakeholder concerns, and local policy considerations.
  Email Chris Colwell at **chris.colwell@flocksafety.com**.
- Connect with your Customer Success Manager or our Support Team at **support@flocksafety.com** for onsite support, council engagement assistance, and additional resources designed to help your agency navigate public conversations with confidence.

