Week Two: Public Funding and Operational Sources

1. Compare types of criminal justice operating budgets

There are four most commonly used operating budgets: line-item budgeting, program budgeting, performance budgeting, and zero-based budgeting—and they all offer benefits and drawbacks. Line-item budgeting is probably the simplest form of budgeting, but it has minimal information because the focus or object of the spending is the program within the system. Program budgeting is usually a good normative approach for specified budget areas, because decision making involves allocating resources determined by the program funding. It can be limiting to specified areas, however, and requires time to properly calculate through metrics or evaluate programs to achieve overall success.

Zero-based budgeting generally requires every line item of a budget to be approved, not only the changes. It requires thorough review of budget requests from a base of zero. The process often includes adjustments of part of the budget upward or downward to compensate and adjust. Simply put, a zero-based budget process requires allocation of money from another line item until you can create the line item for the next budget cycle.

1. Discuss the challenges that criminal justice leaders face with instituting operating budgets

Some of the challenges leadership can face in instituting operating budgets involve the agency, the mission, their personnel, and change. For example, all leaders in an agency should have a solid understanding of the budgetary approach, and take ownership in the budget process, not simply move budget money around from year to year. Often budgets are outdated and don't truly reflect the current times or needs. Poor budget practices, such as copying and pasting budgets from year to year and not representing changing times, is another challenge.

Then there are the changing needs of criminal justice agencies. Technology can provide outstanding service or efficiency, but can also be high in cost and not included in the budget. By the time the budgets catch up and allocate for technology, technology usually advances and the money allocated may only cover a portion of the newer technology or service contracts. Unpredictability of funds is always a challenge. In high tourist areas, for example, bed or resort taxes are large funding components. If tourism slips one year or even a couple, an agency’s budget could be greatly affected. Often these challenges can be further caused by unpredictability factors such as weather, natural disaster, or other unforeseen circumstance.
Then you can lead into:

- Considering these issues, how do the budgetary roles of local, state, and federal policing agencies differ and yet remain the same?

The budgetary requirements of local officials are usually narrowly focused on servicing their community and residents. This differs greatly when compared to the work of federal sector agencies whose budgets are more global in scope. The police chief in a small Midwestern town may not care about funds for border security, but a federal official leading a federal agency charged with border protection must seek money for border protection. The federal official will most likely not focus on factors like DUI or loud stereo ordinances, as the local agency would. These differing roles often dictate funding and set parameters for various budgeting approaches and needs. Even though these agencies differ, they truly remain the same across the public sector, and leaders are all fighting for resources to best service its citizens and fulfill their criminal justice mission in their area.