

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

The evolution of law enforcement in the United States over the last 40 years has been nothing short of remarkable. The evolution of policing from the professional model to community policing has been steady and unstoppable. Policing has touched the social third rails of race and homelessness. In effect, the profession has evolved to truly merit the term “peace officer.” We are at the forefront of social change and at the front line of homeland security. It is an exciting and rewarding time to be a cop.

Law enforcement officers today are better trained, better equipped, and more reflective of the communities they serve than at any other time in our history. This critical mass of training, equipment, and diversity coupled with community policing has allowed us to bring crime down to record lows and witness an increasing level of public support for the job that we do.

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public concerns over crime and social disorder issues. In its simplest form, community policing is about building relationships and solving problems.

The downturn in the economy has impacted the country in ways that could not have been predicted even five years ago. The enhancement of community policing and the myriad of social outreach programs employed by local law enforcement have been brought about in large measure by the ready availability of local funding sources. That financial foundation is in serious jeopardy in many local jurisdictions.

Some have made the argument that the economic challenges compel us to abandon community policing because we simply cannot afford it. In fact, we cannot afford to not utilize these proven principles. American law enforcement faces the challenge of dealing with significant budget shortfalls, and departments nationwide are being forced to lay off sworn and civilian personnel to make ends meet. A recent survey conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum on the impact of the economic downturn on policing showed that 51 percent of respondents reported enduring budget cuts in fiscal year 2010, and their average budget cut was 7 percent.

While I believe that the economy will continue to improve and the recovery will continue,

it is unlikely that local budgets for law enforcement will return to their previous funding levels. Instead, we are challenged to fundamentally alter the delivery of police services. The exact nature of that alteration remains unclear. What is clear is the need for a strong partnership with the community that serves as a force multiplier for local agencies and assists in focusing limited police resources where they are needed.

Over the last sixteen years, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has been a critical player in the advancement of community policing. Although our mission has always been the advancement of public safety through community policing, we have been seen as a hiring agency because of our investment in adding officers to the street. However, what has attracted fewer headlines is the funding that has advanced community policing through training, technical assistance, and the dissemination of more than five million publications.

Over the past two fiscal years, COPS has been able to fund only about 10 percent of the hiring applications we have received. That leaves 90 percent of the need unfunded, creating a gap between the hiring needs of law enforcement

agencies and the fiscal capacity of local budgets. The COPS Office has been asking agencies to look at COPS funding as four-year problem-solving grants, rather than simply financial assistance to fill a budgetary gap. This shift in perspective is at the root of our 2011 program.

The changes that we are making to the grant programs are meant to encourage the view of them as a means for communities to address specific and persistent crime and disorder problems instead of a means of simply bolstering staffing levels. They are a direct means to advance public safety through community policing. In addition, we have improved our technical assistance resources by making them more widely available, easily accessible, and more relevant to the challenges confronting the field.

We want it to be clear that our decisions will remain objective, transparent, and based on public safety problems within a given jurisdiction. We will also place increased emphasis on the viability of the community plans proposed by departments as part of their grant applications.

In fiscal year 2011, to help you address specific problems in your communities, COPS grants will be improved in several ways. Among these improvements are

- the utilization of a community policing self-assessment tool, which will allow departments an opportunity to efficiently assess their community policing activities;
- training for grantees whose community policing scores indicate that additional technical assistance in certain areas would be helpful;
- the enhancement of our grant-monitoring practices to include a more comprehensive review of a department’s community policing efforts and to provide additional community policing technical assistance on-site; and
- the development and the availability of knowledge resource products that assist grantees with implementing community policing principles to meet their objectives.

In these economically challenging times, community policing—the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve—is the key to community safety. The COPS Office is committed to being the organization that you can rely on to support your efforts to develop the innovative policing practices critical to the safety of your communities. ♦



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