COPS Office Anti-Heroin Task Force (AHTF) Program—How Decisions were Made to Allocate Approximately $6 Million Available When More than $13 Million was Requested

The COPS Office received applications from 15 eligible state law enforcement agencies requesting $13,746,621 in federal funding for the FY 2015 COPS Office Anti-Heroin Task Force (AHTF) program.

The COPS Office developed an application to meet the requirements of the law

The COPS Office developed an application for AHTF funds that met the requirements of the statute with a focus on advancing public safety by providing funds to investigate illicit activities related to the distribution of heroin or unlawful distribution of prescriptive opioids or unlawful heroin and prescription opioid traffickers through statewide collaboration. Only state law enforcement agencies authorized by law or by a state agency to engage in or supervise anti-heroin investigative activities were eligible to apply for funding.

The COPS Office balanced scoring indicators

To measure and compare the necessary scoring indicators, the COPS Office consulted with experts in the fields of policing, criminology, and drug control policy to develop appropriate application questions. Applicants were asked to submit information regarding their jurisdiction's heroin problem on such indicators as

- reported primary treatment admission rates for heroin and other opioids for the previous three years;
- current anti-heroin investigative activities;
- planned or current involvement in an anti-heroin task force.

The community policing philosophy engages in a proactive and systematic examination of identified problems that can be countered with effective responses. Community policing relies heavily on partnerships and relationships between law enforcement and the community it serves. Narrative questions were designed to examine an agency's formation of collaborations with federal, state, local, or tribal partners such as other law enforcement and public agencies, private organizations, or participation in multijurisdictional task forces. Agencies were asked to identify and describe the types of partnerships they intended to initiate or enhance in order to address their identified heroin problem.

The COPS Office verified with applicants the data that was submitted

The application system contains numerous built-in logic checks to help prevent the submission of erroneous data. In addition, once the applications were submitted, specialists in the COPS Office immediately reviewed the data contained therein. In some cases, the COPS Office contacted applicant agencies to verify information provided in their application. This data verification process, though time-consuming, was crucial to ensuring that all applicants were properly evaluated based on accurately and consistently reported seizure data.

The COPS Office developed a uniform system of evaluating the information that applicants submitted

Comprehensive Review

The 15 eligible applications underwent a comprehensive review process by specialists and external heroin and other opioid subject matter expert (SME) peer reviewers.

The SME peer reviewers evaluated the following criteria in the Project Narrative and Budget Narrative sections of the application to determine the quality of each application. The reviewers looked at the following:

- Problem identification
- Current heroin and other opioid investigative activities
- Anti-heroin task force participation
- Collaboration and partnerships
- High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area threat assessment with regard to heroin and other opioids
- Strategy to achieve program goals
- Applicable and allowable budget items requested

The SME peer reviewers then developed recommendations based on a rating of "Highly Recommended," "Recommended," or "Not Recommended" for each proposal. From the recommendations, seven agencies ranked within the "Highly Recommended" rating, and three agencies ranked within the "Recommended" rating; five agencies were ranked within the "Not Recommended" rating.

Data Scoring

The focus for funding was on state-level law enforcement agencies in states with high rates of identified heroin problems, as indicated through the following sources of state-wide data:

- Primary treatment admissions for heroin
- Primary treatment admissions for other opioids

State primary admissions data for all applicants was scored and ranked within their respective recommendation rating categories. At this time, because of funding availability, applicants that received "Recommended" and "Not Recommended" ratings were removed from further consideration. A methodology for scoring was established to analyze and rank the seizure data provided in each application. Each category is of equal value, and the data was scored based on the rate of change between each year and the most recent year's data. Below is a classification of each item that was scored:

- Primary admissions data for the past three years

  - Rates per 100,000 population of primary treatment admissions for heroin for the past three years
  - Rates per 100,000 population of primary treatment admissions for other opioids for the past three years

- Percent change in primary treatment admissions rates across three years

  - Percent change in primary treatment admissions for heroin rates across three years
  - Percent change in primary treatment admissions for other opioids rates across three years