

CONVERSATIONS *with* Rural Law Enforcement Leaders VOLUME 2



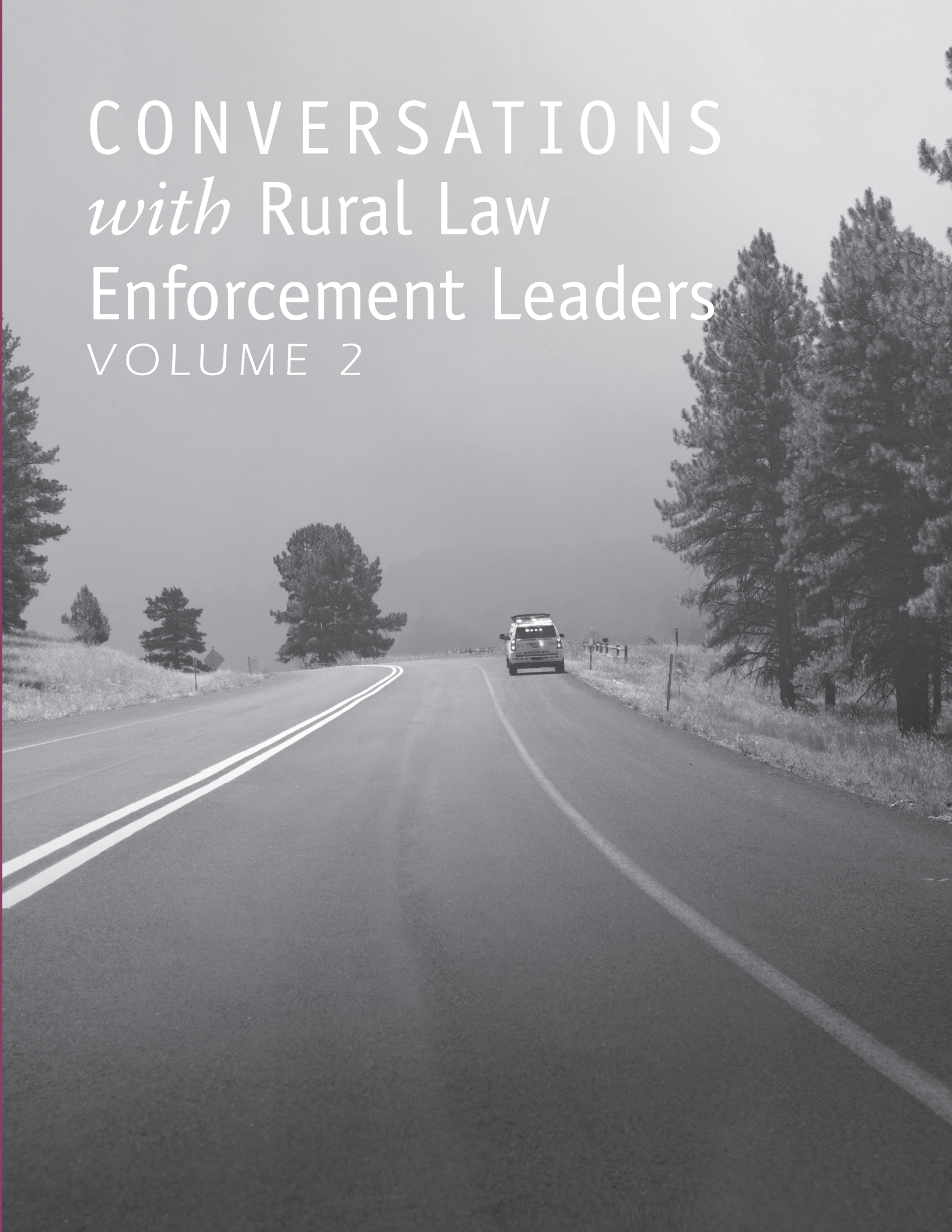
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Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

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CONVERSATIONS
with Rural Law
Enforcement Leaders
VOLUME 2



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Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

Rural law enforcement agencies represent a significant majority of the nation's law enforcement, both in terms of number and geographical coverage. These agencies face many of the same public safety and crime challenges as their colleagues in larger urban and suburban jurisdictions. At the same time, they face a number of challenges that are unique to rural areas. With job opportunities decreasing and poverty increasing, rural jurisdictions—individually and nationwide—have experienced increases in violent crime rates, as well as illicit human, gun, and drug trafficking.

Despite these challenges, in the past rural law enforcement leaders have often been left out of conversations regarding their challenges and how the Federal Government can help address their needs. President Donald J. Trump and his administration have placed an unprecedented focus on listening to—and partnering with—rural law enforcement leaders across the nation and providing resources to reduce violent crime and enhance public safety. In September 2018, in an effort to be more responsive to the needs of rural law enforcement, the COPS Office and BJA directors developed a strategy to facilitate discussions and solicit feedback from rural law enforcement executives throughout the United States.

This publication, *Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders: Volume 2*, summarizes the key topics, areas of focus, and needs raised by rural law enforcement leaders at the second series of these discussions in Texas, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania.

We appreciate all the sheriffs, chiefs, and command personnel who serve and protect our nation every day. We particularly thank those who participated in these conversations for their open and honest feedback, examples, and suggestions. Their contributions provide clear recommendations and opportunities for DOJ in our ongoing commitment to support those who protect and serve our communities nationwide.

Sincerely,


Phil Keith

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services



Introduction

Overview of rural law enforcement in the United States

Rural areas make up 72 percent of the United States and are home to 46 million people. Though more economically diverse than in the past, rural areas are still responsible for the majority of production in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and forestry. Declining job opportunities in these sectors have led to lack of employment and increasing poverty in many rural communities—as well as a shrinking tax base to support service providers. As a result, many rural public safety and public health professionals face staffing shortages, while existing staff are responsible for large geographic areas. Many are also challenged by lack of training and the need to wear multiple hats.¹

While rural law enforcement agencies are spread thin, the violent crime rate in rural areas is rising, climbing above the national average in 2018 for the first time in 10 years.² Illicit drug use has also risen in rural areas, bringing its own associated crimes.³ And of course, sparsely populated regions have always faced their own unique crime and disorder challenges. But despite their increasing crime rates, smaller rural agencies are sometimes left out of the conversation regarding contemporary law enforcement needs and challenges.

Purpose of the project

In September 2018, in an effort to be more responsive to the needs of rural law enforcement, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), working with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and local U.S. Attorneys, developed a strategy to gather feedback from rural law enforcement executives throughout the United States. As a result, a series of listening sessions, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders, was planned. The purpose of these sessions is to facilitate discussions and solicit input from rural law enforcement leaders regarding the strengths and challenges of rural agencies, their technical assistance and resource needs, and the most effective innovations in crime fighting and public safety response. Additionally, the sessions served as an opportunity for the COPS Office and BJA, other DOJ officials, and relevant stakeholders to provide information regarding existing federal resources—including federal grant funding opportunities, online resources, and training and technical assistance programs—to support rural law enforcement.

1. *Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity*, United States Department of Agriculture, October 21, 2017, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-prosperity-report.pdf>.
2. Alan Greenblatt, "In Rural America, Violent Crime Reaches Highest Level in a Decade," *Governing: The Future of States and Localities*, July 2018, <https://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-crime-rural-urban-cities.html>.
3. Shibani Mahtani, "'Nothing But You and the Cows and the Sirens' - Crime Tests Sheriffs Who Police Small Towns," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nothing-but-you-and-the-cows-and-the-sirens-crime-tests-small-town-sheriffs-1526122800>.

The listening sessions

The first round of listening sessions, in South Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, Iowa, and Montana, are described in Volume One of this series.⁴ This publication covers the second round of listening sessions in Texas, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania that took place in late 2019 and early 2020. A third round of listening sessions was also conducted later in 2020, although because of the COVID-19 pandemic, those took place over teleconference.

In the second round, some sessions were standalone meetings, while others occurred in conjunction with annual meetings of state sheriffs' and chiefs' associations. More than 250 state and local law enforcement executives—sheriffs, chiefs, supervisory special agents, and executive directors from national associations—from states and Tribal Nations met with DOJ representatives to discuss and identify areas of concern and collaborate on short-term and long-term solutions including grants, operational challenges, training and technical assistance, hiring programs, officer safety and wellness, and a myriad of other federally supported and organized resources. The obstacles attendees described were broadly similar to those heard previously, though the particulars were often state- or agency-specific. This report examines the overarching themes associated with the challenges of rural policing, the specific concerns of individual states and agencies, and new ideas regarding how to move the profession forward.

4. National Police Foundation, *Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders: Volume 1.*, Rural Law Enforcement (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2020), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0892>.

Recurring Themes

The continuation of this series of listening sessions brought new ideas and perspectives and provided a space to share valuable information about targeted solutions to serious problems facing law enforcement agencies. As well, the repetition of the most significant and common concerns raised in the previous forums validated the severity and uniformity of those problems. While different states and agencies each encounter different specific issues, the broad themes across all listening sessions have remained consistent: funding, recruitment and retention, staffing, training, equipment, substance use and addiction, illegal drug trafficking and related crimes, jail capacity, mental health and medical care, and complications obtaining and maximizing federal grants. Immigration enforcement and drug interdiction was also a theme common to border states in both the northern and southern United States.

Funding

As demonstrated in the first series of listening sessions, insufficient funding is a consistent and widespread problem that touches nearly every component of a law enforcement agency and creates a feedback loop: less funding means fewer training opportunities, fewer officers, and fewer resources, which, in turn, can enable widespread drug trafficking, with fewer investigations and fewer convictions. Increased drug trafficking sparks increases in drug use and related crime, which results in overcrowding of jails and overtaxing of the jurisdiction's available mental health and medical resources. Overtaxed jails and mental health resources cannot accommodate the demand for services and many substance users remain beholden to their addiction, creating more opportunities for drug trafficking. Rural police agencies are already taxed by their size and locations; they are unable to exploit economies of scale that favor larger agencies and face logistical hurdles to coordinating efforts with their neighbors. As a result, they often find themselves constantly reacting to the public safety threats and urgent crises associated with drug trafficking, rather than proactively planning and training to execute long-term, targeted, visionary solutions to the systemic problems they have identified. In Michigan, attendees identified a lack of resources for conducting daily law enforcement activities, participating in drug interdiction operations, or joining homeland security task forces as the "most significant hurdle" to the preservation of public safety.

Even where they do not lead to increases in crime, limited resources can increase the perception of crime and disorder, by lowering agencies' ability to focus on order maintenance, low-level crimes, and highway safety.

While total funding remains the most broadly applicable, persistent, uniform concern, several law enforcement executives articulated that federal funding to states was distributed inequitably and did not reach most of the state's law enforcement agencies. In Texas, as in many other sessions, sheriffs expressed frustration with Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG funding), stating that it had been allocated only to larger jurisdictions, not to the majority of agencies. Some noted that the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) designation was paramount to securing supplemental federal funds to combat drug trafficking. One sheriff did explain that, in cases when only one of two geographically proximate agencies is designated, there are often agreements in place to ensure the two agencies share the increased resources.

Recruitment and retention

Recruiting the right personnel to work in law enforcement is an increasingly difficult task. A report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found an 11 percent decrease in sworn officers between 1997 and 2016,⁵ during which time the United States population increased by 21 percent.⁶ Agencies of all sizes are struggling with recruitment due to negative perceptions about law enforcement and inadequate pay, and rural agencies have been the most impacted.⁷ While no agency is ever satisfied that it has the best possible people, training opportunities, equipment, and resources, most rural agencies—those that police a population of fewer than 50,000—have fewer than 10 sworn employees, so any vacancy means at least a 10 percent reduction in authorized personnel.⁸ Further, because of perceptions of the safety of rural communities,⁹ the number of authorized officers may be only a fraction of the ideal number.

Across all listening sessions, many attendees discussed the difficulties they face with both recruitment and retention: The job is tougher than ever; officers are expected to perform their duties flawlessly; fewer people feel called to service, while many of those who do use smaller agencies as stepping stones into larger and more prominent police departments in urban areas; and, amid an overall national decline, crime in rural areas is increasing.¹⁰

For some, the problem is as simple as not having the financial resources to bring in new officers or compete with larger agencies to retain the people they have. Sheriffs from multiple states noted that COPS Office Hiring Grants have helped but represented only a temporary solution. For a smaller agency, the loss of the grant funding can often mean the permanent loss of that officer, and even one person is a sizeable loss in smaller agencies.

For other agencies, the problem was more complex. One sheriff stated that his office is simply not able to attract the right applicants: “This is a time where people don’t want to be in law enforcement. We have enough money and there is grant money available for hiring, but we can’t find people to hire.” Attendees provided similar anecdotes across the listening sessions, and the data further illustrate the problem: The Police Executive Research Forum found that 36 percent of member agencies reported a “significant decline” in applications between 2014 and 2019, while an additional 27 percent reported at least a “slight” decline.¹¹

5. Shelley Hyland, “Full-Time Employees in Law Enforcement Agencies, 1997-2016,” Statistical Brief, Bureau of Justice Statistics, August 2018, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ftelea9716.pdf>.

6. “Population, Total - United States,” The World Bank | Data, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=US>.

7. Brett Meade, “Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Law Enforcement Officers,” Blog, National Police Foundation Blog, March 17, 2016, <https://www.policefoundation.org/recruiting-selecting-and-retaining-law-enforcement-officers/>.

8. *Policing in Small, Rural, and Tribal Communities*, Practices in Modern Policing (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2018), https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/IACP_PMP_SmallTribal.pdf.

9. Sarah M. Chilenski, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Mark T. Greenberg, “Understanding the Link between Social Organization and Crime in Rural Communities,” *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, June 26, 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4482473/?report=reader>.

10. Greenblatt, “In Rural America, Violent Crime” (see note 2).

11. Police Executive Research Forum, *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2019), <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

The problems of insufficient financial resources and a lack of applicants are intertwined: Larger jurisdictions can often offer better pay and benefits to incentivize applications and, perhaps more importantly, these better-funded agencies can make decisions that promote officer safety and well-being. Officers who feel safe and supported continue to serve for longer, reducing the need to fill vacancies.

Pay and benefits

Across the country, police officers earned an average of \$56,160 in 2011. That figure was \$65,210 in 2018, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹² Although this represents important progress, the gains were not shared equitably across all agencies. In New Jersey—the most densely populated state¹³—the median salary for police was more than \$105,000 by 2016 after regular increases since 2010.¹⁴ Rural departments struggle to match those salaries. Several sheriffs noted that younger officers are less likely to choose small towns, and that lower pay and benefits is undoubtedly one reason why.

Training

Another casualty of budget shortfalls in rural areas is funding for training. Funding for Nevada Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), for example, is at the same level as in 2008,¹⁵ despite 18 percent population growth in the state during that same period.¹⁶ Sheriffs reported that their agencies are finding it nearly impossible to meet POST training requirements due to budgetary concerns. Population has increased, as have the requirements for officers, programs, and training. Unfortunately, that increase in demand has not resulted in a commensurate increase in budget to meet it.

The problem of inadequate training resources goes beyond Nevada and beyond POST. At several forums, attendees discussed additional training that would be particularly useful to their individual agency or region, such as a “critical need” for forensic training for crime scenes (and the necessary equipment to conduct proper forensic investigations), intelligence collection, school resource officer (SRO) training—particularly in areas in which schools are overcrowded and new SROs will need to be hired—and training on the requirements of prosecuting federal gun cases, so that law enforcement officers can better partner with prosecutors in prompting just outcomes.

12. Shako Liu, and Phil McCausland, “Rural Police Struggle to Recruit amid Poor Pay and Public Perception,” NBCNews.com, November 10, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/rural-police-struggle-recruit-amid-poor-pay-public-perception-n1078496>.
13. Emma Caplan, “Most Densely Populated U.S. States,” WorldAtlas, September 8, 2020, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/most-densely-populated-u-s-states.html>.
14. “Cops in N.J. Now Earn Over \$100K. See How Much They Make in Your Town,” NewJersey.com, April 22, 2019, https://www.nj.com/news/2017/05/how_much_is_the_median_cop_salary_in_your_town.html.
15. *Report of Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training* (Las Vegas, NV: Nevada State Legislature, 2018), <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/InterimCommittee/REL/Document/11044>.
16. Health Resources and Services Administration, “Nevada Population Data,” 2008 State Profiles - Nevada. Health Resources and Services Administration, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://hab.hrsa.gov/stateprofiles2014/2008/states/nv/State-Population-Data.htm>; U.S. Census Bureau, “Nevada and Idaho Are the Nation’s Fastest-Growing States,” press release, December 20, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/estimates-national-state.html>.

Throughout the listening sessions, sheriffs were supportive of training—any training—and expressed gratitude to officers who sought out these opportunities, particularly those that were free (i.e., grant-funded), but attendees from smaller agencies, such as one Michigan sheriff, reported that backfill costs and strain on remaining staff can make even no-cost opportunities difficult. In these small departments, any time one officer attends a training, the others are forced into overtime, which an already strained budget cannot accommodate.

Equipment

The subject of equipment was raised in every listening session, with some agencies reporting that even their most basic needs are not being met because of budgetary constraints. In one instance, a Nevada sheriff noted that even internet access is too costly, with one communications company asking \$1,400 per month for access to existing infrastructure. Other sheriffs also discussed lacking communications equipment—including body-worn cameras, radios, and mobile data terminals—and interoperability capacity. Tactical equipment, such as tourniquets, ballistic helmets, and bulletproof vests, was also either unavailable or came at the expense of other valuable equipment and training resources.

Border areas reported additional unmet equipment needs, including equipment for vehicles, intelligence gathering tools, portable x-ray machines, and License Plate Readers (LPR) linked to regional and national systems.

Some agencies were interested in pushing technology forward to help reduce the unique burdens of rural policing—the use of small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUAS), for example, could allow police to better locate stolen property and missing persons in regions where there is simply too much land to expect officers to search through more traditional methods. While this has become standard practice in a few departments across the country,¹⁷ some attendees indicated that drone use is not on their radar, instead inquiring more about how to police the general public's drone use, expressing concern over the lack of clarity around rules and regulations—and over whom to contact for more information.

Although no specific funding opportunities dedicated to sUASs were shared, COPS Office Director Phil Keith, former BJA Acting Director Michael Costigan, and former BJA Principal Deputy Director Tracey Trautman offered targeted solutions to many other equipment issues by discussing how Byrne JAG funding and the Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) can be used to provide the most essential equipment, and how severe budget limitations could prompt a waiver on any matching funds requirements. Some attendees reported already having purchased bulletproof vests out of pocket, but DOJ staff were clear that the federal support is there for these vital tools.

17. John Seewer, "Law Enforcement Agencies Turning to Drones to Fight Crime," *Washington Post*, May 28, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/2018/05/28/84041c42-62bd-11e8-a768-ed043e33f1dc_story.html.

Substance use and addiction

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drug overdoses are the leading cause of injury-related death.¹⁸ Despite a four percent decrease from 2017 to 2018, over 67,000 people still died as a result of overdose in the United States in 2018. In 1999, 4.0 people per 100,000 died of drug overdose in rural communities. Since then, the numbers have trended upward, reaching over 20.0 people per 100,000 in 2017.¹⁹ The increase was consistent across sex and race and with respect to intent (i.e., homicide, suicide, accidental death).

In 2017, the CDC found that “the percentage of people reporting illicit drug use is less common in rural areas, [but] the effects of use appear to be greater.” Because of this, and because of the geographic challenges of low population density, police in rural areas are tasked not only with drug trafficking interdiction and arrest of distributors, but also with saving and supporting addicts as first responders. With jail as the primary tool at their disposal, officers often arrest users and addicts, who are slowly processed through the courts—often without getting treatment or other help—and released back to the streets to use again and be arrested and jailed again.

The cycle of abuse often starts early. Addiction is not limited to adults—several sheriffs cited drug psychosis as a primary or base issue with teenage students, and schools often face some of the same funding and resource issues that police encounter.

Further complicating matters, Ohio sheriffs noted that, as federal resources have addressed the opioid crisis,²⁰ new complications have arisen, including the resale and abuse of suboxone—a drug often prescribed to reduce the symptoms of opiate addiction and withdrawal—and the rise of methamphetamine production and distribution.²¹ Attendees from other states reported similar issues.

Illegal drug trafficking and related crime

A common theme across all listening sessions to date has been illegal drug trafficking and associated violence. Attendees from several states noted that, as governments have ramped up efforts to combat the opioid crisis, neither the supply nor demand for drugs has abated. Further, successful efforts by law enforcement to interdict the trade often have violent ramifications after the fact. Attendees in several states spoke of gun violence and prostitution being closely tied to drug trafficking, with border states adding the element of illegal immigration and even human trafficking to the radar of their law enforcement teams. While multiagency task forces work to combat these public safety problems, some attendees

18. “Opioid Overdose,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed March 19, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>.

19. Salynn Boyles, “CDC: Overdose Death Rates Now Highest in Cities — But Rural Women Are Still Dying at Higher Rates than Urban Women,” Public Health and Policy, Medpage Today, August 2, 2019, <https://www.medpagetoday.com/publichealthpolicy/publichealth/81383>.

20. G. William Hoagland, Anand Parekh, Tim Swope, Morgan Bailie, Nick Hart, Regina LaBelle, and Capri S. Cafaro, “Tracking Federal Funding to Combat the Opioid Crisis,” (Washington, DC: Bipartisan Policy Center, 2019), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Tracking-Federal-Funding-to-Combat-the-Opioid-Crisis.pdf>.

21. “Suboxone Addiction and Abuse Treatments,” American Addiction Centers, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/suboxone>.

from smaller agencies reported they are unable to participate due to budget shortages, removal of road deputies, and a lack of necessary equipment (such as portable x-ray machines, K9 units, LPRs, etc.). While southern border state attendees reported that Drug Enforcement Administration support has been critical, attendees from northern border states indicated that they do not receive the same attention, which may increase the success rate of traffickers in those jurisdictions.

Jail capacities

Despite some progress, the opioid crisis has not ended as a result of new programs and initiatives. Police are first responders, tasked with tackling this crisis as it happens, which routinely puts officers in difficult positions. Jails are overcrowded and drug addicts—and many others found in violation of the law—need medical care and mental health services that the jails (as presently constructed) are not well-equipped to provide. Officers are not tasked with deciding what the law should be, nor with judgment or sentencing, but the circumstances are such that there may be no other place for an offender if arrested, leaving officers in a bind and choosing from bad options. Attendees from some states reported that not only did their jails lack both space and mental health resources, but state hospitals had also begun turning away individuals brought in by police. When taken to jail, some individuals suffering from withdrawal or more complicated issues have attacked correctional officers and other inmates. Knowing this possibility, police in multiple states explained that they must make difficult choices. Sometimes the best choice is not to arrest, but making the wrong decision in these challenging cases leads to public mistrust and even fear. Conversely, choosing to arrest can result in the offender being processed and released and returning to the same situation.

Mental health and medical care

Attendees in several states highlighted the need for mental health and medical support with for those who are arrested and detained. The system, as presently constituted, is set up to house suspects and offenders, but not to provide them with meaningful care and support. With jails in many jurisdictions overcrowded, inmates in need of mental health or medical care are regularly released pending adjudication, which, in the case of mental health issues, is a disservice to both victim and offender and damages trust and accountability.

Most rural agencies lack the funds to provide adequate medical and mental health services on their own, and rely on collaborations with external partners. Many agencies, however, reported that they do not have the funding to sustain such a collaboration. Even if they are able to establish one with a grant, the collaboration will end when the grant does, making agencies hesitant to apply for limited-term grant funding. “Three years is not enough,” one sheriff offered.

According to one attendee, a rural county in Nevada had an independent audit conducted and the concluding recommendation was that medical and mental health resources be made available 24 hours a day in the jail. The cost estimate for providing these services was at least \$450,000 annually—budgetarily impossible, as the county’s tax base is extremely low, a limitation which impacts all county services, not just jails. Moreover, these resources do not currently exist in the county: to establish it, the

agency would need to not only pay the salary of the providers but incentivize their relocation to rural Nevada to work with a jailed population that requires work on nights and weekends—a difficult task, even if the funding were available.

Although the optimal solution may be to have a team of providers available 24/7 and year-round, dedicated to the jailed population, one attendee noted that his county benefitted significantly from part-time access to one licensed clinical social worker. Unfortunately, that person left for a similar position in a more populous area with better pay and the county does not have the budget to make the position full-time or offer other incentives, decreasing the likelihood of finding a suitable replacement.

Obtaining and using grants

At all 12 listening sessions to date, attendees have raised the issue of obtaining and using grants. Sheriffs express frustration with the lack of funding assistance from the federal government. In response, the COPS Office and BJA have discussed grant opportunities and programs that have provide meaningful assistance to similar agencies throughout the country, but not all agencies that apply will be awarded grants and many law enforcement leaders have articulated real challenges to obtaining or accessing grants, training, and other programs.

The most basic concern expressed by leaders of many agencies in several states is that the smallest and most rural agencies simply lack the grant-writing capacity and resources—even identifying all of the grants for which an agency is eligible is a considerable task for someone inexperienced. Larger agencies can afford to have dedicated staff specializing in grants, but smaller agencies cannot budget for that, particularly given the brevity of most grants—for agencies that will be unable to sustain funding when the grant period expires, it is not worth risking the dedicated person-hours needed to apply on an uncertain payout of limited duration. Excessive reporting requirements exacerbate the problem—though some attendees did express gratitude to the COPS Office for already having worked to reduce the most burdensome and least valuable reporting requirements significantly.

Attendees of several listening sessions also noted that the process feels opaque, even to those who are familiar with it, at every level from solicitation through reporting. Questions frequently arose as to why an application was awarded or denied, why it would be different from year to year, and what would have bolstered an application that was not awarded. In addition to clarity about the review process, attendees expressed an interest in more concrete and direct guidance as to what might disqualify an application. It is important that grant opportunities strike the right balance between being informative and clear and being unnecessarily cumbersome and daunting.

Local governments can sometimes add layers of unnecessary complications. Some attendees explained that their County Boards require someone from the sheriff's office to justify why they are applying for the grant. Because local county politics is based on personal relationships, the sheriff must personally justify each application, rather than delegating a deputy or a contracted grant-writer to engage with the County Board for the sake of efficiency. This, too, can be a deterrent to the progress that all parties claim to seek. As one sheriff put it: "It's not the need and it's not the availability of federal dollars and resources—it's the process in the middle that local agencies and the federal government need to work to address."



Specific Challenges

In addition to the broader trends within rural law enforcement across the country, law enforcement leaders at the second series of listening sessions also brought up significant, specific challenges their jurisdictions have faced. These included inconsistencies with prosecution and courts, elder justice issues (especially financial fraud), technological shortcomings, the dangers of responding to domestic violence situations, problems with encryption of illegal communications, persistent challenges in maintaining safe schools, and obstacles to obtaining and maximizing grant funding.

Inconsistencies in federal drug prosecution

Some attendees noted that, while addiction is a health and a community issue and addicts need more help than jails can provide, laws and enforcement guidelines do not reflect this understanding—even if the resources were there to deal with substance users outside of the criminal justice system, they are still required to enforce the laws as they exist. This leads to a “revolving door” dynamic where some substance users are repeatedly arrested, processed, adjudicated, and released only to cycle through the system again because the underlying addiction is never sufficiently addressed. Consistently re-arresting the same people for the same reasons and putting them into a system that does not seem to recognize the obvious pattern of recidivism leads some to feel that their work in law enforcement has had no meaningful purpose, and leads others to feel the burden of making decisions that could reduce public safety or public trust.

Some attendees also complained of the discrepancies between state or local and federal laws and enforcement guidelines and how that can lead to declined prosecutions of some cases. They reported bypassing certain prosecutors entirely for federal crimes, bringing them directly to a different jurisdiction within the state to ensure that the case would proceed. Fortunately, this practice was not common and is no longer necessary, as the current group of U.S. Attorneys is more consistently committed to working *with* law enforcement to effectively communicate regarding best practices and obtain just outcomes.

Elder justice

Some sheriffs reported that elder justice a significant concern in their counties—in particular, financial scams preying on the elderly. They noted that many of the elderly are uneducated about the different forms of modern financial scams and are likely to be confused by technological changes from governments and banks, enabling scammers to pose as representatives of trusted institutions.

Physical elder abuse is common in community-living situations,²² but the social isolation more commonly found in rural elderly populations also provides time and space for financial exploitation, and the data reflect this.²³ The resources to fight financial abuse are available to both law enforcement and to the elderly population, but meaningfully educating the most vulnerable communities is both challenging and insufficient—fraud is not a constant practice and new techniques are typically identified only after they have been used effectively.

Technology

Advancements in technology can make policing safer, more effective, and more efficient. But while some larger departments are pushing the profession forward with sUASs, LPRs, predictive policing,²⁴ and data mining,²⁵ other agencies are still struggling to provide each deputy or officer with a functioning radio. Multiagency task forces have proven effective, but basic information sharing between state and local law enforcement is still not universal, and poor records management within an agency²⁶ can mean that even information access is a challenge. With insufficient funds and staffing shortages compounded by technological inefficiencies, many attendees expressed that their objective is to meet long overdue technological standards, rather than pursuing innovations to advance the field of policing.

Domestic violence

Women in rural communities experience intimate partner violence (IPV) at a higher rate than women in urban and suburban areas but live farther away from both resource programs and law enforcement.²⁷ With increased social isolation due to the geography of rural communities, IPV is not often immediately evident to neighbors and others in the community. From the perspective of law enforcement, domestic violence situations can be extremely volatile, with officers and deputies entering tense situations not knowing what to expect—situations that could be complicated by substance use or access to deadly weapons. U.S. Attorney Justin Herdman (Northern District of Ohio) described these as “the most dangerous and difficult situations law enforcement officers will face,” noting that last year two officers were killed responding to a domestic violence call in Westerville, Ohio, and another officer was killed in a similar situation in Girard, Ohio, before he could even enter the residence—the suspect opened fire rather than grant access.

22. Xin Qi Dong, “Elder Abuse: Systematic Review and Implications for Practice,” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 63, no. 6 (2015): 1214–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.13454>.

23. *Rural and Tribal Elder Justice Resource Guide* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice Elder Justice Initiative, 2018), <https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/book/file/1110846/download>.

24. Martin Kaste, “How Data Analysis Is Driving Policing,” National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/25/622715984/how-data-analysis-is-driving-policing>.

25. Police Executive Research Forum, *Research on the Impact of Technology on Policing Strategy in the 21st Century*, (Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International, 2016), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/251140.pdf>.

26. Steve Terrell, “New Mexico State Police Chief Clearing Controversies,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 2, 2019, https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/new-mexico-state-police-chief-clearing-controversies/article_05f5917b-057b-5924-98c2-a80fe0e317f9.html.

27. Corinne Peek-Asa, Anne Wallis, Karisa Harland, Kirsten Beyer, Penny Dickey, and Audrey Saftlas, “Rural Disparity in Domestic Violence Prevalence and Access to Resources,” *Journal of Women’s Health* 20, no. 11 (November 11, 2011): 1743–49. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2011.2891>.

For victims of IPV whose abuser has access to a firearm, the likelihood of a fatal confrontation is greatly increased—at least sixfold, according to Herdman, though some studies suggest the risk of death may be as much as 40 times greater.²⁸ Anyone with even a misdemeanor conviction for domestic abuse or with an active order of protection against them (criminal or civil) is prohibited by federal law from owning a firearm.²⁹ Some of the U.S. Attorneys advised law enforcement officers in attendance that they may be able to bring federal charges against these offenders when serial abusers are released by the local or state judicial system, or when there is insufficient available evidence to prosecute other serious crimes for which the offender is known to be responsible.

Encryption

An increasing number of communications are encrypted, with even the largest tech companies providing comprehensive encryption services to all for all types of communications. Unfortunately for law enforcement, drug trafficking and sexual abuse are made easier by these technologies—even obtaining warrants for known offenders, arresting the suspect in question, and confiscating the devices used for the illegal communications is sometimes insufficient in obtaining the key information required to support a prosecution.³⁰ One sheriff added that, in many cases, the communications themselves are criminal, as in the case of child sexual abuse, but cannot be intercepted or decrypted. Attendees explained that they understood the desire for privacy for law-abiding citizens but expressed that there must be a solution for law enforcement officers who go through the proper channels to obtain search and arrest warrants.

School safety

The national conversation relating to school safety is typically focused on the rare and sensational criminal behaviors, such as mass shootings. At many of the listening sessions, sheriffs expressed concern over common, persistent problems that have been insufficiently addressed. For example, overcrowding is typically viewed as an issue faced only by the school, but in North Dakota, a large and rapid influx of students has resulted in a shortage of both classroom space and school resource officers (SRO), the existing SROs are unable to enforce building security, as campuses expand into temporary buildings. Attendees noted that, while North Dakota has become the second-largest oil-producing state in the U.S., the local schools and law enforcement agencies have not seen the requisite increase in funding and resources to meet the increased demand.³¹ Even with proper funding, quickly recruiting and training more SROs and adapting security plans is a significant challenge for local agencies.

28. S.B. Sorenson and R.A. Schut, "Non-Fatal Gun Use in Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1524838016668589>.

29. 18 U.S.C. § 921 et seq.

30. Tom Ridge, "Law Enforcement's Encryption Dilemma," *The Hill*. September 16, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/cybersecurity/461558-law-enforcements-encryption-dilemma>.

31. "North Dakota Fracking and Water Use Facts" (Bismarck, ND: North Dakota State Water Commission, 2019), https://www.swc.nd.gov/pdfs/fracking_water_use.pdf.

One sheriff noted that schools dealing with rapid increases in student populations are not equipped to manage the influx of students with language barriers, special needs, or substance use or mental health issues. Teachers in North Dakota have reported that classroom overcrowding has increased tensions between students, but they struggle to keep order while managing these other increases to their professional burdens. As a result, frustrated students become more agitated and violent, gangs become more prevalent, and the drug trade becomes impossible for educators to interdict. Another sheriff noted that “the prolonged use of drugs is affecting many school-related activities.” Law enforcement, then, becomes the catch-all for these problems not otherwise addressed in schools, as counseling and resources become overtaxed or small issues go undetected long enough to morph into larger issues that result in violent behavior.

Grant administration

The acquisition and administration of grant funding has been a topic of many conversations across all listening sessions, with multiple attendees identifying frustrations and DOJ staff—from both the COPS Office and BJA—both (1) providing insights into best practices and (2) working to better understand the concerns of the local law enforcement and improve the process moving forward.

In some sessions, attendees noted particular frustration with the Byrne JAG funding levels, noting that they are subject to change annually, creating uncertainty for sheriffs and challenges for counties working with significant budget constraints due to a low tax base. Some attendees noted that their County Boards are willing to provide the funding, while others indicated that their Boards prefer sheriffs apply for as many grants as possible in the hopes of cutting funding to police in order to address the county’s other needs. Because of this, many grants do not end up increasing agency budgets or capabilities. In many parts of the country, county and state policies and review boards are established to oversee and assist in the application process but, in so doing, often add to the time it takes to apply. Some grants have short application windows and many County Boards meet infrequently; as a result, some agencies noted that they have had to submit rushed work.

Law enforcement leaders also expressed concern over the administration of the funding by the State Administering Agency (SAA). Because the SAA is also classified as a law enforcement agency, it is permitted to keep some of the grant funds for its own use in its statewide grant administration. The SAA possesses what seems to be unilateral authority in the dissemination of federal funds in some states.

Similarly problematic were grants for task forces, which require the participation of multiple agencies from local, state, and federal law enforcement; those agencies, however, may not want to participate as secondary stakeholders in one task force when they already hold primary responsibility on another. Interagency cooperation and coordination is already a well-documented challenge, and grant funding opportunities are not immune.

In addition to the flaws of the application and acquisition processes, law enforcement leaders lamented the burdensome requirements on the administration of grant funds. The consensus was that monitoring and reporting is unnecessarily complicated and requires too much information, disproportionately impacting the smallest and most rural agencies which cannot dedicate staff to the task.

Implementation, too, was a concern for some agencies. National Public Safety Partnership (PSP) grantees received funding and resources, but leaders in immediately adjacent agencies not receiving assistance expressed concern that crime from grantees' jurisdictions is merely being pushed into their own, further straining their own personnel.³²

32. "About," National Public Safety Partnership, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.nationalpublicsafetypartnership.org/#about>.

Interagency Relationships

Smaller and rural agencies may be able to compensate for some of their natural limitations by cooperating with law enforcement at other levels and jurisdictions, but creating effective and efficient teams across agencies is a complex task.

Task forces

In 2014, Texas Sheriffs A.J. Louderback and Michael O'Connor initiated a coalition of 18 sheriffs in southern Texas to establish a partnership of cooperation relating to 287(g) assistance.³³ According to Sheriff O'Connor, Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) was the catalyst for the creation of this partnership, as their perception was that larger jurisdictions were receiving the bulk of federal resources and attention.³⁴ Each participating sheriff signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) of cooperation in investigation and interdiction of violent crime, illegal drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and human trafficking. The MOU was later expanded to include disasters, information sharing, cross deputization, and equipment sharing. The coalition has proved successful, intercepting and confiscating or destroying large quantities of drugs, guns, and illegally obtained cash. In addition to their cooperative agreement, these 18 sheriffs also stated that they actively and consistently support the Border Patrol.

While the success of the project is encouraging, it is not broadly representative of the experiences of rural law enforcement agencies attempting to partner and cooperate. In Michigan, 33 percent of attendees stated that they did not participate in any interagency drug task force, and half of the attendees did not participate in a Joint Terrorism Task Force. In both cases, this was due primarily to budget constraints and a lack of equipment, not a lack of interest or need. Geographic limitations were also cited as considerable obstacles to effective interagency operations.

In multiple meetings, sheriffs discussed the scarcity of cell phone towers in more rural areas and the lack of radio and CAD interoperability. Several attendees specifically lamented their inability to communicate to offer or request mutual aid. In the most rural agencies, the closest officer who can provide backup may not be from the same agency. Two sheriffs recounted an incident in which an officer was struggling on the side of the road with a suspect and was not able to communicate directly with other officers to ask for backup—he could only communicate with his own dispatch, which then had to call 911 to facilitate communication with another agency, delaying the arrival of the support he required.

Information sharing was the greatest concern relating to interagency relationships, particularly the sharing of digital evidence between law enforcement agencies and prosecutors. Even law enforcement agencies in the same county cannot always efficiently share data—one attendee reported that their county has over 40 law enforcement agencies and it is almost impossible for them all to effectively and securely share pertinent evidentiary data is almost impossible for them, given their current technological capacities and training.

33. "Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act," Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, April 27, 2020, <https://www.ice.gov/287g>.

34. "Project Safe Neighborhoods," Project Safe Neighborhoods, U.S. Department of Justice, April 22, 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/psn>.

Tribes

In North Dakota, attendees from several tribes reported that they have drafted and signed MOUs to obtain grant funding and awards for victim services. One tribe is the lead on the application, with the others effectively classified as “subcontractors,” awarded by the lead so that the necessary resources are shared. This is particularly useful for larger grants that might not be awarded to a single tribe. Counties could also sign MOUs with tribes to cooperate in requesting grant funding, but no attendees reported that this had happened in their state.

While some attendees described successful cooperation between tribes or between agencies, the relationship between the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and local law enforcement agencies was described by most as “strained.” In Nevada, some attendees expressed concerns over a fundamental breakdown of communications, with law enforcement leaders not even being able to identify a point of contact within the BIA for a variety of different questions, including basic inquiries about jurisdiction and payment. One sheriff suggested that BIA bureaucracy is too bloated and not in touch with the more localized issues, and nearly all attendees from Nevada expressed frustration with the BIA’s process of managing offenders, which is supposed to pay the county jails for costs associated with tribal arrests but typically pays only a small portion of the bills that the law enforcement agencies would expect BIA to pay.

Some expressed concern that they could not afford to arrest and detain tribal citizens (due to these and related costs, such as travel between detention and adjudication facilities), and that this could prompt officers to handle tribal suspects more leniently. Some law enforcement leaders saw mutual aid agreements as more fertile ground for cooperation than cross-deputization, because they more easily accommodate differences in training and related requirements across agencies.

Progress, Best Practices, and New Ideas

The listening sessions were convened for the U.S. Department of Justice to hear from rural law enforcement leaders whose needs had been underrepresented in national policing dialogue. Acting on the feedback received is an ongoing process. Some comprehensive solutions will require significant structural change, but both the COPS Office and BJA are committed to making immediate changes wherever possible to address the needs of local law enforcement throughout the country.

Progress

In recent listening sessions, COPS Office Director Keith has explained that his agency is changing the grant-making process to base awards more heavily on need. To this end, it is eliminating the peer review process, which favored the best-written applications. Further, all rural agencies will receive bonus points for self-designating as rural in the application process, ensuring that they are not passed over for larger departments from urban areas. Because most rural agencies do not have a dedicated grants team, the COPS Office is working to keep all solicitations open a minimum of 60—and ideally 90—days, addressing the concerns of some sheriffs that their county boards must provide approval but do not meet more than once in a 30-day period.

Former BJA Acting Director Costigan also noted that grant applications historically have been as long as 75 pages, which he described as “unnecessarily daunting” and conceded would be enough to make sheriffs decide against applying. He stated that the DOJ’s Office of Justice Programs (OJP) will be working to bring all solicitations down to less than 25 pages, focusing on the essential information to communicate to the agency what might constitute a winning application. In addition, OJP is reworking the language of the solicitations to ensure that more agencies are eligible; going forward, OJP will look to categorize certain grants based on agency size so that smaller agencies compete with smaller agencies and larger agencies compete with larger agencies.

In response to questions relating to a lack of training, Director Keith highlighted the Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) as an invaluable resource that has already fielded over 300 requests for technical assistance at no cost to the recipients.³⁵ The National Sheriffs’ Association provides the subject matter experts (SME), so the program is “sheriffs training sheriffs,” and the response time for requests is less than nine days for the majority of requests. Accordingly, he encouraged chiefs, sheriffs, and other executives to adopt his “if it’s free, it’s for me” mantra and pursue the training and technical assistance they most need, noting that one type of training could focus on grant applications if that is what an agency needs most.

One notable story was shared from Texas, where a multiagency interdiction team had phenomenal success. CRI-TAC now has a training program in which sheriffs train sheriffs on how to form and manage effective multiagency interdiction teams; this information was of interest to a number of attendees who had detailed their agencies’ challenges in interagency cooperation.

35. “Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC),” National Sheriffs’ Association, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://www.sheriffs.org/programs/cri-tac>.

For those who expressed concern about even no-cost trainings putting a strain on their resources, Director Keith mentioned the development of an online training portal. In this portal, the COPS Office will make available its full suite of training modules to law enforcement agencies at no cost. The COPS Office is working with its training providers to ensure portal courses can meet various state POST requirements or obtain national certifications with state and national agencies, in the hopes it can help compensate for insufficient training budgets in some states.

In response to several law enforcement leaders who reported their local schools desperately need cameras and communications equipment, the COPS Office directed attendees to the School Violence Prevention Program grant, with over \$50 million in funding available for K–12 school safety measures.

On the subject of equipment, BJA representatives made clear that the BJA's Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) is available to all attending agencies, and indicated that severe budget limitations would prompt a waiver on any matching funds requirements,³⁶ adding also that this issue was of particular importance to then Attorney General William Barr.

In addressing the opioid epidemic and the scourge of associated violence, the COPS Office explained to attendees that its antidrug programs are state-centric. Prior to Attorney General Barr's tenure, states did not have to work with local law enforcement agencies, and rural counties were often unable to obtain their share of federal antidrug resources. Today, there is a special condition on all state awards requiring them to work with local law enforcement agencies to combat drug trafficking and associated crime. Director Keith informed the attendees that, should that ever not be their experience, they should reach out to the COPS Office, which will, in turn, address the issue with the appropriate points of contact for the state.

Best practices

Presenting in Nevada, Chief Mike Butler discussed the relative successes of two opioid initiatives in his own agency: Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD)³⁷ and the Angel Initiative.³⁸ Butler focused on the initiatives' collaborative nature and advocated for a restorative justice approach. He reported that the recidivism numbers for participants in the programs are significantly lower than those of the nonparticipating population, and that crime reporting has gone up, indicating that the community is developing trust in the justice process.

36. "Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership: Overview," Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://www.ojp.gov/program/bulletproof-vest-partnership/overview>.

37. "LEAD Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion / CO-RESPONDER | City of Longmont, Colorado," City of Longmont, Colorado, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://www.longmontcolorado.gov/departments/departments-n-z/public-safety-department/community-programs/lead-co-responder>.

38. "Angel Initiative," City of Longmont, Colorado, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://www.longmontcolorado.gov/departments/departments-n-z/public-safety-department/community-programs/police-assisted-addiction-recovery-initiative-paari>.

The success of these initiatives is notable and relevant, particularly in light of the concerns law enforcement leaders from other states shared relating to public trust. Operating programs at the community level is one way around the “revolving door” that attendees of several listening sessions have complained of. Chief Butler encouraged his peers to think beyond large, detached oversight functions and consider what they need at the local level, where they are the experts, and stressed that there is no one form of a community-based approach.

It is important for police officers to be viewed as key members of the cities and towns they serve. This engagement is necessary for effective crime reporting, prosecution, and recruitment and retention of the right officers. In New Mexico, attendees reported that community engagement has meant more time listening to the people to hear their concerns—going into schools, engaging the public, and showing availability and care to build trust and relationships.

New ideas

The listening sessions were a forum for ideas for progress and suggestions for practice. Ideas raised at the sessions included the following:

- **Microgrants.** One sheriff proposed making more microgrants available to small agencies—small grants focused on smaller opportunities, with streamlined application processes and fewer restrictions and reporting requirements.
- **Redefining terms.** Some asked that the “rural” designation not be limited by population size but suggested expanding it to categorize agencies by access to resources, population density, and other factors.
- **Online forum.** One person suggested that the COPS Office create an online forum where law enforcement agencies can submit questions relating to specific, acute, or unique challenges.
- **Changing the narrative.** One attendee proposed the creation of a national-level program, managed by the COPS Office, with the stated objective of changing the narrative around policing. This program would collaborate with local law enforcement agencies nationwide to help identify creative, effective recruitment strategies and would work to share best practices with smaller agencies.
- **Standards.** One sheriff suggested that the DOJ work to create a federal standard for information sharing across agencies, guiding law enforcement agencies in developing their processes allowing technical vendors to develop to that standard and maximizing interoperability and effectiveness.



Conclusion

The second series of rural law enforcement listening sessions reinforced the takeaways from the first—smaller agencies have been effective despite minimal resources and considerable obstacles. Hearing the same concerns voiced by many experienced leaders in different jurisdictions across the country has made it clear that the issues facing them are serious and must be addressed comprehensively and thoroughly.

Still, there is progress to celebrate and opportunities for more. In the most recent sessions, concerns relating to the grant application and reporting processes prompted not only a response of understanding, but the articulation of specific, immediate solutions. Complaints about the “revolving door” were answered by U.S. Attorneys, who presented solutions for moving cases from local to federal courts and for prosecuting violations of gun laws when admissible evidence does not adequately support more serious prosecutions (and are collaborating with local law enforcement to better understand what is needed to facilitate these prosecutions). DOJ personnel offered better access to no-cost trainings—both online and in-person—and new, targeted grant opportunities to addressing specific challenges outlined by smaller agencies. Further, the bonus points for self-designated rural agencies makes these agencies competitive for federal grants, even against departments from larger, more densely populated areas.

As the listening sessions continue, and feedback and ideas are presented, the COPS Office and BJA will continue to document their concerns and solutions—and to use rural law enforcement’s feedback to retool, revise, and rethink their practices advancing the DOJ mission. The U.S. Attorneys, the COPS Office, and BJA are all working together to understand the immediate and long-term challenges facing law enforcement, share best practices, find and implement solutions, and imagine a better landscape. They will continue this work with planned sessions in additional states. In the meantime, the COPS Office and BJA have responded to smaller agencies’ voices with the following transactions and resources from FY 2019 through 2020.

Solicitation revisions

Both BJA and the COPS Office streamlined their solicitations in order to simplify the application processes and minimize post-award burdens for the field. As an example, the COPS Office integrated the following revisions into all its programs:

- Reduced the number of questions asked in all applications.
- Reduced **by half** the number of words/character counts in fields requiring narratives.
- Created new quick-start application guides for all programs.
- Reduced progress reporting from four to two times per year.
- Changed scoring on applications to provide bonus points to rural agencies who focus on violent crime, border security, opioids, schools, and building trust and respect.

In FY 2020, in addition to executing any statutory prioritization that may be applicable, OJP provided priority consideration to applications in its solicitations that addressed specific challenges faced by rural communities. To receive priority consideration under the rural priority, applicants must have described what makes the geographic service area rural (using U.S. Census or other appropriate government data), how isolated the area is from needed services, and how they would address specific challenges in rural communities.

Grant administration—Rural and tribal justice outreach and site visitations (January–February 2020)

DOJ leadership is committed to ensuring that rural and tribal agencies acquire needed assistance and full support in making their states, localities, and communities stronger and safer. In response, DOJ representatives from OJP (BJA, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) and the COPS Office visited several states to provide assistance and answer any questions that may be hindering these underserved groups from receiving funding.

The purpose of these events was to provide outreach, promote upcoming solicitations, and provide information regarding the grant application process, to rural and tribal organizations who often do not apply for or understand how to apply for DOJ funding. In addition to providing more information, training and technical assistance were offered to those who would benefit the most from the information. The states visited during these events included Arizona, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Funding opportunities for rural jurisdictions

- BJA FY 2019 Southwest Border Rural Law Enforcement Information Sharing and Interdiction Assistance Grants

This innovative program sought to provide resources, training, and technical assistance to rural law enforcement agencies along the Southwest Border to assist with the reduction of violent crime, including drugs and human traffickers. The initiative included two areas of funding: field-based initiatives and a training and technical assistance (TTA) initiative.

<https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/bja-2019-16289>

- FY 2020 Supporting Small and Rural Law Enforcement Agency Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program

The purpose of this program is to provide funding and program development support to small and rural agencies that intend to initiate expanded body-worn camera (BWC) programs. The program will support rural law enforcement agencies that are seeking to establish or expand comprehensive BWC programs and have made plans to implement this technology in a manner that maximizes the benefits of BWCs.

This is a TTA provider-based program. The selected TTA provider, in conjunction with BJA, will develop mechanisms to ensure that subrecipients engage in a deliberate and phased plan to deploy this technology.

<https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/bja-2020-17011>

Training and technical assistance for rural jurisdictions

- Southwest Border Rural Law Enforcement Assistance Program

This innovative program provides resources to small, rural, and tribal law enforcement agencies along or near the southwest border of the United States. The program will support efforts in addressing precipitous increases of all types of crime unique to this region, including human trafficking, sexual assaults, extortion, gang activity, murder, drug trafficking, and other forms of violent crime.

<https://southwestborder.ncirc.gov/>

- FY 2020 Northern and Middle States Rural Law Enforcement Training and Technical Assistance Grant Program

This program will provide resources and TTA to smaller rural and tribal law enforcement agencies located in the northern and middle states of the United States to support their efforts to reduce violent crime, including drug-related crime and human trafficking. This support could include enhancing information sharing (including of investigatory and intelligence data) and dedicated communications capability among federal, state, local, and tribal agencies throughout these state. It may also include providing previously identified specialized equipment to address crime issues unique to a designated area, for which the TTA provider must ensure that the proper training is provided.

<https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/bja-2020-17373>

- FY 2020 Law Enforcement Training & Technical Assistance Response Center

Through this opportunity, BJA sought applications to fund a TTA provider to provide law enforcement agencies with information and expertise from multiple organizations or consortia via a one-stop, dedicated response center. Its specific objectives were to coordinate TTA provided by national leaders, develop information and resources for the field; and deliver TTA to state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies.

<https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/bja-2020-18813>

Appendix A. Individual State Listening Session Summaries

The following are individual summaries of each of the *USDOJ Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders* listening sessions held from September 2019 through March 2020.

Texas

Date: September 12, 2019

Location: United States Attorney's Office—Southern District of Texas, Houston, Texas

Number of Attendees: 19 Texas state and local law enforcement leaders

Ryan Patrick, U.S. Attorney – Southern District of Texas

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Presentation on Southern Texas Interdiction Task Force by Sheriff A. J. Louderback, Jackson County, Texas; Sheriff T. Michael O'Connor, Victoria County, Texas; Sheriff Brian Hawthorne, Chambers County, Texas

Identified Needs: Resources and technological upgrades (e.g., communications equipment, equipment for vehicles, cameras for schools, x-ray units, license plate readers, tactical gear), training and strategy development, grant-writing assistance, and education on liability risk and mitigation.

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in Texas discussed fostering interagency cooperation through the creation of task forces and the support of the Border Patrol. Drug trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal immigration were cited as the primary areas of focus for most rural law enforcement agencies. They discussed the challenges of inconsistencies among federal prosecutors and in the allocation of funding and resources. Sheriffs particularly highlighted their concerns regarding access to and compatibility of technology.

Michigan

Date: October 15, 2019

Location: Lansing Center, Lansing, Michigan

Number of Attendees: 51 Michigan state and local law enforcement leaders

Matthew Schneider, U.S. Attorney – Eastern District of Michigan

Andrew B. Birge, U.S. Attorney – Western District of Michigan

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Michael Costigan, Acting Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Identified Needs: Training and technical assistance, continuity and reliability of grant funding, a streamlined grant application process, consistent funding levels from the counties, equipment (e.g., body-worn cameras, license plate readers, portable x-ray machines), and equitable distribution of asset forfeiture funds with smaller and more rural agencies.

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in Michigan discussed funding and staffing shortages, inadequate access to resources (particularly equipment), and the complexity of the grant application and administration processes. Drug trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal immigration were cited as the primary areas of focus for most rural law enforcement agencies, and leaders noted that they felt less attention was paid to these serious public safety concerns at the northern border than at the southern border. They discussed challenges with interagency communication and operations. Sheriffs particularly highlighted their concerns regarding access to drug interdiction equipment and training and their frustrations with obtaining and administering grants.

Nevada

Date: December 11, 2019

Location: Regional Public Safety Training Center, Reno, Nevada

Number of Attendees: 16 Nevada state and local law enforcement leaders

Sue Fahami, Assistant U.S. Attorney – District of Nevada

Deborah L. Spence, Assistant Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Edward Puccerella, Special Advisor, Office of the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs

Identified Needs: Jail space, budget increases (specifically for interagency task forces and mental health resources), consistent access to mental health providers, reduced grant reporting requirements, improved relationships between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and state and local law enforcement agencies, and microgrants (smaller grants with fewer restrictions).

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in Nevada discussed increases in training requirements with decreased available funding, challenges communicating effectively with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the opioid crisis, and best practices for community relations. Drug trafficking, opioid abuse, and mental health support were cited as the primary areas of concern for rural law enforcement agencies. They discussed the impact of poor interagency communication and support on both officer wellness and public trust. Sheriffs particularly highlighted their concerns regarding both medical and mental health support in dealing with addiction and other crises that, while commonly associated with criminal behavior, are not well-addressed by jails.

New Mexico

Date: December 12, 2019

Location: State of New Mexico Office of the Attorney General, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Number of Attendees: Several New Mexico state and local law enforcement leaders
Shannon Long, Assistant Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
Edward Puccerella, Special Advisor, Office of the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs

Identified Needs: Recruitment and retention of sworn officers, improved records management and other technological upgrades, community and public trust.

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in New Mexico discussed challenges communicating effectively with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, drug production and interdiction, access to technology, and sharing of information between agencies. Methamphetamine production and distribution and domestic violence were cited as primary areas of concern for rural law enforcement agencies. They discussed the impact of poor interagency communication, staffing shortages, and outdated technology on officer wellness and public trust. Sheriffs particularly highlighted failures in interagency communication leading to more dangerous situations for officers and deputies.

Ohio

Date: February 19, 2020

Location: Crowne Plaza Columbus North–Worthington, Columbus, Ohio

Number of Attendees: 70 Ohio state and local law enforcement leaders
David M. DeVillers, U.S. Attorney – Southern District of Ohio
Justin Herdman, U.S. Attorney – Northern District of Ohio
Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
Michael Costigan, Acting Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Identified Needs: Recruitment and retention of officers, mental health support, improved interagency communication, evidence-gathering capabilities (e.g., breaking encryption for known offenders—with a warrant), training and technical assistance, and grant-writing support and assistance.

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in Ohio discussed increased inconsistencies in grant funding, opioid addiction, production and trafficking of methamphetamines, recidivism, and investigative obstacles. Drug trafficking, opioid abuse, mental health support, and domestic violence were cited as the primary areas of concern for rural law enforcement agencies. They discussed the impact of serial recidivism and strategized how to break the cycle. Sheriffs particularly highlighted their concerns regarding the difficulty of investigating and building cases against known offenders, often due to encryption of illegal communications.

North Dakota

Date: March 3, 2020

Location: North Dakota Heritage Center and State Museum, Bismarck, North Dakota

Number of Attendees: 34 North Dakota state and local law enforcement leaders

David Hagler, Assistant U.S. Attorney – District of North Dakota

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Michael Costigan, Acting Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Identified Needs: Secure campuses, cameras, and school resource officers; mental health resources and provider access; jail space.

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in North Dakota discussed operating with insufficient budgets and how to handle a dramatic increase in population without the commensurate increase in staffing, training, and equipment. Sheriffs particularly highlighted the effects of these shortages on schools, which are also strained and ill-equipped to manage language barriers, gang violence, substance use, and overcrowding on what have become open and insecure campuses. Tribal representatives shared their success in sharing grant funds, and the U.S. Attorney's office provided strategies for using gun charges to make cases federal where appropriate.

Pennsylvania

Date: March 13, 2020

Location: Wyndham Garden State College, Boalsburg, Pennsylvania

Number of Attendees: 62 Pennsylvania state and local law enforcement leaders

Bruce D. Brandler, First Assistant U.S. Attorney – Middle District of Pennsylvania

Tracey Trautman, Principal Deputy Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Matthew Scheider, Assistant Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Identified Needs: Jail space, equipment (e.g., radios, tactical equipment, vehicles), recruitment and retention of deputies, clarity of grant application eligibility, and mental health resources and provider access.

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in Pennsylvania discussed their lack of access to equipment and resources, overcrowding of jails, and addressing mental health crises. Sheriffs particularly highlighted the effects of equipment shortages on officer safety. Mental health and medical care in correctional facilities was a primary area of concern for sheriffs, who expressed frustration when state-run hospitals turned away suspects and offenders whose needs jails were ill-suited to meet. Some sheriffs also noted issues getting clarity on laws and regulations related to rapidly evolving technology issues, such as the use of drones.

Appendix B. U.S. Department of Justice Resources

FY 2020 U.S. Department of Justice Resources

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

U.S. DOJ Program Plan: <https://grantsnet.justice.gov/programplan/html/Home.htm>

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)

COPS Office Grants: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/grants>

2020 COPS Office Anti-Heroin Task Force Program: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/ahtf>

2020 COPS Office Anti-Heroin Task Force Program Pre-Award fact sheet:
https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2020AwardDocs/ahtf/Fact_Sheet.pdf

2020 COPS Anti-Methamphetamine Program: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/camp>

2020 COPS Anti-Methamphetamine Program Pre-Award fact sheet:
https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2020AwardDocs/camp/Pre_Award_Fact_Sheet.pdf

School Violence Prevention Program: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/svpp>

“North Texas Sheriffs Work Together to Reduce Drug Smuggling and Human Trafficking,” *Community Policing Dispatch* 11, no. 12 (December 2018),
https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/12-2018/texas_sheriffs.html

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)

OJP Grants/Funding: <https://www.ojp.gov/funding>

OJP Human Trafficking Awards: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-awards-nearly-101-million-combat-human-trafficking#:~:text=OVC%20awards%20the%20Promoting%20Employment,for%20survivors%20of%20human%20trafficking>

BJA Funding & Awards: <https://www.bja.gov/funding.aspx>

BJA Programs Supporting Law Enforcement (March 2020): <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/bja-programs-supporting-law-enforcement-3-2020.pdf>

BJA Programs that Support Rural and Tribal Justice (February 2020): <https://bja.ojp.gov/library/publications/bureau-justice-assistance-programs-support-rural-and-tribal-justice>

BJA National Training and Technical Assistance Center: <https://bjatta.bja.ojp.gov/>

Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP):
<https://www.ojp.gov/program/bulletproof-vest-partnership/overview>

Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Program Law Enforcement / First Responder Diversion:
https://www.coapresources.org/Content/Documents/BriefingSheets/BJA_COAP_Law_Enforcement_First_Responder_Diversion.pdf

Responding to the Opioid Crisis in Rural America—Judges and Sheriffs Workshop - Meeting Summary (August 2019): <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/responding-to-opioid-crisis-in-rural-america-meeting-summary.pdf>

VALOR Officer Safety and Wellness Program: <https://www.valorforblue.org/>

Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI): <https://www.sakitta.org/>

Body-Worn Camera Toolkit: <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/bwc/index.html>

Body-Worn Camera (BWC) Community Engagement Guidance: Engaging the Community in BWC Policy Development and Reviews of BWC Operations: <https://bja.ojp.gov/library/publications/bwc-community-engagement-guidance-engaging-community-bwc-policy-development>

BJA's Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) Resource Center: <https://www.cossapresources.org/>

Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program: <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/jag/overview>

SchoolSafety.Gov - Find Resources to Create a Safer School: <https://www.schoolsafety.gov/>

About BJA

The **Bureau of Justice Assistance** (BJA) helps to make American communities safer by strengthening the nation's criminal justice system: Its grants, training and technical assistance, and policy development services provide state, local, and tribal governments with the cutting edge tools and best practices they need to reduce violent and drug-related crime, support law enforcement, and combat victimization.

BJA is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office for Victims of Crime, and Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking.

BJA is led by Acting Director Tracey Trautman.

BJA Mission

BJA provides leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal law enforcement in achieving safer communities. BJA supports programs and initiatives in the areas of law enforcement, justice information sharing, countering terrorism, managing offenders, combating drug crime and abuse, adjudication, advancing tribal justice, crime prevention, protecting vulnerable populations, and capacity building. Driving BJA's work in the field are the following principles:

- Emphasize local control.
- Build relationships in the field.
- Provide training and technical assistance in support of efforts to prevent crime, drug abuse, and violence at the national, state, and local levels.
- Develop collaborations and partnerships.
- Promote capacity building through planning.
- Streamline the administration of grants.
- Increase training and technical assistance.
- Create accountability of projects.
- Encourage innovation.
- Communicate the value of justice efforts to decision makers at every level.

BJA has four primary components: Policy, Programs, Operations, and the National Officer Safety and Wellness Office. The Policy Office provides national leadership in criminal justice policy, training, and technical assistance to further the administration of justice. It also acts as a liaison to national organizations that partner with BJA to set policy and help disseminate information on best and promising practices. The Programs Office coordinates and administers all state and local grant programs and acts as BJA's direct line of communication to states, territories, and tribal governments by providing assistance and coordinating resources. The Operations Office coordinates the planning, communications, and budget functions; provides overall BJA-wide coordination; and supports streamlining efforts.

To learn more about BJA (<https://www.bja.gov/>), follow us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/DOJBJA/>) and Twitter @DOJBJA (<https://twitter.com/DOJBJA>).

Learn about BJA Programs (<https://www.bja.gov/programs.aspx>) or Contact BJA (<https://www.bja.gov/About/contact.html>) for additional information.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, www.cops.usdoj.gov. This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

Rural law enforcement agencies face increasing rates of crime and disorder—and often have dwindling resources with which to combat them. To discuss critical issues in rural policing, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has convened a listening session series with rural law enforcement stakeholders to discuss rural law enforcement’s common concerns, challenges, and needs. The results of the second round of these sessions, which took place in seven states in late 2019 and early 2020, are summarized here.



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

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To obtain details about COPS Office programs, call
the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at www.cops.usdoj.gov.