

COPS Office STOP School Violence: School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP)—How Decisions were Made to Allocate \$25 Million When More than \$85.8 Million was Requested

The SVPP solicitation opened on June 25, 2018, and applications were required to be submitted by July 30, 2018. The COPS Office received 236 applications from states, units of government, and Indian tribes requesting \$85,859,130 in federal funding.

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

The COPS Office developed an application for SVPP funds that met the requirements of the statute with a focus on advancing public safety by providing funds to improve security at schools and on school grounds. Only states, units of local governments, and Indian tribes 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 school safety to develop appropriate application questions.

Applicants were asked to submit information on such indicators as the following:

- Census population
- Total number of schools
- Total school enrollment
- Dollars spent per student
- Percentage of students with free or reduced priced lunch
- Crime indicators

In asking a variety of school safety and fiscal health questions, the COPS Office was able to gauge a view of both the need for improved security and the need the financial assistance of applicants through objective and verifiable indicators that all applicants, from rural communities to large cities, could accurately report.

The community policing philosophy engages in a proactive and systematic examination of identified problems that can be countered with effective responses. Applicants were asked to identify evidence-based strategies and programs that address their jurisdiction's school safety challenges.

The COPS Office checked and double-checked, verifying the data applicants provided

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. The COPS Office reviewed multiple data points within each application and in some cases contacted applicants 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 accurate and reliable economic, crime, and school data.

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

Determination of Need Data Review

The COPS Office focused on balancing the applicant's need for federal assistance with their school safety need, based on their responses to the background and improved security need questions as well as the catastrophic (if applicable) narrative responses. A numerical score for the financial and school safety need sections of the application ranked applicants. Within this pool, the COPS Office ensured that at least 20 percent of the applicants represented each demographic: urban, suburban, and rural. Along with the ranked score, all applicants underwent a basic minimum review of the program requirements, and after this phase of review, 172 applications were eligible for comprehensive narrative review.

A minimum score was established for the financial and school safety need section of the application. Within this pool of applicants that received the minimum score, the COPS Office ensured that at least 20 percent of the applicants represented each demographic: urban, suburban, and rural. A total of 64 applicants did not meet the minimum score and were removed from further consideration.

Comprehensive Narrative Review

The 172 applications that met the minimum determination of need score underwent an exhaustive and comprehensive review process.

The peer reviewers evaluated the following criteria in the Project and Budget Narrative sections of the application to determine the quality of each application. The reviewers based their scores on the following:

- School safety planning and assessment efforts
- Funding request and integration
- Management and implementation plan
- Sustainability plan

The narrative score was added to the data score to determine a final score for each application and develop a final ranking for the applications.

COPS Office Director Review

As with all COPS Office program awards, the COPS Office Director made the final decision regarding which SVPP applications to fund. In addition to the final ranking, the Director took into consideration the following factors:

- The presence of a catastrophic incident in the jurisdiction
- The geographic distribution of the applicants including urban, suburban, and rural areas
- The size of the applicant jurisdiction
- The type of jurisdiction
- Demonstrated need for improved security
- Demonstrated need for financial assistance
- Evidenced ability to make the improvements sought with grant funds
- Use of evidence-based strategies and programs such as those identified by the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative of the Department of Justice
- Other strategic priorities

Ultimately, the COPS Office funded 91 SVPP applications, which represents approximately 40 percent of the total number of applications submitted.