



**COPS**  
Community Oriented Policing Services

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

Officer Safety and Wellness (OSW) Group Meeting Summary

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# Officer Safety and Wellness Forum

**March 14, 2016**

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## Overview of the Officer Safety and Wellness Group

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THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE'S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES (COPS OFFICE) AND BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE (BJA) ESTABLISHED THE OSW GROUP TO PROVIDE A NATIONAL FORUM FOR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HOW TO REDUCE DEATHS AND INJURIES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS. WHILE THE NUMBER OF OFFICERS KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY HAS BEEN STEADILY DECREASING, POLICING CONTINUES TO FACE IMPORTANT ISSUES IN ENSURING OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS.

Comprised of representatives from law enforcement agencies and associations, federal agencies, and the research community, the purpose of the OSW Group is to bring law enforcement thought leaders, criminal justice practitioners, and other colleagues together to share their broad perspectives on improving officer safety and wellness. Participants contribute information and ideas with the goal of enhancing subject-related products, tools, resources, and services available to the field. In addition, the group encourages the nation's law enforcement agencies to adopt cultures of safety and wellness.

During the initial kick-off meeting held in July 2011, the OSW Group identified the 16 focus areas that would guide future meetings as well as the overall mission of the group (see sidebar). The following 16 areas were further defined and prioritized in the subsequent September 2011 meeting, also considered the first official meeting, after which the COPS Office produced a summary report (see Fiedler 2011):

1. Injuries and death due to gunfire
2. Premeditated and unprovoked ambush situations
3. Rifle/long-gun threats/assault weapons
4. Education and training
5. Leadership and safety practices
6. Emergency vehicle operation and safety
7. Physical health (e.g., fatigue, alcohol, weight, and nutrition)
8. Psychological health
9. Foot pursuit safety
10. Task force operations (federal and local)
11. Offenders (behavior during incident and history)
12. Court security
13. Deployment strategies and communications technologies
14. Maintaining good health
15. Equipment
16. Former military in law enforcement

### The OSW Group Mission

The OSW Group will contribute to the improvement of officer safety and wellness in the United States by convening a forum for thoughtful, proactive discussion and debate around relevant programs and policies within the law enforcement field. Information and insight gained and shared will help enhance programs, policies, and initiatives related to officer safety and wellness.

### The OSW Group Goals

- To create an opportunity and environment for law enforcement organizations and researchers to collaborate on improving officer safety and wellness
- To bring law enforcement organizations and researchers together quarterly to share knowledge and information about officer safety and wellness initiatives
- To disseminate information and best practices to the field through the government and law enforcement organizational communications mechanisms

All meeting summary reports as well as information about future meeting topics are available on the COPS Office OSW Group web page: [www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2603](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2603).

## Letter from the Director

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Dear colleagues,

To engage law enforcement leaders in concerted efforts to support the well-being of the men and women who courageously put themselves in harm's way to protect our safety, former Attorney General Eric Holder asked the COPS Office and the Bureau of Justice Assistance to create the Officer Safety and Wellness Group (OSWG) in 2011.

Since then, this group has brought health and law enforcement experts together numerous times to review research, policies, and practices that impact officer health and safety in a wide range of areas, including physical fitness, drug abuse, and officer shootings. This report summarizes the findings of their March 2016 meeting, in which key stakeholders convened to discuss issues related to ambush prevention, officer morale, and future topics for OSWG focus.

As the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing made clear in Pillar 6 of their report, the safety and wellbeing of our officers is a paramount responsibility for law enforcement leaders. Our officers must be in good physical and mental health to fulfill their mission of protecting and serving their communities, and we as law enforcement leaders must do everything we can to reduce stress, illness, injuries, and death.

I am proud of the COPS Office's collaboration with BJA Director Denise O'Donnell in the OSW Group and of all that our teams have accomplished. In the past five years, they have provided many workable strategies, including messaging and branding guides for creating a culture of safety in law enforcement agencies. Another result of their efforts has been a significant expansion of the Department of Justice's portfolio of resources related to suicide prevention, nutrition, on-the-job safety, and other wellness issues.

But there is still much to accomplish, and we are committed to the important work of the OSWG going forward. On behalf of the COPS Office, I want to express our deep gratitude to the physicians, police trainers, health experts, police chiefs, rank and file officers, and others who have contributed their time and expertise to these efforts.

Supporting safety and wellness is a critical concern to all of us: it not only protects our officers, but benefits their families, their fellow officers, and the public. I am sure you will find this report compelling, and hope you will share it with others in your organization. Working together, we can make a lot of progress toward these goals.

Sincerely,



Ronald L. Davis  
Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

## Introduction

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*Ronald L. Davis, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)*  
*Denise E. O'Donnell, Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)*

### History of the OSW Group

Our law enforcement officers expose themselves to danger every day they are on duty. As a result, their occupational fatality rate is three to five times greater than the national average. Though an alarming number of officer deaths and injuries come from assaults, many others are the result of vehicular accidents and poor physical or mental health. Though progress has been made, too many officers still die young, often from health problems and vehicular accidents. The police lifestyle, which can be marked by both high stress and fatigue, is seen as a major contributor.

The goal of all OSW Group meetings is to create opportunities for law enforcement and researchers to share knowledge, collaborate on improving officer safety and wellness, and disseminate the latest information and best practices to the field. The four major themes for OSW Group meetings are operational and emergency response, leadership and management, mental and physical health and wellness, and training.

In the past five years, the OSW Group has held ten forums on a wide variety of topics, including injury prevention and cardiac health. To share its findings, the COPS Office publishes meeting reports and case studies of promising practices. This report summarizes the discussions of the March 14, 2016 meeting of the OSW Group, which focused on four major topics:

- Perception, Training and Policy
- Firearms Assaults
- Benefits and Drawbacks of Two-Person patrols
- Effect of Morale on Officer Safety and Wellness

There was also discussion of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which contained a section devoted to Officer Safety and Wellness.

In many ways, the participants in this meeting served as a steering group to help establish the OSW Group agenda for 2016 and explore critical issues which could not wait until later meetings to be addressed. The main goals of the meeting were to

- identify the key issues impacting officer safety and wellness;
- discuss and develop a research project based on NAPO's recommendation for two-officer units;
- examine recent officer killings to discern any trends;
- discuss officer morale amid increased scrutiny and high profile negative incidents, and identify steps for addressing this issue;
- establish the 2016 goals and objectives for the OSW Group.

## Opening remarks

Mr. Davis opened the Officer Safety and Wellness Forum by thanking the attendees for participating. He asked for a moment of silence for the 13 law enforcement officers who had been killed by gunfire in the line of duty since the beginning of the year.

Mr. Davis briefly described his law enforcement experience before working in the COPS Office. He recalled how difficult it is when an officer is killed in the line of duty.

As he noted, though fewer police officers are now being killed—approximately 50 in 2014, down from a high of 72 in 2011 according to the FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA)<sup>1</sup> database—the numbers are still too high.

Officer safety continues to be a top priority of the COPS Office.

On the day of the meeting, COPS, BJA, and the Major Cities Chiefs Association released a report, *Understanding Firearms Assaults Against Law Enforcement Officers in the United States*.<sup>2</sup> The report examines policies, training, and other factors that reduce the risk of officer injuries and deaths.

The forum included short presentations to provide a springboard to discussion. Forum participants were asked to contribute their ideas on how to ensure officer safety and wellness.

Ms. O'Donnell talked about the OSW's history and current initiatives. Of the group's 16 areas of focus, the following three are considered top priorities which began in 2011s:

- Injuries and death due to gunfire
- Premeditated and unprovoked ambushes
- Threat posed by rifles, long guns, and assault weapons

About 13,000 officers were injured as a result of assaults last year.

This work is an important priority at BJA and includes some programs that were discussed during the meeting, including the Violence Against Law Enforcement and Ensuring Officer Resilience and Survivability (VALOR) Initiative and the Destination Zero programs.

The VALOR Initiative is a training program designed to prevent violence against law enforcement officers and ensure officer resilience and survivability following violent encounters during the course of their duties. Destination Zero programs enable law enforcement agencies to share their safety and wellness programs that have worked well.

James Cople of Strategic Applications International moderated the forum and discussions. Eric Nation of the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children cofacilitated. Mr. Cople said that the purpose of the forum was to identify action steps and recommendations to protect officers and keep them healthy.

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of this data 2004-2013 is available at [https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/leoka/2013/tables/table\\_1\\_leos\\_fk\\_region\\_geographic\\_division\\_and\\_state\\_2004-2013.xls](https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/leoka/2013/tables/table_1_leos_fk_region_geographic_division_and_state_2004-2013.xls)

<sup>2</sup> The report is available at <http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W07971>.

## Perception, Training, and Policy

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It was noted that officers' opinions of safety and wellness programs are influenced by how they are presented and how well they mesh with what the officers feel they need. These perceived needs vary across generations, though officers of all ages consider equipment and training to be important.

Most programs focus on safety over wellness, because safety is immediately critical to survival, while the consequences of an unhealthy lifestyle are deferred to the future. However, young people today generally have a greater interest in health and well-being than previous generations. They know more about nutrition and take better care of themselves than many of the older officers, and have greater expectations of wellness support from their agencies.

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Multi-generational branding in messages about safety and wellness is important.

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But defining "officer safety and wellness" is difficult because some groups prefer a more expansive definition than others, feeling that job satisfaction contributes to wellness, for instance. Others believe that cynicism, fatigue, and officer attitudes toward their own department affect safety and wellness.

Because most officers are more worried about threats to their physical safety, getting them to buy into the wellness part of a program will require a well-crafted message. Multigenerational branding is important too. Different generations have different training needs and concerns, as do men and women. For example, though older officers want better medical coverage, many younger ones are more focused on salary.

Suggestions:

- Consider officers' preferences when developing a safety and wellness program and show how it meets their needs when presenting it.
- Learn how different generations define "officer safety" and determine which issues are important to each group.
- Develop the data infrastructure to determine how officers view safety and wellness.
- Define "health" and "wellness" in a way that will help measure them.
- Conduct studies to measure the effectiveness of wellness programs.

### Safety and injury prevention

According to LEOKA, which contains assault data from state reporting systems, there were 15,725 assaults against officers in 2014, resulting in 13,824 injuries. However, though statistics on assaults are available, more specific statistics on injuries while on duty are not collected. Some are available through LEOKA and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but it is impossible to tell what led to the injury. Was it a body armor problem? Or a failure to use a seatbelt or helmet?



More than 100,000 officers are injured each year. Assaults are not the primary cause of officer injuries; many officer injuries result from non-emergency situations, such as tripping down the stairs. A study by the IACP found that 35 percent of on-duty injuries were strains and sprains, accounting for 68 percent of lost workdays. However, safety is being taken more seriously than it was in the past, as evidenced by the fact that more officers are wearing seatbelts and body armor.

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It is important that both the federal government and national organizations make a long-term commitment to data collection. It will take at least two years to set up a good system and another three to discern any trends. But there is data regarding officer wellness to begin that research now. Some more could be obtained through the employee assistance programs, which have information on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), officer suicides, and other issues.

Suggestions:

- Analyze officer injuries in more detail, including which are related to safety on duty and which to non-emergency work.
- Work with the different generations to develop better-targeted officer safety and wellness information.

### **Mental and emotional health**

It is also important to focus on mental and emotional health. Officers leave the profession because of these issues. The Department of Defense (DoD) collects data on military personnel that may also be applicable to police. They have made progress in understanding the role that PTSD plays in overall health and their data could be helpful in determining the effects of stress on police officers. Likewise, the DoD could also benefit from research on police.

Suggestions:

- The DOJ could work with the DoD to obtain data that would be applicable to police wellness.
- Agencies should include mental health in officer wellness programs.

### **Effects of using de-escalation**

Meeting participants brought up that they have heard from officers that they do not like de-escalation training programs, believing they are media driven, forced upon them, and ultimately make them less safe. Furthermore, some view de-escalation training as suggesting that they are doing something wrong and that criminal offenders are the victims. Particularly now, in an era of mass demonstrations and with the wave of recent police killings, officers feel they are under siege, and those feelings must be acknowledged for new studies and programs to move forward.

Officers need to know that de-escalation training can help make their jobs safer. It can not only positively affect their safety and wellness, but help reduce everyday stress. However, they must be convinced by research before they will accept it.

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Officers need to know that de-escalation can help make their jobs safer.

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Suggestions:

- Improve messaging to officers in order to make the case that de-escalation training does make officers safer.
- Study whether treating people with respect will make an officer less safe, and what role fatigue, cynicism, and attitude toward the department play in officer safety.
- Continue to collaborate across organizations on this effort for the long-term. Too many studies are “one-offs,” in which the study is done but not built upon.

## Understanding Trends in Firearms Assaults Against Officers

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*Joe Kuhns, University of North Carolina at Charlotte*

Dr. Kuhns presented a study he did with his colleagues, which was jointly released the day of the meeting by BJA, the COPS Office, and the Major Cities Chiefs Association. The study, Understanding and Reducing the Use of Deadly Force and Firearms Against Law Enforcement Officers,<sup>3</sup> identified the types of calls that have resulted in the fatal shootings of police officers. Knowing which calls pose the greatest risk could allow law enforcement to minimize their risk when they respond.

Past studies have found that police are often shot at but seldom hit, and gunfire fatalities are even rarer. But Kuhns’ study found that police are more likely to be killed in states in which there are more guns—and because firearm ownership has increased rapidly, officers who respond to calls are now more likely to encounter somebody with a firearm.

LEOKA and Uniform Crime Reporting Program data show the following over the past five years:

- 148 officers were killed by firearms
- 1,014 were injured
- 10,149 officers were fired upon

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<sup>3</sup> The report is available at <http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0797>.

Using the two merged databases to compare cities with a similar population range, the study identified those with an elevated risk of officers being fired upon. The study investigators spoke with police in those cities to try to understand why the rates are elevated in some and not others. They also examined written departmental policies for handling various situations, such as routine traffic stops and the serving of arrest warrants.

Among other things the study pointed out was the importance of knowing which calls pose the greatest risks. The following are its recommendations for responding to high-risk calls:

- A two-officer car response
- Ongoing communication with the officers
- A policy on the extent to which officer discretion can be used in the situation
- Body armor worn by the officers
- Assistance from police specialists in complex situations, such as calls involving individuals with mental illnesses

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Because firearm ownership has increased rapidly, officers who respond to calls are now more likely to encounter somebody with a gun.

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### Officer discretion or tactical decision making?

Participants questioned the term “officer discretion.” Are problems the result of officer discretion or of the lack of training in sound law enforcement practices? What the researchers called “officer discretion” may actually be what practitioners consider a tactical error. Perhaps it could be called “tactical decision making.”

The question is, how many officer shootings resulted from tactical errors, and how many happened when officers followed training and department protocols? Officers do not always have discretion, and there may be times when a department should not allow it.

Officers make decisions based on their training, not necessarily on department policy. Also, the officers may not have been trained to follow their department’s policy. What’s more, policies are sometimes in place and trained on, but not regularly enforced.

### Strategies for reducing risk

What firearms safety policies could be adopted that would increase officer safety and prevent felonious assaults? One way to determine which policies would be effective is to analyze how police shootings occur and use the analysis to develop prevention strategies. In some departments, these strategies are presented during roll call, training, or refresher training. The problem with this approach is that the lessons learned stay in the department. More systematic means are needed for sharing event after-actions and lessons learned across agencies.

With support from the COPS Office, the Police Foundation has created a near-miss database that could serve as a national clearinghouse for information about close calls, but many recent officer shootings have not been included in it. However, several agencies have committed to reporting data, which can be entered anonymously, and those working on the database are hopeful it will catch on. The Police Foundation plans to do outreach to departments so that they know about it.

Suggestion:

- Create a national clearinghouse for lessons learned from firearms assaults against officers to be transmitted across departments.

## Seatbelt and vest policies

The OSW Group felt that the problem of police not following vest and seat belt policies must be addressed. Though the Public Safety Officers Benefits (PSOB) Program does not deny benefits to officers who were killed or injured when not wearing their vest or seatbelt, there have been cases of officers who were injured or killed while speeding when not on an emergency call being denied benefits. The PSOB has been working on that issue.

Some meeting attendees noted that public service announcements have been effective in changing officers' attitudes about seatbelts; and there is technology which can alert supervisors if officers aren't wearing their belts. Although disciplining officers for not following seat belt policies is an option, the group believed that non-punitive policies focused on education and changing the culture and social mores within departments could actually be more effective. The follow-up with officers is critical to ensuring that these policies work.

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Many officers believe body-worn cameras are meant to spy on them. Agencies need to do a better job to communicate that they can actually make them safer.

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## Body-worn cameras can also increase safety

Footage from body-worn cameras can be helpful in training, and departments should use the information from these cameras in a productive, not punitive, way to improve training and response. Footage showing policy violations could be used to help officers better understand and retain information through real-life examples. Law enforcement departments should check out the body worn camera guides<sup>4</sup> available on the COPS Office website.

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<sup>4</sup> *Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned*, <http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P296>; *Police Officer Body-Worn Cameras: Assessing the Evidence*, <http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P289>

Many officers believe that mistrust of the police is the reason they are required to wear body cameras, and are opposed to wearing them, as they believe the cameras are meant to spy on them. But historically, in-car dash cameras are more likely to exonerate officers of wrongdoing than to incriminate them, and many in the OSW Group believe the same is likely to be true of body cameras. Cameras may also encourage citizens to be more law abiding, given they also will be aware of being recorded.

Broader acceptance of body-worn cameras can be accomplished by working with the officers' union and sending the right message, noting instances in which the cameras benefited the officers. Union support is critical and more training is needed. Moreover, the message to officers must be that the cameras will help them and make them safer.

Suggestions:

- Mandate the use of seatbelts and vests and encourage compliance with the proof of their protective value.
- Use video from body-worn cameras for after-action training reviews, with the message that the review is meant to reduce injuries in future events, not to punish the officers.
- Obtain the support of rank-and-file officers for the body camera policies.

It should be noted that these recommendations may help officers survive firearm assaults, but even the best training and policies cannot stop someone who is determined to murder a police officer. However, the more we do to understand assaults and build evidence-based prevention programs, the more likely it will be that officers survive.

## Ambushes: What We Know and What Lessons We Can Learn

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*George Fachner, COPS Office and Zoë Thorkildsen, CNA Safety and Security*

Mr. Fachner introduced a COPS Office publication<sup>5</sup> which examines ambush assaults to find out how to prevent them, respond to them, and improve officer survivability. The study examined the following: whether the characteristics of communities and police agencies influence whether ambushes occur, whether incident dynamics influence officer survivability, and how often post-incident reviews should take place.

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65 percent of agencies where an ambush occurred conducted a review of the event, resulting changes including new policies, training, strategies and equipment.

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<sup>5</sup> George Fachner and Zoe Thorkildsen, *Ambushes of Police: Environment, Incident Dynamics, and the Aftermath of Surprise Attacks Against Law Enforcement* (Washington, DC: COPS Office, 2015). <http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P340>.

The report reviewed data on ambushes from 2007 to 2011, examining a wide variety of variables, including equipment, training, post-incident reviews, officer characteristics, and community crime levels. An analysis of 187 ambushes found the following:

- Officers assisted by other officers are more likely to survive.
- Staying more than 10 feet away from the assailant increases survival odds.
- Poor lighting gives police an advantage.
- Body armor greatly improves survivability.
- Vests are the best protection, but many officers in rural areas do not have them.
- Officers receive more head and neck wounds now, probably because assailants assume they are protected by vests.

### What constitutes an ambush?

OSW Group meeting participants disagreed on the definition of “ambush.” Some said that a traffic stop in which the officer is shot should be included, but others said that it should involve an element of planning and entrapment.

The LEOKA Program categorizes ambush incidents as those which involve entrapment and premeditation.<sup>6</sup> These are situations in which an unsuspecting officer was targeted or lured into danger as the result of conscious consideration and planning by the offender. They agreed, however, that this lack of a clear, agreed-upon definition exists across the field.

Mr. Fachner said that the ambushes analyzed in the COPS-Office-sponsored study had been reported to LEOKA by law enforcement agencies which may have defined “ambush” in different ways, and that these definitional differences could complicate measurement.

Of the agencies where an ambush had occurred, 65 percent conducted a review of the event. All reviews covered tactics, but only 26 percent mentioned industry best practices. Agencies conducting reviews were more likely to implement changes.

Changes that came about as a result of reviews included new policies (e.g., first aid, directed cover fire), new trainings (e.g., officer approach to a motor vehicle), new strategies (e.g., two officers dispatched on 911 hang-up calls), and new equipment (e.g., ballistic helmets, tourniquets).

The OSW Group also suggested better intelligence gathering and dissemination (e.g., tracking violent groups). They agreed that training, including simulation-based training, is important, as well as post-incident analysis. Self-aid and medical kits were described as necessary equipment.

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<sup>6</sup> Melissa J. Blake and Roger D. Miller, “Ambushes on U.S. Law Enforcement Officers,” Officer Safety Corner, *The Police Chief* 82 (August 2015): 12–13

Suggestions:

- Define “ambush” and rely on that definition for future data collection efforts
- Research the impact of law enforcement philosophies and operations on violence against the police
- Conduct systematic reviews of ambushes so that all law enforcement agencies can learn from them
- Use reality-based training to prepare officers for high-stress events and evaluate how the officers handle the events

## Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department ambush after-action report

Ms. Thorkildsen presented the after-action report<sup>7</sup> on the ambush of two Las Vegas police officers while they were eating lunch in 2014. The two assailants fled to a nearby store, where they killed a man who tried to shoot at one of them. One of the assailants was killed in a gun battle with police; the other died from a self-inflicted gunshot.

Because the officers who responded to this event had been trained in reality-based and Multi-Assault Counter-Terrorism Action Capability, they responded effectively. Afterward, they said that the reality-based training had been particularly helpful. But though the officers’ response was good, there were some lessons learned by the department:

- The incident command system was not properly established, resulting in confusion and miscommunication
- Staging areas were not established during the initial response, resulting in confusion for arriving units

As a result of the shootings, the department expanded Incident Command System (ICS) training and temporarily instituted two-person patrols, which officers said made them feel safer and provided greater emotional support. The officers also praised the department’s support programs. However, they noted that these efforts were focused on officers in the same unit as those who were killed, and that others who were close to these officers, but not in their unit, did not receive that same level of support.

Ms. Thorkildsen also noted that it is important to look at the Las Vegas ambush as two distinct events. The first was an execution-style murder, while the second was an active shooter situation. Officer training also has to address those events differently in order to maximize survivability.

## The influence of antigovernment rhetoric

The OSW Group discussed the fact that the killers were extremists who had written about their hatred of police, although not enough to be flagged. They told their roommates that day that they were going out to kill cops. It was noted that this parallels what was found in San Bernardino, California, where people had relevant information but did not tell the police.

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<sup>7</sup> Zoe Thorkildsen, Ashley Shultz, Thomas Woodmansee, and Drew Tracy, *Las Vegas After-Action Assessment: Lessons Learned from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Ambush Incident* (Washington, DC: COPS Office, 2016). <http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0798>.

With so much antigovernment rhetoric, how can officers be trained to be vigilant without becoming paranoid? In the past two years, officers have been ambushed by people with antigovernment and antipolice attitudes. Police are feeling under attack and need support from citizens.

Asked what the group could suggest to protect officers against ambushes, one participant noted that federal hate crime legislation has helped protect people against hate crimes based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and more. Similar legislation protecting police could therefore be beneficial.

However, it is necessary to look at each shooting individually. Some police shootings are related to an antipolice climate; others are not. One source of information which may be beneficial to agencies in reviewing their safety training and policies is the LEOKA Program's study of the profiles of cop killers.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the annual *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted* report and the Officer Safety Awareness Training the FBI offers, LEOKA has additional resources available for law enforcement via a special interest group that can be accessed through the FBI's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP) at <https://www.cjis.gov>. It includes three major case studies entitled *Killed in the Line of Duty*, *In the Line of Fire*, and *Violent Encounters*. This work focuses on felonious assaults and killings of law enforcement, critically examining officer perceptions, offender motives, and the circumstances that brought them together.

There is also a forthcoming FBI study which contains information that can be used to reduce the risk to officers. It contains interviews with assailants as well as the officers who were ambushed. The researchers found that one out of four assailants had a history of assaulting officers, and many had self-identified as future cop killers. Repeat violent offenders will continue to commit crimes and place police at risk. A deeper dive into this study's data may help law enforcement agencies respond.

Suggestions:

- Develop an online incident-based command training program that would be compatible with a range of electronic devices, including tablets.
- Update the incident command system and develop software to provide online training.
- Build on the current incident command system, but encourage more agencies to use it and to train and retrain periodically
- Create a public campaign to reinforce the importance of passing along information about threats to the police.
- Find ways to reduce antipolice rhetoric in the media and in public discourse to reduce the number of ambush attacks on cops.
- Designate law enforcement officers as a protected category under the federal hate crimes statute.
- Study the characteristics and motivations of people who ambush law enforcement officers.

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<sup>8</sup> "Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) Program," FBI, accessed June 16, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/leoka-resources>.



Past research showed that 65 percent of officers who were attacked did not see their attack coming. By comparing data from past research to current research, we can confirm whether current training is helping. When a firefighter is killed on duty, an extensive amount of data is collected for a federal repository, and a similar system could be helpful to police. But though better-informed research is a good idea, one participant said that there should not be an additional federal reporting mandate imposed.

Also, the group reiterated that constantly telling officers to be vigilant 24 hours a day and to keep in mind that they could be killed when they least expect it might ultimately cause more harm than good. There is a need for a balanced approach. It is necessary to think about the mindset that trainings could create as well.

The OSW Group also discussed the reality that sometimes the right choice is something that makes officers feel safer, even if data do not indicate that it actually is. Specifically they noted the move to two-person cars by the LVMPD in the wake of the ambush killings. There was no evidence to suggest that it would actually protect officers. But if a two-person patrol gives officers a greater sense of security, then it could support officer wellness and demonstrate to officers that their commanders are concerned for their general wellbeing.

Suggestions:

- Compare past research to current research to see whether training is reducing the risk of officer ambush.
- Create a national violent death review system for law enforcement officers. Some data are already being collected and can be included. This system should be available to researchers and include tactical and medical treatment reviews; it could produce data that would inform officer training in less than two years.
- Create online training programs which officers in isolated or low-resource areas could access. Online programs would ensure they receive the latest training.
- Conduct new studies on whether two-person patrols make officers safer.
- Strengthen laws that apply to repeat violent offenders.
- Make protective equipment more widely available to all officers.
- Conduct a study of the impact of community emotional climate on law enforcement officers, including communities which acknowledge officers' work and show they care for their wellness and safety.
- Create more collaborative efforts among agencies in which data and ideas are shared.

## Blue Lives Matter

The Fraternal Order of Police, which represents more than 300,000 officers and may be the world's largest law enforcement organization, sent [formal letters](#)<sup>1</sup> to President Barack Obama and congressional leaders in 2015, urging them to expand the law to include targeted crimes against law enforcement officers.

And in March of this year, Rep. Ken Buck (R-Colorado), introduced a bill in Congress which would make it a hate crime to target a police officer. The bill, dubbed [The Blue Lives Matter Act of 2016](#),<sup>†</sup> would expand the federal hate crime statute to include law enforcement officers who are targeted for acts of violence because of their jobs.

<sup>1</sup>Fischler, J, "Top Police Union Calls For Expansion Of Hate Crimes Law To Cover Cops," BuzzFeed News, January 6, 2015.

<sup>†</sup>Blue Lives Matter Act of 2016, H.R. 4760, 114th Cong. (2016).

## Research to practice: Two-person patrols

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Most of the data on two-person patrols are old, dating back to the mid-1970s. At the time, one study found that two-officer units were safer and more productive, providing more visibility and shorter response times. Many officers also preferred them to a one-person car. However, some smaller studies done later found that officers feel equally safe in a one-person car.

Immediate backup is one advantage of a two-person patrol. Officers feel safer, have a feeling of being more prepared to meet the situation, and enjoy the camaraderie. It is also easier to observe what is happening. One officer drives; the other observes. On the other hand, officers in a two-person car are more likely to become complacent because they can assume their partner is being vigilant.

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Officers feel safer in a two-person car, but are more likely to become complacent.

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Some also noted that a two-person patrol can better monitor the technology in the car, most of which did not exist in the 1970s. Also, a person facing arrest may be more tempted to shoot at a lone officer but may make a different decision when there are two. But ultimately the OSW Group agreed that more research is needed to determine whether a two-person car is actually protective or just psychologically protective.

Another related research question is whether one officer can better de-escalate a situation than two. The example given was that in rural communities a single officer's backup could be 20 miles away, which may encourage officers to avoid escalating confrontations. Alternatively, with two-person patrols, it may be possible for one officer to be ready for a lethal encounter, providing greater protection to both officers. Research on this question should take into account the new technology and the younger generation's approach.

But it was noted that a two-person patrol can be an inefficient use of resources given that 70 percent of police activity involves routine tasks that one person can handle easily. Cost is a key barrier—two-person patrols double the cost of staffing. There may be times of day when two-person patrols are better, but very few municipalities will want to bear the cost.

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A two-person patrol can be an inefficient use of resources, but efficient method of response.

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A pilot study of two-person patrols in hot spots, areas where a high number of risky calls are expected, may be appropriate. Such patrols would reduce the calls for backup, which require another car to leave its sector. Research should take into account the size of the law enforcement agency, size of the patrol area, and the number of times officers have to wait for a backup.

## Research and data collection

It may also be important to understand the dynamic decision making that occurs between two officers, and whether it affects officers' skills and careers. Since police have so much new technology available to them, it would also be wise to examine how to handle calls for service in today's technology-rich environment.

Studies are needed to gather information on the following:

- the physical effect on safety of both one- and two-officer cars in different circumstances
- the psychological effect of two-person patrols
- if there is a positive psychological effect, under what circumstances the effect occurs and why
- whether new officers who have partners at the early stages of their careers perform better later

Participants agreed that research on this issue is needed, but there is no one data source that would answer all these questions about two-person patrols. A study using various scenarios to see how officers would react would be good; it would also be possible to measure officers' stress levels, but this would not determine if officers on two-person patrols are actually safer or merely perceive themselves to be.

A meta-analysis tapping into data from other countries could be a good place to start the research and would be less expensive than immediately launching a randomized control trial. Though meta-analysis is only as good as the studies it draws from, it can factor in the strength of the studies from which it draws data. A randomized controlled trial could cost between \$1.5 million and \$2 million. A meta-analysis could cost between \$50,000 and \$80,000.

No matter the ultimate research plan, the first step should be to conduct a systematic review of the data that is available.

Suggestions:

- Develop a checklist that a commander can use when a police officer is killed. There are many things to do and this would be helpful.
- Run a pilot project to determine whether two-person patrols in high-crime areas might be more effective.
- Conduct a systematic review to find out what data are available and see what circumstances increase officer safety.

## Police Morale and Officer Safety and Wellness – Is there a Relationship?

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*John Bouthillette, VALOR Initiative*

At the beginning of his presentation, Mr. Bouthillette commented that since officer safety and public safety are interdependent, trust between police and their communities is more important than ever. VALOR training therefore teaches officers how to maintain their safety while maintaining positive relations with citizens.

## The Valor Officer Safety Initiative

Created by the BJA in 2010 in response to the increasing number of assaults against law enforcement officers, the VALOR Officer Safety Initiative provides all levels of law enforcement with tools that can help prevent violence against law enforcement officers and enhance officer safety, wellness, and resiliency.

VALOR is a comprehensive effort that includes classroom and web-based training, research, and resources for sworn state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers. Its officer safety training is free of cost, and available to all levels of law enforcement both on site and online. Since it was launched, more than 21,000 law enforcement personnel have received VALOR Training. More information is available at <https://www.valorforblue.org>.

VALOR training is divided into the following parts:

- **Foundation.** Teaches officers how to analyze a potentially dangerous encounter. It provides an overview of research, current trends, and threats.
- **Indicators.** Provides training to prevent criminal activity, explains how to minimize unnecessary use of force and teaches how to recognize behaviors and movements that indicate an individual could have a concealed weapon.
- **Response.** Focuses on techniques that can help de-escalate an encounter and avoid hypervigilant tactics and also provides training in casualty care and rescue, including life sustaining first aid.
- **Mindset.** Emphasizes officer health and wellness and provides officers with the skills to achieve work-life balance. Provides officer survival lessons.
- **Executive Briefing.** Provides information to executive officers on hiring and career-long training for officers. Allows senior law enforcement officers to share experiences and innovative approaches to law enforcement.

The program also provides officers with follow-up training as well as access to the VALOR website, which has had about 23 million hits to date. Feedback from participants has been very positive.

### Discussion of the effects of poor morale

One group member noted that morale affects wellness by increasing stress, and another said that public support increases officer morale, as does knowing that department leadership supports them. Officers want to feel supported, and just thanking them for their service helps. It was noted that most citizens actually do support law enforcement officers and have begun to thank them more often.

A third group member said that the morale of his officers has not been affected by the negative publicity of recent years, and he assures his officers that he will support them for doing their jobs as they are trained. He also cautioned that the current antipolice climate should not completely dictate police training. It was noted that all morale problems are local problems. Locally, many officers do get good support despite national dialogues.

When officers slack off in their duties, as some may have done because of the recent criticism of police, they put their safety and the safety of their fellow officers at greater risk. Officers who do not do their jobs fully and to the best of their abilities can put everybody, citizens and their fellow officers, at greater risk. Leadership must convey that message.

Moreover, a department must support an officer accused of wrongdoing until it is proven that the officer did something wrong. The officer has due process rights and having the confidence that their department will support them through the process is important to their mental wellbeing in dangerous and difficult situations.

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When officers respond to criticism by slacking off in their duty, they put everybody's safety at greater risk.

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In regard to wellness, it was noted that in a survey conducted approximately 20 years ago, officers who have collective bargaining rights were shown to have fewer workplace injuries and higher morale. It could be worthwhile to explore this research further and on a larger scale. It is also believed that morale is higher in departments where the union leaders and department commanders collaborate. All agreed that when officers believe they are being treated unfairly by the department, it will negatively affect their work in the community.

Suggestions:

- Remind officers that not carrying out their duties could make them and their fellow officers less safe.
- Conduct new and continuing research to determine whether having a collective bargaining unit boosts department morale.

### Officer suicide

Officer suicide is a major concern and should be a subject of more intensive research; more information is needed. Though it is known that police are at much higher risk compared to the general public, there is little data on officer suicide, including to what extent the fact that men are generally at greater risk than women impacts the professional rate within a male-dominated profession.

One participant also noted that police suicide deaths rose between 2010 and 2013. More police officers die by suicide than in the line of duty, according to *Breaking the Silence: A National Symposium on Law Enforcement Officer Suicide and Mental Health*, a report prepared by the IACP in partnership with the COPS Office.

Some suicides are related to work stress and some to personal problems; it is difficult to say to what extent police suicides are job-related. Also, it is more difficult for police to ask for help when they do have personal problems. It is important to pursue research on how the job affects the health and wellness of officers and their families.

## Suicide Prevention Resources

The Suicide Prevention Resource Centers (SPRC) of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has a program called *In Harm's Way*, which provides training for preventing law enforcement suicides: <http://www.sprc.org/bpr/section-III/harm%E2%80%99s-way-law-enforcement-suicide-prevention>

### *Ongoing screening considerations*

Law enforcement agencies need a way to screen individuals to better determine their capacity to cope with the stress of the job. Screening should also be ongoing. It was suggested that there is a highly accurate two-question screening measure used with trauma patients which could be adapted for use with police officers to flag potential suicides.

Also, while some departments require each officer to visit with a police psychologist periodically, and feel that this offers tremendous benefit in destigmatizing the mental health check by making it automatic, others commented that this is unnecessarily costly, and could be replaced with the two-question screening test.

Suggestions:

- Agencies should routinely post suicide awareness literature that contains contact information for confidential sessions with mental health practitioners.
- Agencies can mandate that officers attend counseling when they have been involved in certain situations.

## President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

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### *Deborah Spence, COPS Office*

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing conducted seven public listening sessions, during which a variety of individuals and organizations gave input on policing.

The task force made 59 recommendations within six areas, called pillars. The sixth pillar is Officer Wellness and Safety. Some Pillar Six recommendations, including one for expanding the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program, were addressed to Congress.

Some were addressed to executive branch agencies, such as DOJ, to promote and enhance officer safety and wellness initiatives. Others, such as the recommendation to provide benefits to survivors regardless of the cause of line-of-duty death, were made to non-federal agencies, organizations, and insurers.

The Task Force website contains all of the testimony received during the seven listening sessions, as well as other related resources: [http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/TaskForce\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/TaskForce_FinalReport.pdf).

## Setting priorities in officer safety and wellness

Discussion of future priorities brought up the fact that many agencies have an aging officer population, resulting in increasing numbers of wellness and health issues. Also mentioned was a research finding that binge drinking off duty is a problem. Alcoholism, use of socially acceptable drugs such as marijuana, and prescription drug abuse should be addressed in future meetings.

Another group member commented that secondary employment may have as negative an effect on officers' ability to perform on the job as binge drinking, as moonlighting officers may not have had enough sleep before starting their shifts. Such off-duty factors should be considered when setting officer schedules. There was also discussion of how the injudicious use of social media causes stress and ruins some officers' careers.

Another topic of discussion was the possibility that negative publicity related to the events in Ferguson, Missouri could adversely affect recruitment. If agencies have difficulty recruiting, they may lower their standards, leading to safety and wellness problems down the road. Dr. Kuhns, who teaches in a criminal justice program, commented that he has heard anecdotal reports that current students are less interested in going into law enforcement than past students were. Many of the practitioners at the meeting felt the same way about these recruitment challenges.

Suggestion:

- Respond to biased or erroneous reports in the news and social media by disseminating information and developing messaging to set the record straight, provide the full story, or simply present the law enforcement side of the story. It is important that law enforcement provide clear, timely communications and enter the public discourse.

## Moving to action

The group proposed possible recommendations and action steps that the OSW Group could take over the next two years to further enhance its ability to influence the safety and wellness of the law enforcement profession.

Suggestions:

- Issue joint statements on critical topics in safety and wellness.
- Support and encourage efforts to obtain needed data in the areas under discussion, including those issues that affect morale
- Identify best practices for building morale and maintaining a healthy lifestyle and help disseminate them to officers and executives. This could be done by putting out a call for presentations from departments and agencies which have successful health and wellness programs. Agencies could send one-page descriptions of their programs, and the best would be invited to give presentations to the group.
- Encourage agencies and organizations to increase their efforts to counter some of the negative publicity that law enforcement has received recently. Call on law enforcement groups to work together to publicize positive information about the police.
- Call on agencies to improve their sharing of information related to successful health and safety programs.

- Look for additional federal agencies the working group can partner with to grow the library of health and wellness research, knowledge, and promising practices resources. This could include DoD, HHS, and others. The DoD has ways to evaluate the success of wellness programs and has studied issues such as alcoholism, PTSD, and suicides. The Army also has a three week program on mental health and wellness. Though there is not much data yet on how successful the program is, the working group could benefit from the Army's studies and recommendations. The Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) teams have an examination to predict resilience and resistance to combat-related stress, and their data may be available too. It would also be helpful to study officers' strategic thinking and decision making.
- Develop a comprehensive definition of "officer wellness" that the group and its constituent members can use to further the national discourse on this important issue.
- Engage with law enforcement leaders to better understand better why they do not currently invest significantly in officer wellness initiatives. It could be a lack of funding, or perhaps because wellness programs are often seen as employee assistance programs (and therefore not very important).



## Appendix. OSW Group Forum Attendees

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### ATTENDEES

**Cedric Alexander, Psy.D.**

Director of Public Safety  
DeKalb County Police Department

**Geoff Alpert, Ph.D.**

Professor  
Department of Criminology and Criminal  
Justice  
University of South Carolina

**James W. Baker**

Director of Law Enforcement Operations and  
Support  
International Association of Chiefs of Police

**Shon Barnes**

Captain  
Commander of the Operational Force Division  
Greensboro Police Department

**John Bouthillette**

Program Chief  
Adult Protective Services  
Division of Licensing and Protection  
Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging  
and Independent Living

**Jim Burch**

Vice President for Strategic Initiatives  
Police Foundation

**Amanda Burstein**

Program Manager  
International Association of Chiefs of Police

**Al Cannon**

Sheriff  
Charleston County Sheriff's Office  
Major County Sheriffs' Association

**Alexander L. Eastman, M.D.**

Lieutenant and Deputy Medical Director  
Dallas Police Department

**Andrea Edmiston**

Director of Governmental Affairs  
National Association of Police Organizations

**Craig W. Floyd**

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial  
Fund

**Janeé Harteau**

Chief  
Minneapolis Police Department

**Ed Hutchison**

Director of Traffic Safety & Triad Programs  
National Sheriffs' Association

**Joe Kuhns, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

**Brian McAllister**

Training Instructor  
Officer Safety Awareness Training Program  
Law Enforcement Officers Killed and  
Assaulted Program  
Criminal Justice Information Services  
Federal Bureau of Investigation

**Roger Miller**

Chief  
Mission Development Unit  
Engagement & Analysis Branch  
Terrorist Screening Center  
Federal Bureau of Investigation

**Timothy Richardson**

Senior Legislative Liaison  
National Legislative Office  
Grand Lodge  
Fraternal Order of Police

**Darrel Stephens**

Executive Director  
Major Cities Chiefs Association

**Zoë Thorkildsen**

Research Analyst  
CNA Safety and Security  
CNA Corporation

**Tom Wilson**

Director  
Center for Applied Research and Management  
Police Executive Research Forum

**Daniel Zivkovich**

Second Vice President  
International Association of Directors of Law  
Enforcement Standards and Training

**FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES**

**Ronald Davis**

Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing  
Services

**Steven Edwards, Ph.D.**

Senior Policy Advisor  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

**George Fachner**

Collaborative Reform Specialist  
Office of Community Oriented Policing  
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**Deborah Meader**

Policy Advisor  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

**Denise O'Donnell**

Director  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

**Nancy Rodriguez, Ph.D.**

Director  
National Institute of Justice

**Cornelia Sorensen Sigworth**

Associate Deputy Director  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

**Deborah Spence**

Acting Assistant Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing  
Services

**FACILITATORS**

**James Copple**

Principal  
Strategic Applications International

**Eric Nation**

Director of Training and Development  
National Alliance for Drug Endangered  
Children

## About BJA

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The Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) mission is to provide leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal justice strategies to achieve safer communities.

BJA has four primary components: the Policy Office, Programs Office, Planning Office, and Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program 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 drive policy and help disseminate information on promising practices. The Programs Office coordinates and administers state and local grant programs and acts as BJA's direct line of communication to state, local, territorial, and tribal governments by providing assistance and coordinating resources. The Planning Office coordinates the planning, communications, and budget formulation and execution; provides overall BJA-wide coordination; and supports streamlining efforts. The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program Office provides death and education benefits to survivors of fallen law enforcement officers, firefighters, and other first responders and disability benefits to officers catastrophically injured in the line of duty.

BJA's overall goals are to (1) reduce and prevent crime, violence, and drug abuse and (2) improve the functioning of the criminal justice system. To achieve these goals, BJA programs emphasize enhanced coordination and cooperation of federal, state, and local efforts. BJA's objectives in support of these goals are to:

- Encourage the development and implementation of comprehensive strategies to reduce and prevent crime and violence
- Encourage the active participation of community organizations and citizens in efforts to prevent crime, drug abuse, and violence
- Provide training and technical assistance in support of efforts to prevent crime, drug abuse, and violence at the national, state, and local levels
- Reduce the availability of illegal weapons and develop strategies to address violence in our communities
- Enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies to reduce crime
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of the adjudication process, including indigent defense services
- Assist states in freeing prison space for serious and violent offenders through the design and implementation of effective correctional options for nonviolent offenders
- Enhance the ability of criminal justice agencies to access and use new information technologies
- Encourage and support evaluation of the effectiveness of funded programs and dissemination of program results

## About the COPS Office

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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 police 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.

Another source of COPS Office assistance is the Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance (CRI-TA). Developed to advance community policing and ensure constitutional practices, CRI-TA is an independent, objective process for organizational transformation. It provides recommendations based on expert analysis of policies, practices, training, tactics, and accountability methods related to issues of concern.

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.

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 127,000 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.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

The COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—can be downloaded at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.