

# WebMemo



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## Why Would COPS 2.0 Succeed When COPS 1.0 Failed?

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Recently, there have been calls for Congress to beef up the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).<sup>1</sup> From fiscal year 1996 to FY 1999, the COPS budget peaked at \$1.4 billion annually. Since then, the COPS budget has steadily declined: For FY 2008, it was \$320 million.

Created in 1994, COPS was expected to reduce crime by subsidizing the placement of 100,000 additional police officers on America's streets. Research by both The Heritage Foundation and the U.S. Department of Justice found that the program failed.<sup>2</sup> One Department of Justice study concluded that "[w]hether the program will ever increase the number of officers on the street at a single point in time to 100,000 is not clear."<sup>3</sup>

Heritage Foundation evaluations have uniformly found that COPS grants had little to no impact on crime rates.<sup>4</sup> In 2001, Heritage's Center for Data Analysis (CDA) conducted an independent analysis of the COPS program's effectiveness.<sup>5</sup> The CDA evaluation accounted for yearly state and local law enforcement expenditures, as well as other socio-economic factors, in counties from 1995 to 1998. It found that COPS grants for the hiring of additional police officers and for technology had no statistically significant effect on reducing the rates of violent crime.

In 2006, a second CDA evaluation of COPS grants, using data from 1990 to 1999 for 58 large cities, confirmed the earlier conclusion that the program has done little to reduce crime.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it found that the ineffectiveness of COPS grants

awarded to large cities may be due to their misuse, with grants awarded to large cities being used to supplant local police expenditures. Federal funds were substituted for local funding.

**Very Little Impact on Crime.** The 2006 CDA evaluation found that COPS grants had a small effect on the crime rates in large cities. This strongly indicates that increasing funding for the COPS program will do little to reduce crime.

COPS grants were disbursed in three types: hiring grants, Making Officer Redeployment Effective (MORE) grants, and innovative grants.

The *hiring grants* paid for 75 percent of the salaries of newly hired officers over three years. Grantees were required to retain the new officers after the grants expired. Although the hiring grants were associated with a slight decrease in robberies, the hiring failed to have a statistically measurable impact on murder, rape, assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft rates. A 1 percent increase in hiring grants is associated with a 0.01 percent decrease in robbery rates, or a reduction of 0.06 robberies per 100,000 residents. The hiring grants' meager effect on robberies and the lack of statistically significant findings for the six other crime categories suggest

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[www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/wm1903.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/wm1903.cfm)

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that new funding for the hiring grants will do little to help large cities fight crime.

The *Making Officer Redeployment Effective grants* provided funding for technology, officer overtime, and civilian staff salaries. The MORE grants were intended to redeploy veteran officers from administrative tasks to community policing and appear to deter more crime than is deterred by the hiring grants. Though there was no statistically significant relationship between MORE grants and murder, rape, larceny, and auto theft rates, the grants had a small deterrent effect on robbery, assault, and burglary rates. A 1 percent increase in MORE grants was associated with:

- A 0.007 percent decrease in robberies,
- A 0.005 percent decrease in assaults, and
- A 0.002 percent decrease in burglaries.

For the average large city, the deterrent effect of a 1 percent increase in MORE grant funding per capita resulted in:

- 0.005 fewer robberies per 100,000 residents,
- 0.03 fewer assaults per 100,000 residents, and
- 0.017 fewer burglaries per 100,000 residents.

The MORE grants have changed since the 1990s. Renamed “technology” grants, they no longer re-

quire grantees to use the funding to redeploy officers from administrative tasks to community policing. Instead of the original competitive application process, the technology grants are awarded through congressional earmarks. Limiting the MORE grants to earmarks may negate the deterrent effect found in this evaluation.

The *innovative grants* provided funding for addressing specific problems like domestic violence, gangs, and youth firearms violence. These grants have a statistically significant relationship with a reduction in the murder rate but no statistically measurable effect on the other crime rates. A 1 percent increase in innovative grants per capita is associated with a 0.001 percent decrease in murders per capita, or 0.0002 fewer murders per 100,000 residents. By the end of the Clinton Administration, most of the innovative grants were discontinued.

**Are COPS Grants Worth the Cost?** The value of the crimes prevented by COPS grants was estimated using prior research on the cost of crime to victims. Specifically, the dollar values of crimes prevented through COPS grants are estimated on a per capita basis.

A 1996 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study estimated the cost of crime to victims (victim-cost) based on personal expenses (e.g., medical care and

1. Robert Gorden, “Bring Crime Back—To The National Agenda,” CBS News, March 25, 2008, at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/03/25/opinion/main3965781.shtml> (April 23, 2008). For examples of legislation reauthorizing COPS, see the COPS Improvement Act of 1997 (S. 368 and H.R. 1700).
2. Gareth Davis, David B. Muhlhausen, Dexter Ingram, and Ralph Rector, “The Facts About COPS: A Performance Overview of the Community Oriented Policing Services Program,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA00-10, September 25, 2000, at [www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/CDA00-10.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/CDA00-10.cfm); Christopher S. Koper, Jeffrey A. Roth, and Edward Maguire, “Putting 100,000 Officers on the Street: Progress as of 1998 and Preliminary Projections Through 2003,” in Jeffrey A. Roth, Joseph F. Ryan, Stephen J. Gaffigan, Christopher S. Koper, Mark H. Moore, Janice A. Roehl, Calvin C. Johnson, Gretchen E. Moore, Ruth M. White, Michael E. Buerger, Elizabeth A. Langston, and David Thatcher, *National Evaluation of the COPS Program: Title I of the 1994 Crime Act* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2000), p. 163; and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General, “Police Hiring and Redeployment Grants, Summary of Audit Findings and Recommendations,” *Audit Report* No. 99-14, April 1999, at <http://usdoj.gov/oig/reports/COPS/a9914/index.htm> (April 16, 2008).
3. Koper *et al.*, “Putting 100,000 Officers on the Street,” p. 152.
4. David B. Muhlhausen, “Do Community Oriented Policing Services Grants Affect Violent Crime Rates?” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA01-05, May 25, 2001, at [www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/CDA01-05.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/CDA01-05.cfm), and David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D., “Impact Evaluation of COPS Grants in Large Cities,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA06-03, May 26, 2004, at [www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/cda06-03.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/cda06-03.cfm).
5. Muhlhausen, “Do Community Oriented Policing Services Grants Affect Violent Crime Rates?”
6. David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D., “Impact Evaluation of COPS Grants in Large Cities,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA06-03, May 26, 2004, at [www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/cda06-03.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/cda06-03.cfm).

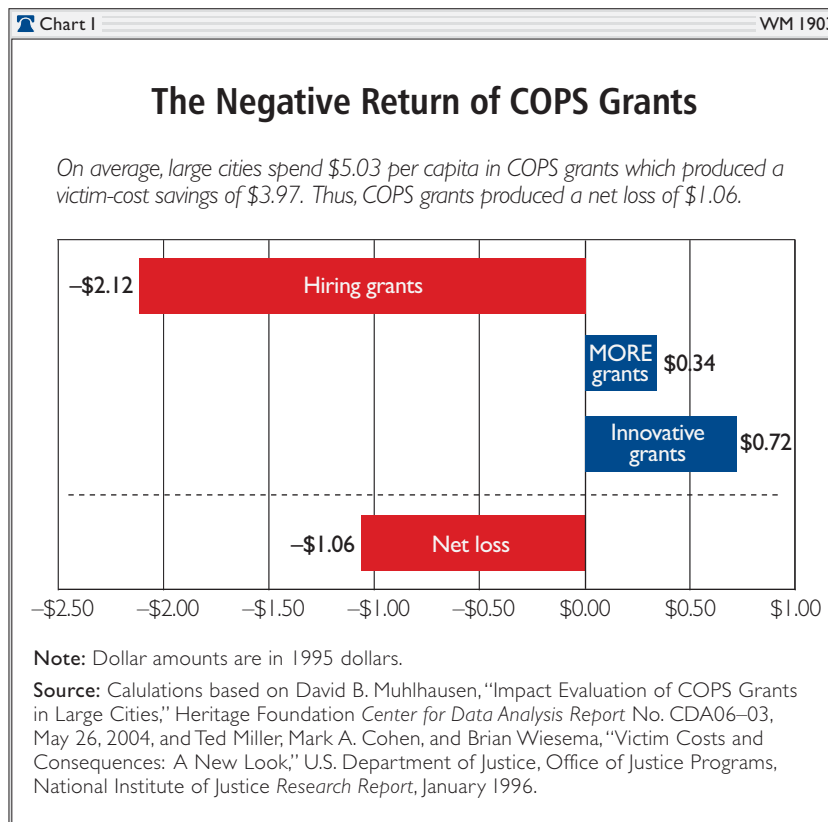
property losses); reduced productivity relating to work, home, and school; and quality of life losses.<sup>7</sup> For the analysis, the NIJ figures are converted into 1995 dollars. For example, each murder prevented results in an estimated victim-cost savings of \$3.1 million. The victim-cost savings for each crime prevented are \$8,400 for robbery, \$25,300 for assault, \$1,500 for burglary, and \$3,900 for auto theft.

From 1995 to 1999, large cities spent an average of \$3.05 per capita in hiring grants, \$1.36 per capita in MORE grants, and \$0.62 per capita in innovative grants. The cost-benefit estimates indicate that COPS grants did not pay for themselves.<sup>8</sup> (See Chart 1.) On average:

- Large cities spent \$3.05 per capita in hiring grants, which led to a victim cost-savings of \$0.93 per capita—a net loss of \$2.12 per capita;
- Large cities spent \$1.36 per capita in MORE grants, which led to a victim cost-savings of \$1.70 per capita—a net gain of \$0.34 per capita; and
- Large cities spent \$0.62 per capita in innovative grants, which led to a victim cost-savings of \$1.34 per capita—a net gain of \$0.72 per capita.

Thus, average total COPS grant spending of \$5.03 per capita in these cities produced \$3.97 in victim-cost savings for a net loss of \$1.06 per capita.

Overall, the innovative grants were allocated the smallest share of COPS funding and appear to have produced the greatest monetary benefits. Though the benefits of the MORE grants are not as large as the innovative grant benefits, the MORE grants produce positive returns. The hiring grants, which



were allocated the largest share of funding over the years and received the most public attention, appear to be the least effective of the grants.

**Grants Apparently Used to Supplant Local Funds.** The ineffectiveness of COPS grants awarded to large cities may be due to their misuse. The 2006 CDA evaluation found that COPS grants awarded to large cities were used to supplant local police expenditures. Federal funds were substituted for local funding.

This finding is supported by multiple audits conducted by the Department of Justice. Its Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that cities failed to hire the number of officers required and did not comply with other grant conditions.<sup>9</sup> For example, instead of hiring 249 new officers, Newark, New

7. Ted Miller, Mark A. Cohen, and Brian Wiersema, "Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice Research Report, January 1996, at <http://ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/victcost.pdf> (April 16, 2006).  
 8. For more information on the methodology used to estimate the benefits of COPS grants, see Muhlhausen, "Impact Evaluation of COPS Grants in Large Cities," pp. 15–16.

Jersey, reduced its police force by 142 officers from FY 1996 to FY 1997.<sup>10</sup>

Other audits indicate that some police departments supplanted local funding by failing to hire the required number of additional officers. For example, OIG audits indicated that Atlanta, Georgia, El Paso, Texas, and Sacramento, California, used COPS grants to supplant local funding.<sup>11</sup> Atlanta used over \$5.1 million in hiring grants to pay the salaries of officers who otherwise would have received funding from local sources. After receiving grants to hire 231 additional police officers, El Paso failed to hire the number of officers required by the grant. Sacramento used over \$3.9 million in hiring grants to retain officers funded through earlier grants.

In Washington, D.C., the police department was awarded almost \$11 million in MORE grants to hire 56 civilians and redeploy 521 officers through technology purchases.<sup>12</sup> When the OIG asked for a list of officers redeployed from administrative duties to community policing as required by the grants, the list included only 53 officers. Of the 53, one officer was deceased, 10 were retired, and 13 no longer worked for the police department.

COPS appears to have done little to resolve the misuse of its grants. According to congressional tes-

timony by Justice Department Inspector General Glenn A. Fine, “in many cases, the response to our findings was a paper exercise and...the COPS program did not take sufficient action to either bring the grantee in compliance, to offset the funds, to recoup the funds or to waive the funds.”<sup>13</sup> Fine testified that COPS did not pay enough attention to ensure adherence to the grant requirements, including the hiring of officers, retaining officers, and tracking the redeployment of officers.<sup>14</sup>

**Recent Research Supports Conclusion That COPS Was Ineffective.** Professors John Worrall of the University of Texas at Dallas and Tomislav Kovandzic of the University of Alabama at Birmingham recently evaluated the impact of COPS grants in 189 large cities from 1990 to 2000.<sup>15</sup> The authors found that COPS hiring, MORE, and innovative grants had little to no effect on crime. Commenting on the significance of their finding for public policy, the authors concluded that “a strategy of throwing money at the crime problem, of simply hiring more police officers, does not seem to help reduce crime to a significant extent.”<sup>16</sup>

**Outside the Federal Government’s Scope, Expertise, and Responsibility.** Grants that subsidize the routine activities of local law enforcement

9. For a discussion of the Inspector General audits, see Muhlhausen, “Impact Evaluation of COPS Grants in Large Cities,” pp. 16–18.
10. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General. “Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Grants to the Newark, New Jersey Police Department,” Executive Summary, *Audit Report* No. GR-70-98-007, June 1998, at <http://usdoj.gov/oig/grants/g7098007.htm> (April 16, 2008).
11. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General, “Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Grants to the Atlanta, Georgia, Police Department,” Executive Summary, *Audit Report* No. GR-40-98-006, April 1998, at <http://usdoj.gov/oig/grants/g4098006.htm> (April 16, 2008); “Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Grants to the El Paso Police Department, El Paso, Texas,” Executive Summary, *Audit Report* No. GR-80-01-013, May 30, 2001, at <http://usdoj.gov/oig/grants/g8001013.htm> (May 16, 2006); and “Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Grants to the City of Sacramento Police Department, California,” Executive Summary, *Audit Report* No. GR-90-98-022, May 1998, at <http://usdoj.gov/oig/grants/g9098022.htm> (April 16, 2008).
12. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General, “Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Grants to the Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia,” Executive Summary, *Audit Report* No. GR-30-01-003, December 29, 2000, at <http://usdoj.gov/oig/grants/g3001003.htm> (April 16, 2008).
13. Hearing, *Office of Justice Programs*, Subcommittee on Crime, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, 107th Cong., 2nd Sess., March, 5, 7, and 14, 2002, p. 109.
14. *Ibid.*
15. John L. Worrall and Tomislav V. Kovandzic, “COPS Grants and Crime Revisited,” *Criminology*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (February 2007), pp. 159–190.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

assign to the federal government functions that fall within the expertise, jurisdiction, and constitutional responsibilities of state and local governments.<sup>17</sup> Combating ordinary crime is the principal responsibility of state and local governments. If Congress wants to aid in the fight against crime, it should limit itself to unique roles that only the federal government can play. The federal government should not become a crutch on which local law enforcement becomes dependent.

**Conclusion.** Programs such as COPS, with a long history of poor performance, should be elimi-

nated. They have failed to achieve their goals and have assigned to the federal government functions that fall within the expertise, jurisdiction, and constitutional responsibilities of state and local governments. With a drastically smaller budget and a failed history, COPS is desperately in search of a new mission. Congress should reject efforts to beef up the program and instead should eliminate it entirely.

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17. David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D., and Erica Little, “Federal Law Enforcement Grants and Crime Rates: No Connection Except for Waste and Abuse,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2015, March 14, 2007, at [www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/bg2015.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/bg2015.cfm).