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**Author(s):                 Christopher K. Koper ; Gretchen E. Moore ; Jeffrey A. Roth**

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# Putting 100,000 Officers on the Street: A Survey-Based Assessment of the Federal COPS Program

Christopher S. Koper, Jerry Lee Center of  
Criminology, University of Pennsylvania

Gretchen E. Moore, The Urban Institute

Jeffrey A. Roth, Jerry Lee Center of Criminology,  
University of Pennsylvania

*Prepared for:*  
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**URBAN INSTITUTE**  
Justice Policy Center

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## **Abstract**

Passed in 1994, the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program was intended to promote community policing and add 100,000 officers to the nation's communities through grants for hiring officers and civilians and acquiring technology. As part of a larger, multi-year study of COPS, this paper examines the progress of COPS towards the latter goal using results from a telephone survey conducted with a nationally representative sample of police agencies in the summer of 2000. Results suggest that grantees will keep most hiring and civilian positions after their grants expire and that productivity gains from technology grants, while variable, will be close on average to those forecast when the grants were awarded. Overall, we estimate that COPS will add 98,000 officers to the nation's communities on a temporary basis between 1994 and 2005, within a likely range of 93,400 to 102,700 officers. However, these officers will not all be available for service at any one point in time. After post-grant attrition of officer and civilian positions, we estimate that the permanent, or at least indefinite, impact of COPS post-2005 will be 82,000 officers, within a likely range of 69,100 to 92,200 officers. New officers will account for 60%-65% of the temporary COPS effect and 55%-60% of the permanent COPS effect, while productivity increases (measured in officer equivalents) stemming from technology grants and, to a lesser extent, civilian grants will account for the remainder.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the most ambitious crime control policies of recent years has been the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program. Passed as part of the *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994* (i.e., the 1994 Crime Act), a primary goal of the COPS program has been to add 100,000 police officers to the nation's communities through grants for the hiring of officers and civilians and the acquisition of technology. This paper presents results from the final wave of a multi-year process evaluation of the implementation of COPS (for overviews of earlier results, see Roth and Ryan 2000a,b). Based on telephone interviews conducted in the summer of 2000 with a nationally representative sample of police agencies, we examine the short and long-term effects of COPS on levels of policing in the United States. More specifically, we investigate two key issues. First, how many officers has COPS added to America's police agencies? Second, how much of this increase has been short-term and how much will continue on a permanent, or at least indefinite, basis after the expiration of COPS grants?<sup>1</sup>

In the subsequent sections of the report, we first describe the COPS program and the findings from earlier waves of this evaluation. We then present updated estimates of the impact of COPS on policing levels in America based on the year 2000 data. We conclude by discussing remaining questions and avenues for further inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> Another major objective of COPS has been to encourage the adoption of community policing by American police agencies. A separate report is forthcoming on the impact of COPS on styles of policing in America.

## 2. THE COPS PROGRAM

Title I of the 1994 Crime Act allocated nearly \$9 billion dollars to the COPS program. In fulfillment of a campaign promise made by President Bill Clinton, one of the primary goals of this legislation was to increase the level of policing in the United States by 100,000 officers through grants to state and local law enforcement agencies. Federal authorities sought to achieve this goal through two means.

The first was a series of grant programs for hiring new officers. These grants have generally funded up to 75% of the salary and fringe benefits of new officers for 3 years. At the outset of the COPS program, grants were awarded on the condition that grantees make a “good faith” effort to retain COPS-funded officers after the expiration of the grants.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in April 1998, applicants were required to submit a written retention plan with their applications. Finally, in August 1998, program administrators in the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office), the agency responsible for administering the COPS program, developed a more specific criterion for the retention requirement by requiring grantees to retain COPS officers for at least one full budget cycle after the one in which the grant expires.

COPS-funded positions are meant to supplement, and not supplant, preexisting officer positions. In other words, a grantee is not to use COPS funds to replace local funds the grantee would have otherwise used for law enforcement. For instance, grantees should not use COPS funds to replace losses from normal year-to-year attrition. Nor should grantees cut existing positions to retain COPS-funded officers. To illustrate, if an agency with a budgeted force of 100 officers receives a COPS grant for 5 officers, then the agency is expected to maintain a force of 105 officers for the life of the 3 year grant plus one full budget cycle (which will generally be 1 year) following the budget cycle in which the grant expires. If, for example, the agency loses three officers after receiving the grant, the COPS Office expects the agency to replace those officers as well as retain the 5 COPS officers for the required period.

The second means by which COPS has sought to increase police strength is the Making Officer Redeployment Effective (MORE) program. MORE grants provide funds for grantees to hire civilians and purchase technology. The rationale for these grants is that utilization of new technologies and greater use of civilian support staff will increase the productivity of existing officers, permitting them to spend more time in the field. Grantee agencies can thereby increase the presence of officers in the field without actually hiring new officers. During its first year, MORE also provided funding for officer overtime.

MORE grantees have utilized COPS funding to acquire a variety of technologies, most commonly mobile computers for installation in cars and desktop computers for general and administrative purposes (Roth et al. 2000). Grantees have also used MORE funds to obtain automated booking/arrest systems, telephone reporting systems, computer aided dispatch systems, and miscellaneous technologies like geographic mapping systems. Civilian employees hired with MORE funds have served as, among other things, administrative/clerical workers,

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<sup>2</sup> Applicants were also required to match the COPS funds with at least 25% of program costs and to submit acceptable strategies for implementing community policing in their jurisdictions.

dispatchers, property room managers, specialists (e.g., crime analysts, grant managers), and community policing workers (e.g., volunteer coordinators, social workers).

Redeployed time that officers spend in the field as a result of MORE grants is counted in terms of full time officer equivalents (FTEs). Each FTE is equivalent to 1,824 hours, which is the federal estimate of the average time that a police officer works each year, exclusive of overtime. Hence, every 1,824 hours of officer time an agency saves each year through MORE funding is counted as the equivalent of having another officer on the force.

In some instances, counting time saved is a relatively straightforward calculation. For instance, a civilian may take over administrative duties performed by a uniformed officer so that the officer can be redeployed to fieldwork, resulting in a one-to-one FTE calculation. In other instances, counting time saved from MORE grants is more complex. This may occur with civilian or technology grants, but it is particularly true for technology awards. To illustrate how time saved from a technology grant might be calculated, consider a hypothetical example in which an agency purchases laptop computers and report writing software to reduce the amount of time that officers spend writing reports. If the agency's officers write 28,763 reports per year and the technology is estimated to save officers 20 minutes per report, then the grant will save 575,260 minutes, or 9,587 hours, per year. Under the federal formula, this amounts to  $9,587 / 1,824 = 5.3$  FTEs of time saved per year, which is assumed to be devoted to community policing.<sup>3</sup>

However, neither grantees nor the COPS Office has had much data to guide projections of time saved. Since approximately the second year of MORE (1996), the COPS Office has based counts of awarded FTEs on the number of officers that grantees could hire for the same amount of federal grant money. Accordingly, MORE applicants must show – or, perhaps more accurately, project on plausible grounds – that they can achieve productivity increases with their MORE grants that will match or exceed (in FTEs) the number of officers that they could hire with the same funding.

The first COPS hiring grants were awarded following the passage of the Crime Act in late 1994. The COPS Office began awarding MORE grants in 1995. In May 1999, the White House announced that COPS had reached the milestone of funding 100,000 officers. Approximately 60% of the first 100,000 officers had been funded through hiring grants, while the remaining 40% were FTEs funded with MORE awards (Koper and Roth 2000).

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<sup>3</sup> This example was taken from instructional training materials provided by the COPS Office.

### 3. THE NATIONAL COPS EVALUATION: PRIOR RESULTS

In 1995, the National Institute of Justice awarded a grant to the Urban Institute to study the impact of COPS on policing in America. The study, which has employed nationwide telephone surveys, site visits, and case studies, has focused largely on discerning COPS' effects on the level and style of policing. At the heart of the evaluation has been a series of telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of police agencies, stratified by agency size and COPS program status (including both COPS grantees and agencies without COPS grants). Nearly 1,500 agencies were interviewed in the first wave of the survey in the fall of 1996. Subsequent surveys were conducted with subsets of these agencies (as well as some newly sampled agencies) in 1997 and 1998. A series of prior reports presented results based on data gathered through 1998 (for summaries, see Roth and Ryan 2000a,b). In the synopsis below, we focus on prior results pertaining to the effect of COPS on levels of policing.

Relying primarily upon 1998 survey results, supplemented by some national time series analysis of police employment data, Koper and Roth (2000) estimated the impact of COPS on levels of policing through 1998 and made preliminary projections of the eventual impact of all COPS awards made through May 1999, the point at which the White House announced that 100,000 officers had been funded, including both the officers funded with hiring grants and the MORE-funded productivity increases. Koper and Roth projected that COPS hiring grants had added between 36,300 and 37,500 officers to the nation's police forces by the end of 1998 and that MORE grants had resulted in the redeployment of an additional 9,100 to 10,900 FTEs to field duties.

In projecting longer-term effects, the most important issues are whether grantees will retain COPS-funded officer and civilian positions after their grants expire and they are no longer obligated to keep the positions (post-grant retention of officer and civilian positions are governed by the same guidelines) and whether MORE grantees will achieve their full projected productivity increases after they have implemented all new technology.

Koper and Roth estimated that grantees would retain 64 to 91 officer positions for every 100 awarded. Other positions would be cut or retained only through cuts in non-COPS positions in the agencies. However, very few hiring grantees had expired grants at the time of the 1998 survey; consequently, these estimates were based on agencies' expectations rather than their experiences. Further, post-grant retention requirements were still somewhat vague during most of the survey period (summer of 1998). Finally, Koper and Roth had to make assumptions about the number of positions likely to be cut by agencies expecting to lose COPS positions.

With respect to MORE grants, Koper and Roth projected that grantees would eventually increase productivity by 58 to 72 FTEs for every 100 FTEs awarded. Hence, it appeared that agencies would fail to achieve all of their projected productivity gains. Indeed, Roth et al. (2000) illuminated many of the difficulties that MORE agencies were experiencing with technology implementation, as well as the uncertainties involved in projecting time saved. Moreover, the lower bound estimate of 58 FTEs redeployed for every 100 awarded was based on agencies having more experience with MORE implementation, suggesting that the lower bound



























































