

CONVERSATIONS *with* Rural Law Enforcement Leaders VOLUME 1



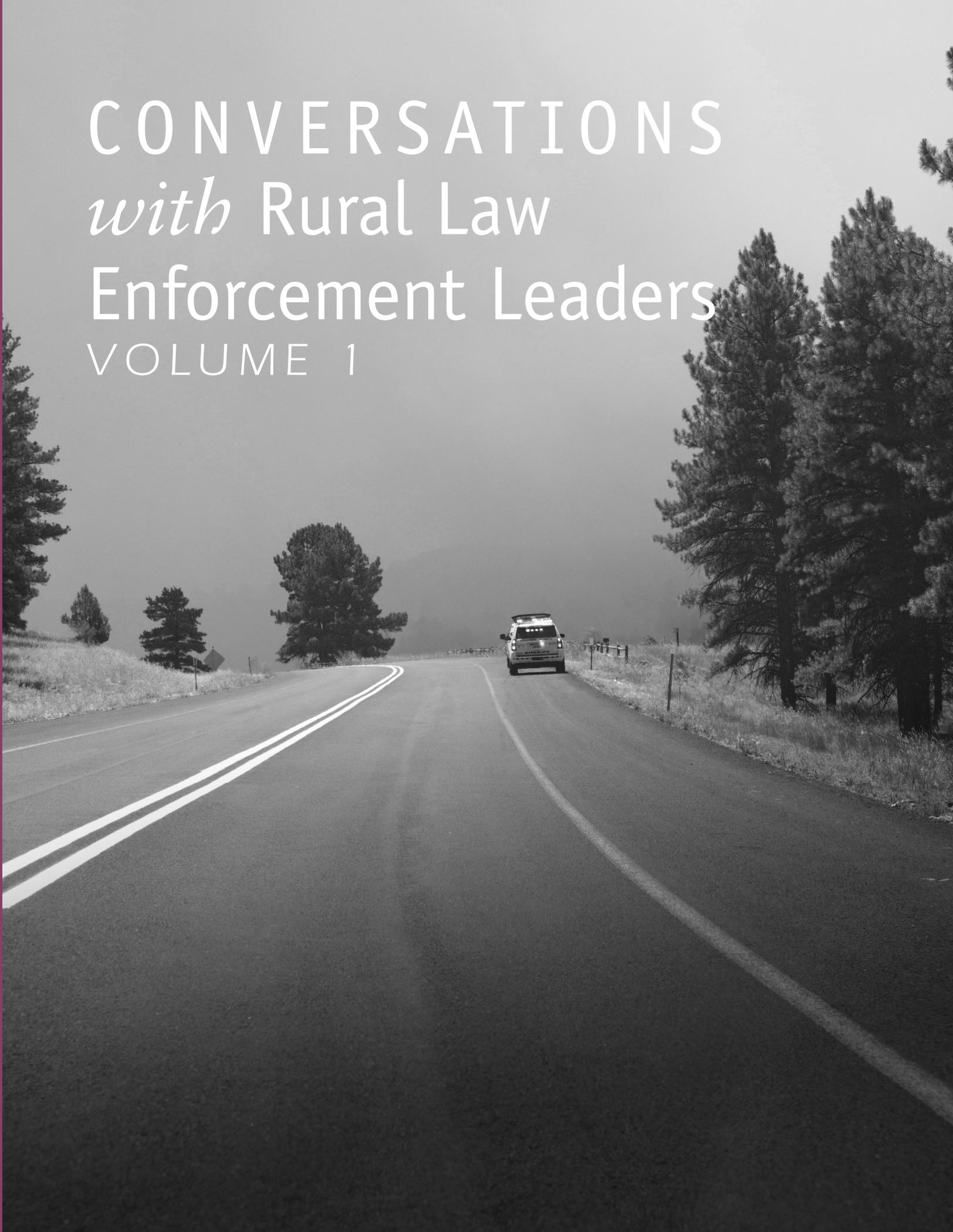
COPS
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CONVERSATIONS
with Rural Law
Enforcement Leaders
VOLUME 1



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Letter from the Directors of the COPS Office and the Bureau of Justice Assistance

Colleagues:

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

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

This publication, *Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders*, summarizes the key topics, areas of focus, and needs raised by rural law enforcement leaders in South Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, Iowa, and Montana.

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

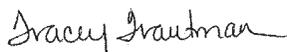
Sincerely



Phil Keith

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services



Tracey Trautman

Acting Director

Bureau of Justice Assistance



Introduction

Overview of rural law enforcement in the United States

Rural areas¹ make up 72 percent of the United States' land area, and are home to 46 million people.² Though more economically diverse than in the past, rural areas are still responsible for the majority of production in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and forestry.³ Declining job opportunities in these sectors have led to lack of employment and increasing poverty in many rural communities—as well as a shrinking tax base to support service providers. As a result, many rural public safety and public health professionals face staffing shortages, while existing staff are responsible for large geographic areas. Many are also challenged by lack of training and the need to wear multiple hats.⁴

While rural law enforcement agencies are spread thin, the violent crime rate in rural areas is rising, climbing above the national average in 2018 for the first time in 10 years.⁵ Illicit drug use has also risen in rural areas, bringing its own associated crimes.⁶ And of course, sparsely populated regions have always faced their own unique crime and disorder challenges.

But despite their increasing crime rates, smaller rural agencies are sometimes left out of the conversation regarding contemporary law enforcement needs and challenges.

Purpose of the project

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

1. The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas—"urbanized areas" with populations of 50,000 or more and "urban clusters" with populations of between 2,500 and 50,000 persons—and defines as rural "all population, housing, and territory not included" within such areas. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) categorizes entire counties as either rural or as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area containing "at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties."
2. Sonny Perdue, *Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 2017), <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-prosperity-report.pdf>.
3. Perdue, *Report to the President* (see note 1).
4. Perdue, *Report to the President* (see note 1).
5. Alan Greenblatt, "In Rural America, Violent Crime Reaches Highest Level in a Decade," *Governing*, July 2018, <https://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-crime-rural-urban-cities.html>.
6. Shibani Mahtani, "'Nothing but You and the Cows and the Sirens' – Crime Tests Sheriffs Who Police Small Towns; Drugs and Associated Violence Strain Rural Law Enforcement," May 12, 2018, *Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nothing-but-you-and-the-cows-and-the-sirens-crime-tests-small-town-sheriffs-1526122800>.

including federal grant funding opportunities, online resources, and training and technical assistance programs—to support rural law enforcement. The COPS Office also provided specialized on-site technical assistance during each of the meetings.

Methodology

The National Police Foundation (NPF)—through funding from the COPS Office—worked with the COPS Office, BJA, and the U.S. Attorney’s Offices to coordinate and carry out five listening sessions during the first phase. The five sessions were held in Deadwood, South Dakota; Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; Salt Lake City, Utah; Atlantic, Iowa; and Missoula, Montana.

The NPF team collected field notes from each of the conversations and organized them by topic area. (See appendix A for the notes from each meeting.)

Overview of key topic area

Insufficient funding was an overarching topic of all five sessions. Law enforcement leaders in each session explained how the lack of state and local funding impacted every aspect of their agencies and their ability to keep pace with community needs and safety. These leaders related how funding has impacted their ability to hire and retain the staffing levels required for their vast jurisdictions. Funding levels have also contributed to shortages of traditional law enforcement technology and equipment and have exacerbated jail overcrowding. Many of the chief executives noted that where federal funding and resources are available, finding and navigating the application and reporting requirements hampers smaller and rural agencies from applying. Application length, administrative requirements, competitiveness, and restrictions on grant funding use similarly dissuade rural agencies from seeking funds. Both COPS Office Director Keith and executives from BJA and the Office of Justice Programs spoke about the challenges of seeking federal funding during the meetings, reporting that many of these grant processes have been simplified and streamlined.

Lack of funds is a self-reinforcing problem: When rural communities cannot afford to counter the emergence of illicit drugs and provide adequate substance abuse, mental health, and homelessness services, these problems persist and worsen, further straining resources. Insufficient funding has prevented some rural law enforcement agencies from participating in local and regional task forces that could impact drug trafficking. The “revolving door” dynamic, where the same persons with substance use disorders are processed and reprocessed, consuming officer or deputies’ time with seemingly no meaningful outcome, was raised repeatedly by law enforcement executives who serve communities where addiction is considered a law enforcement issue because there are insufficient resources to treat it as a community health issue. Rural law enforcement leaders also reported anecdotal evidence of the increases in drug use and sales contributing to similar increases in crimes such as burglaries and thefts and exacerbating issues such as homelessness and behavioral health crises.

Even apart from the local impact of drug use and trafficking, the lack of funding to allocate personnel or resources to participate in task forces significantly hampers rural law enforcement's interactions with tribal communities and law enforcement agencies located within their areas of responsibility. This presents significant challenges to developing and maintaining relationships with local, state, tribal, and federal stakeholders.

Discussion of Key Topics, Areas of Focus, and Needs

Law enforcement resources

Many law enforcement leaders at all listening sessions identified significant challenges stemming from their lack of resources. Limited staffing, jail space, technology, and equipment have hampered rural law enforcement agencies' attempts to address unique challenges, reduce crime, and create safer communities. While federal resources have been available, difficulties in identifying and accessing them have dissuaded at least some rural agencies from applying.

Staffing and personnel

Many of the rural law enforcement leaders identified staffing shortages as the most significant issue facing their agency. Approximately 88.3 percent of the 12,326 local police departments in the United States have fewer than 50 sworn officers and approximately 93.7 percent of local police departments serve a population of less than 50,000.⁷ The significant majority of rural law enforcement agencies fit into both of these categories, and are even more likely to be among the approximately 47.8 percent of local police departments with fewer than 10 sworn officers.⁸ When coupled with large geographic areas of responsibility, overlaps with tribal or federal property, and the general challenges associated with providing competitive compensation, rural law enforcement agencies experience significant shortages in staffing and difficulties recruiting and retaining personnel.

Staffing shortages

Many rural law enforcement agencies have fewer sworn personnel than needed to adequately cover their jurisdictions, making it difficult to cover calls-for-service and other public safety needs in their jurisdictions. Recent data shows that the population of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, rose by 21.4 percent from 2010 to 2019, yet the number of officers on duty rose by only 13.5 percent during the same time period.⁹ Additionally, more than 30 South Dakota sheriff's offices have four deputies or fewer, and approximately 20 South Dakota cities have only one or two officers.¹⁰ One listening session attendee in South Dakota said they had heard about a National Sheriffs' Association study that determined a sheriff's office needs three full-time employees, but said that their agency has not been able to meet that number or to increase staffing as the local crime rate has risen.

7. Brian A. Reaves, *Local Police Departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, and Practices* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, May 2015), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd13ppp.pdf>.

8. Reaves, *Local Police Departments, 2013* (see note 7).

9. Bart Pfankuch, "Police Agencies in South Dakota Struggle to Recruit, Retain Officers," April 14, 2019, *Argus Leader*, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/crime/2019/04/14/police-agencies-south-dakota-struggle-recruit-retain-officers/3465808002/>.

10. Pfankuch, "Police Agencies in South Dakota" (see note 9).

Staffing shortages also impede officers' ability to engage in proactive community policing activities, efficiently respond to calls-for-service, and keep proficient in training and tactics that can keep officers and their community safe. One Oklahoma police chief noted that staffing challenges have prevented their officers from being able to proactively dedicate time to community engagement activities or spend the time needed to respond to each call effectively. Many rural agencies struggle to be able to backfill shifts so that personnel can attend in-person trainings, and even struggle to find the time for officers to participate in virtual trainings.

“No matter how proactive we want to be, none of us in this room have the staffing to do anything but be reactive.”

– South Dakota sheriff

Drugs in Rural Communities

Illegal drug use and other drug-related issues have challenged rural law enforcement, straining agencies' staffing, jail capacity, and other resources. One law enforcement leader in South Dakota shared that approximately 70 percent of the bookings in their county were for drug-related issues. Other forum attendees described the challenges of dealing with complex addiction issues and treatment needs, despite their limited training and lack of equipment for responding to overdoses.

Without funding and support to disrupt the flow of drugs into their communities, these agencies have not been able to make an impact on drug use and the associated crime problems—or to respond to the community's other needs. Some rural agencies have tried to fill this gap by reorganizing or reprioritizing units within their agencies to focus on drug interdiction and targeted enforcement efforts, but staffing and other resources remain a challenge. Some leaders noted that even where regional drug task forces have been created, their agencies do not have the staff numbers to allow for participation. Another chief executive noted that at one point there was only one K9 deputy in the northern area of their state, and that while there are more now, there are still not enough to meet the needs of the region.

One result of short-staffed law enforcement agencies is excessive pressure and risk placed on officers and deputies when they are on duty. Staffing shortages are an officer safety issue: Requiring officers and deputies to work overtime in stressful situations contributes to fatigue and sleep deprivation, increasing the risk of on-the-job accidents and injuries and other personal and professional challenges.¹¹ A police chief in Oklahoma cautioned that their officers are under constant stress to clear calls quickly—and must do so knowing they likely will not have backup—and are frequently placed in situations where their decisions and actions can be second-guessed and questioned.

Officer recruitment and retention

Staffing shortages are exacerbated by recruitment and retention issues. Although law enforcement agencies of all sizes nationwide are struggling to recruit and retain qualified and effective sworn personnel, these issues pose a particular challenge for rural agencies. Listening session participants attributed the decline in applicants and recruits to the combination of low pay and benefits, the stresses and dangers of the job, the length of time from application to hiring, increased training and certifica-

11. “Impact of Sleep Deprivation on Police Performance,” Office of Justice Programs, last updated January 5, 2009, <https://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/stress-fatigue/Pages/impact.aspx>.

tion requirements, and a general negative perception nationally associated with being a law enforcement officer. Larger jurisdictions are also often able to offset some of these issues with higher beginning salaries and incentives for higher education, which some small and rural agencies are unable to match.

Several participants also noted that recruitment and retention issues can quickly become entrenched. Iowa participants explained how their inability to recruit new officers had increased the amount of overtime required of current personnel; this increased workload is not only unsustainable over the long term, it also discourages new applicants and drives down retention. Participants reported that their agencies commonly require 12-hour or longer shifts, and expect officers and deputies to be on-call regularly when not officially on duty. This is also not conducive to retaining officers and deputies who have the experience to file for lateral transfers to larger agencies where they are likely to make more money and have more balanced schedules.

Jail overcrowding

The “revolving door” of the criminal justice system overburdens sheriffs’ agencies in rural jurisdictions by contributing to the overcrowding of their jail facilities, many of which are old, outdated, in disrepair, and not centrally located. Many rural sheriffs reported that arrests of individuals with drug and mental health issues have exceeded the capacities of their local jail facilities. A sheriff in Oklahoma explained that after a focused anti-drug initiative was conducted, the county jail did not have enough space for all individuals who had been arrested. In another Oklahoma sheriff’s jurisdiction, the grand jury is only convened once a month and jury dockets are scheduled twice-per-year, leaving sheriffs to deal with the strains on their jail space as individuals await trial. In Montana, the recent increases in substance use and arrests for violent crimes in rural communities have also contributed to significant backlogs in state and federal crime labs, resulting in longer periods of pretrial detention. Even after individuals are sentenced, the overcrowding in state and local institutions impacts where those convicted can serve their sentences.

Many attendees reported that neighboring jurisdictions were also experiencing jail overcrowding, and that individuals experiencing homelessness, substance use disorder, and mental illness make up a large number of those incarcerated. In Montana, law enforcement leaders reported that local prosecutors are

Pay and Benefits

Rural law enforcement agencies struggle to provide starting and longer-term salaries that can compete with more urban jurisdictions. The entry-level salary for most law enforcement agencies in South Dakota is approximately \$40,000 to \$48,000 per year, but small and rural agencies are less likely to be able to match the higher end of the scale or offer pay increases over time. In addition to lower salaries, one rural law enforcement leader in South Dakota suggested that some rural jurisdictions in the state lack the housing, entertainment and commerce options, and sense of community to entice potential recruits, leaving them inclined to select more urban jurisdictions. Law enforcement executives also noted that officers and deputies in larger agencies generally have a regular duty assignment in a specific unit or area. In contrast, in rural agencies, officers are afforded less flexibility for regular work schedules, professional development and career advancement, and other benefits associated with retention. During the convening in Montana, a rural chief executive explained that they had just finished 13 consecutive days of 24-hour shifts because there were times when nobody else was available or the only other deputy available was involved in a significant response.

Sources: South Dakota listening session, April 23, 2019; Bart Pfankuch, “Police agencies in South Dakota struggle to recruit, retain officers,” April 14, 2019, Argus Leader, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/crime/2019/04/14/police-agencies-south-dakota-struggle-recruit-retain-officers/3465808002/>; Montana listening session, June 18, 2019.

Geographic Coverage

In some cases, jail overcrowding means that prisoners serve their sentence at the first available bed, which may be hundreds of miles away, not only impacting local family members' ability to visit but also straining law enforcement. A sheriff in South Dakota described some cases where deputies had to drive approximately 360 miles roundtrip to transport an inmate to the closest available facility, leaving only two other deputies to cover the entire county. A second attendee at the South Dakota session expressed concern that if the nearest facility to their agency were closed, the next-closest one would be more than 400 miles away.

opting to release people on community supervision or to not press charges, often leading to a recurring cycle of detention or arrest and release when the underlying issues leading to the arrest are not addressed.

Technology and equipment

While many rural agencies lack the technological and equipment resources that larger agencies take for granted, many of them have become accustomed to providing law enforcement services with what they have. These agencies' leaders' main request was not for equipment or funding, but for more staff and vehicles. The extensive mileage driven by rural law enforcement daily requires that cars be repaired and replaced much more frequently than in urban jurisdictions. Some agency leaders also shared that limited budgets for technology did not necessarily stop them from accessing these items when needed. For example, attendees from South Dakota noted that within interdiction teams, technology and equipment was often shared by the team members and that equipment and technology needs were often met through seizure funds or through partnerships with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

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“[We are] so used to getting by with what we have and keeping shoestring budgets that making a wish list is hard for us.”

– South Dakota chief executive

Those leaders who were able to identify technology that would have a significant impact on their agency's operations all focused on mobile data terminals or mobile data computers, which would greatly enhance officers' and deputies' ability to document encounters and communicate with their departments on patrol, even from hundreds of miles away.

A law enforcement executive from Oklahoma brought up another technology that offers significant promise for rural agencies: Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS). The attendee noted that sUAS technology is affordable and can be used to help bridge the coverage gap caused by limited staff and vast jurisdictional geography.¹² They also reported having had training in sUAS operation, as well as experience using it for search and rescue, tactical surveillance, and locating stolen property. Attendees from other agencies in Oklahoma and Montana that had sUAS technology also related positive experiences with the technology, noting that it helped them with their staffing issues.

12. Maria Valdovinos, James Specht, and Jennifer Zeunik, *Community Policing and Unmanned Aircraft Systems: Guidelines to Enhance Community Trust* (Washington DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0822>.

One of the primary factors preventing rural agencies from purchasing technology and equipment is the cumulative cost; that is, not just the purchase price but also the storage and maintenance costs. For example, Iowa attendees readily noted that these costs were a concern for body-worn cameras (BWC), and in the Oklahoma session, at least one department shared that they had had to discontinue their BWC program because of the data retention costs. Another area where technology presents as a challenge for rural law enforcement is in cybercrime, which is increasingly becoming a problem. Attendees from Utah reported that they have limited capability to investigate and prevent computer-aided crimes. Participants in Iowa similarly identified a need for forensic equipment to support investigation of electronic crimes, noting that while grants might cover some of the initial costs, cellphone unlocking and extraction software can cost thousands of dollars more for upgrades and fees.

Federal funding and resources

Law enforcement agencies from South Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, Iowa, and Montana applied for a total of 577 grants from the COPS Office between 2012 and 2018. Of those applications, approximately 32 percent were approved, resulting in more than \$61.8 million in funding for state administering agencies (SAAs) and law enforcement agencies throughout the states. Despite this funding, leaders of small rural agencies reported still being acutely affected by the staffing shortages and resource needs that grant funding is intended to alleviate. Rural law enforcement leaders at the meetings raised a series of concerns about federal funding—primarily, that the resources needed to identify, apply for, and comply with federal grants and their requirements are the very resources that small and rural agencies lack.

“Most of us, we don’t have the manpower or grant writers on board that have the time. . . You have to almost write a novel to justify your need when the need is already known.”

– Oklahoma sheriff

Finding and navigating available resources

Participants explained that while federal agencies provide summaries and descriptions of available funding and opportunities, they do not provide adequate information about where and how agencies can access them. While the places federal agencies post grant opportunities and application information may seem intuitive to federal employees and to agencies that traditionally receive funding, they can be difficult to find for agencies that do not regularly receive funding and do not have personnel with development experience to identify and apply for grants. Rural leaders also perceived a lack of coordination between federal funding components, further complicating the identification of available funding opportunities.

Besides struggling to identify funding opportunities, participants described being overwhelmed at the requirements just to be eligible to apply for grants. The process agencies must complete prior to applying for federal grants—obtaining a valid originating agency identifier (ORI) number from the COPS Office; then getting a Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number; then ensuring active registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) database, which is also required to be updated or renewed on an annual basis; and, lastly, registering on grants.gov and completing the SF-424 form— can take significant time for small agencies. Some agency leaders explained that although they would be interested in applying for numerous federal grants, the separate processes for each of these components made applying very difficult for them. One Montana law enforcement executive noted that while many grants are available for state agencies, including SAAs, there are fewer grants available directly to local jurisdictions, particularly small and rural ones. Multiple attendees noted that working with SAAs can be time-consuming and difficult.

Application length, requirements, and competitiveness

Participants also noted that federal grant applications are too long and complicated for many smaller and rural agencies facing staffing shortages. A participant from Iowa estimated that completing a single application could take approximately 40 hours for one person. Additionally, since some applications are more attractive when they include letters of support from elected officials and potential partners, attendees said that the time spent getting these additional materials can further complicate the process for agencies and discourage them from applying.

Some participants also said that the competitiveness of some federal grants has dissuaded them from applying. These participants believed that larger agencies have an advantage in pursuing federal solicitations because they can either hire dedicated grant-writing staff or contract grant writers during the time when most federal grants are released. One participant in Oklahoma noted that their department was lucky to have an officer who is good at grant writing and has been successful at obtaining a couple of grants, but was cautious to note that without this individual their agency would not be able to apply for grants. In addition to having grant writers, some rural law enforcement executives perceived that larger agencies are more likely to receive competitive federal funding because they have higher numbers of violent crimes and job vacancies than smaller and rural agencies and have experience with previous grants.

Additionally, some federal grants require agencies that receive awards provide either financial or in-kind matches, as well as other requirements that limit small and rural agencies from applying. For example, the Bulletproof Vest Program (BVP) provides funding for law enforcement agencies to purchase bulletproof vests. An executive in Oklahoma, however, explained that while they would love to obtain grant funding to purchase bulletproof vests, they are unable to meet the 50 percent match requirement, and there are prohibitions against using other federal funds as the 50 percent match for the BVP vests. Additionally, the BVP vests can only be purchased for sworn, full-time personnel, while the agency needed vests for reserve officers as well. Jurisdictions receiving funding for the reimbursement of body armor purchases are also required to have a “uniquely fitted armor vest requirement” and a written “mandatory wear” policy prior to submitting their applications, which some rural law enforcement leaders found cumbersome for their agencies.¹³

13. Bulletproof Vest Partnership, Office of Justice Programs, accessed August 21, 2019, <https://ojp.gov/bvpbasi/>.

Restrictions on funding uses

Concerns with restrictions on the use of federal funding have also dissuaded rural law enforcement agencies from applying for grants. In South Dakota, a participant shared that their agency was able to fund civilian positions through the School Violence Prevention Program, but their need was for sworn personnel that could serve as school resource officers when school is in session and regular patrol officers the rest of the time. Likewise, rural sheriff's department executives in South Dakota and Montana shared that while they appreciate the funding the COPS Office's hiring program provides for law enforcement officers, the inability to use the funding for hiring correctional officers prevented them from applying. Also in South Dakota, one department leader explained that because their K9 grant required a committed officer that had completed K9 training, once that officer moved to a different agency, the department was forced to end its K9 program. Additionally, rural chief executives indicated that the limitation on using COPS Office hiring funds to support pre-existing positions—since the program only provides funding for the initial hiring of personnel and the first three years of their employment—inhibits rural agencies from applying.

In addition to restrictions on personnel, rural law enforcement executives are also impeded by the limitations on using grant funding for new construction, renovations, and equipment purchases. Rural law enforcement executives in Montana, for instance, expressed frustration that the COPS Office and BJA do not provide funding for agencies who need to build new stations or corrections facilities or make renovations to provide treatment wings or areas that could provide services to persons who are incarcerated. Some agency executives in Oklahoma noted that they are unable to use federal funding to purchase BWCs because the costs of video storage and IT resources to complement the new equipment cannot be covered with grant funding.

Administration, management, and reporting requirements

Federal grants have ongoing administrative, management, and reporting requirements that rural law enforcement leaders find difficult and cumbersome to keep up with. Because the requirements are part of the conditions of receiving federal funding, these leaders explained that they would simply rather not apply for grants than have to allocate the resources needed to conduct the administration, management, and reporting associated with federal grants. For example, participants in Montana indicated that

Funding Sustainability

Sustainability requirements associated with certain funding opportunities may unintentionally limit rural agencies from applying. The COPS Office Hiring Program (CHP)—a solicitation for state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies with primary law enforcement authority to increase the total number of sworn officer positions that would not have existed if not for the award—funds sworn officer positions for three years. However, since the CHP has a three-year funding limit, with no option to reapply or apply for continuation funding, chief executives at the listening sessions said that they cannot guarantee the continuation of grant-funded positions—and perceived that they had lost points on the application for failing to demonstrate the sustainability of the position. Representatives in Iowa and Montana said that city and county councils are often reluctant to fund these positions after federal grants have run out, leaving them unable to apply for those hiring grants because of sustainability concerns. Similarly, participants in Oklahoma explained that it can take longer than the three years of the grant for local legislators to see the benefit associated with spending more on law enforcement and create the funding streams to support it.

Source: COPS Hiring Program (CHP), COPS Office, accessed August 21, 2019, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/chp>.

tribal agencies often do not have the capacity to manage grants. Other Montana participants highlighted seemingly nonsensical reporting requirements, noting that many of the quarterly reporting questions required by federal grants are not applicable to them. This frustrates staff who are not sure how to answer required questions.

Funding needs

Since small and rural agencies often need to compete for funding against larger agencies with more staffing capacity and in-house grant expertise, greater access to grants and easier application processes would help these agencies to pursue these opportunities. With this in mind, the COPS Office and BJA have already begun to reevaluate and develop grant application categories that consider agency size and will allocate bonus points and dedicated funds to small and rural agencies. Similarly, the COPS Office and BJA have begun to streamline grant application processes to make them less arduous for agencies to complete, while still asking for all important and necessary information.

Participants repeatedly identified the need for longer funding cycles or opportunities to apply for continuation funding. They also asked for fewer restrictions on potential uses of funding, such as the ability to use hiring grants to hire non-sworn officers or corrections officers. Fewer administrative, management, and reporting requirements would help to alleviate the burden on already understaffed agencies. Additional training and technical assistance opportunities would be valuable in other areas like juvenile justice, school active shooter training and response, and executive leadership, among others.

Acute Challenges

Chief executives at the listening sessions reported that their agencies and communities face serious challenges related to substance use, mental illness, and homelessness. Rural communities lack the funding for effective approaches to these problems, which cause further strain on resources when they go unaddressed.

Illicit drugs

A major common theme arising from all five listening sessions was the effect of illegal drug use and trafficking and associated violence on small and rural communities. The current opioid epidemic has disproportionately impacted small and rural communities. Other small and rural agencies are overwhelmed with methamphetamines and with increases in the potency and purity of other drugs. One Iowa leader noted that the methamphetamines encountered in their community are almost 100 percent pure, while the emergence of fentanyl as an ingredient in drug mixtures has contributed to more opioid overdoses and fatalities. In addition, some agencies are grappling with authorities' reluctance to prosecute marijuana-related crimes, including illegal marijuana-growing operations and possession of amounts of marijuana in excess of medicinal or decriminalized levels, because of the general legislative acceptance of marijuana.

Despite the national focus on the opioid epidemic, some rural law enforcement chief executives reported that not a lot of support is coming to them from the state and federal governments. Participants in Iowa and Oklahoma reported a lack of state resources to address drug-related problems. Some rural law enforcement leaders described increasing problems associated with shifting priorities for federal prosecutors and with their states decriminalizing and legalizing certain amounts of marijuana. One meeting attendee in Montana explained that despite being aware of an illegal marijuana-growing operation, their agency was unable to find a state or federal prosecutor willing to press charges because of hesitation to devote resources to trying such cases. Leaders in other states reported that even cases involving methamphetamines are not being prosecuted. Some leaders also expressed concern that even if their state prosecutes a case, the sentences do not serve as a deterrent. These leaders suggested that this has emboldened criminals to continue committing crimes and has contributed to the feeling that crimes are increasing but funding and support has not.

Most agencies are also being forced to deal with repeat offenders who are released with limited consequences. According to some of the rural executives in Iowa, the manufacture, distribution, use, and negative effects of methamphetamine is taking over their communities and many children are suffering from abuse and neglect.

Task Forces and Criminal Interdiction

A number of counties have formed multijurisdictional task forces to saturate problem areas and combine limited resources to combat the spread of illegal drugs. However, many rural law enforcement agencies do not have the equipment and resources necessary to join these task forces, or to conduct interdiction or other enforcement efforts on their own, as city and county funding for personnel and resources has been substantially cut back. With fewer resources to offer to task forces, small and rural agencies have fewer opportunities to benefit from task force funding and assistance. Their inability to participate also hinders their criminal investigations, as they are unable to build the infrastructure and networking ties to foster intelligence-sharing with neighboring agencies. Building capacity to obtain, analyze, and develop actionable intelligence and the resources to act upon it is a challenge for rural agencies.

and have more resources than the law enforcement agencies trying to identify and counter them. Task forces have been a force multiplier to bring together agencies for criminal interdiction, and have had success in stemming the flow of drugs in some areas, but the cartels have adapted their strategies to avoid them.

Substance use, mental health, and homelessness services

Rural law enforcement leaders from each of the five states discussed the troubles in their communities associated with substance use, mental health, and homelessness. These issues intersect with and aggravate their agencies' resource issues, such as staffing shortages and jail overcrowding. Across multiple sessions, leaders explained that the lack of community-based resources to address mental health—including funding for in-patient treatment facilities—has resulted in increased calls for service related to persons in mental health crisis. A law enforcement leader in Oklahoma noted that a call for service involving a person in mental health crisis that results in an emergency detention order can take an officer several hours to resolve, which is particularly challenging when the department only has two officers on duty when fully-staffed.

Trafficking from the southern border

Attendees at each session attributed the emerging drug problems at least in part to illicit substances being trafficked across the southern U.S. border. Whether north and south along Interstates 9, 29, and 35, or east and west along Interstates 80 or 90, rural law enforcement leaders were able to identify the major thoroughfares in or near their jurisdictions for trafficking drugs, illicit weapons, and persons. Once across the border, rural law enforcement leaders suggested that cartel members work with local gangs to distribute their drugs and weapons, exacerbating crime problems in their communities.

Rural law enforcement leaders requested more support from the federal and state levels to identify and interdict large shipments of illicit drugs across the southern border and along the interstates. They say that law enforcement efforts at the southern border are mostly ineffective in stopping the flow of dangerous drugs and other illegal materials and activities, including human trafficking, coming from Mexico and other parts of Central and South America. These law enforcement leaders noted that cartels are much more sophisticated

Furthermore, since community agencies do not have the resources to provide treatment programs in their facilities, there are few opportunities to partner with community-based providers for treatment services. A sheriff in South Dakota suggested that their jail facility provides the most mental health services in the state, with approximately 17 percent of the incarcerated population having severe mental illness, compared to approximately four percent of the general population.¹⁴ Social service agencies in attendee's jurisdictions are equally overwhelmed due to limited resources and severe understaffing. Law enforcement officers shared that it is not uncommon in rural jurisdictions to have one social service person assigned to six counties, with response time aggravated by the expansive distances that must be traversed. In Montana, officers brought up the resources available in larger counties and more urban areas, such as drug courts, as being something that could be helpful but are currently unavailable to them.

In the meantime, the issue is largely dealt with by detention in jails, which in some jurisdictions have become the de facto holding facilities. For example, a sheriff in Utah noted that they had to house an individual with difficult mental health issues for over eight months because all six mental health beds in southern Utah were occupied, leaving no other option. Despite having an order to transport the individual to a mental health facility, the sheriff was unable to find an opening or the available funding to conduct the transport. Other sheriffs in Utah also perceived their jails as expected to operate as mental health facilities, and described the risky liability situations that their agencies and personnel—who generally have little to no training on interacting with persons in mental crisis—are placed in as a result. A similar sentiment was expressed by a law enforcement executive in Oklahoma who articulated officers' need for access to training in dealing with individuals with mental health issues. The executive suggested that some calls for service involving persons with mental health issues leave officers no option other than detaining the individual until they are no longer considered a threat to themselves or others.

14. "Mental Health by the Numbers," National Alliance on Mental Illness, last updated September 2019, <https://www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-by-the-numbers>.



Interagency Relationships

Interagency relationships are a key component of successful policing, especially for law enforcement agencies in rural areas. Since many rural agencies lack the staffing and resources needed to conduct all the enforcement and community safety services expected of agencies, partnerships and participation in local and regional task forces are force multipliers and opportunities to pool resources to purchase equipment and technology and share information. Listening session participants revealed that rural agencies tend to have good relationships with one another but can feel less positive about their relationships with state and federal law enforcement and criminal justice partners.

Relationships with federal, state, and tribal partners

Rural agency executives at each of the sessions highlighted challenges partnering with, and receiving support from, state and federal stakeholders. Some rural agency leaders expressed that they have not felt supported by law enforcement, legislators, and prosecutors at the state level. These leaders said that state agencies have been hesitant to get involved in collaborative operations because of issues with ongoing lawsuits involving task forces, asset forfeitures, and seizures. Other local leaders perceived that federal participants in task forces expect information to be shared with them, but are hesitant to share information and intelligence back with the task force member agencies. This has hampered some rural agencies from allocating personnel and other resources to task forces, particularly those focused on drug interdiction and human trafficking.

Some rural leaders suggested that there is minimal interest on the part of federal law enforcement agencies—primarily from the DEA; Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)—to partner with small and rural agencies, and a general lack of federal attention to crime issues in rural communities. For example, rural law enforcement leaders in South Dakota and Oklahoma believed that the focus of DEA agents has been on interdicting drugs and weapons from the southern border and large cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, and that FBI agents have been similarly focused on supporting violent crime initiatives in large cities, at the expense of rural communities. One rural law enforcement executive in Montana provided an example of an instance where local Customs and Border Protection agents would not provide assistance on task force arrests and warrant services in the area because they did not have the operation order they needed from the federal government, forcing the local task force to delay their operations.

Geographic distance has created some challenges for building stronger partnerships between agencies. Some rural agencies in Iowa have been unable to identify federal agents who are willing to live and work in their areas; attendees said the lack of resident agents in the western part of the state makes it difficult to pursue federal prosecutions. There is generally no regular full-time federal law enforcement support for these rural areas, because federal stakeholders have to travel hundreds of miles. Participants in Utah explained how this distance complicates joint investigations, because rural agencies have to expend additional resources to build a case that federal partners would be enticed to join. Therefore, some federal crimes are not prosecuted at the federal level, frustrating rural agencies.

In addition to the challenges caused by distance and perceived lack of attention, some rural law enforcement leaders indicated that they do not feel state and federal government stakeholders contribute enough funding for protection of state and national parks and forests that are part of their geographic areas but are not part of the county tax base. One attendee in Montana noted that approximately 70 percent of their county is national forest land, but the federal government does not contribute to the tax base, so the county has to fund the sheriff's office based on 30 percent of the county, even though the deputies have to travel through and respond to calls for service in the national forest. Another Montana attendee's county is primarily state land, but has the same issue. This lack of financial support hampers relationships between rural law enforcement agencies and state and federal stakeholders.

Relationships with tribes

The challenges associated with balancing financial support with expectations of responding to calls for service also affect partnerships between rural law enforcement agencies and tribal lands. Constantly changing jurisdictional lines have caused confusion for rural law enforcement and tribal leaders. Further complicating the ability to discern who has jurisdiction in some locations is the fact that state and federal highways cross many rural and tribal areas. This has affected how areas are policed and how crimes are prosecuted in some cases, and strains relationships across jurisdictions who share responsibility for these unique areas.

Some rural agency leaders also perceived that tribes receive more attention and have access to additional funding support, but rural law enforcement agencies often end up being responsible for primary issues like responding to calls for service on tribal lands with no law enforcement capacity and housing tribal members that have been incarcerated. Additionally, while housing may not require an agency to have special knowledge of tribal requirements, moving forward with a criminal case can. As cases move towards prosecution, some tribes lack detectives, which becomes another resource that rural agencies are required to provide, even though their detectives may lack the necessary knowledge of tribal codes. Rural and tribal jurisdictions lack the funding, training, and support to work together to find consistent, workable solutions to their many issues and are often forced to be solely reactive.

Furthermore, if a rural area borders a tribal area, the rural law enforcement agency will likely need to interact with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Some rural agencies have found it difficult to develop and maintain relationships with BIA agents. Attendees noted that BIA staffing has been inconsistent, with agents frequently rotating for various reasons, complicating their ability to build lasting relationships and understanding of rules and regulations. Some tribal leaders have also required BIA involvement in any arrests of members of their tribe by a non-tribal agency, which can result in delays of several hours, further straining rural law enforcement agencies and complicating partnerships with the BIA.

Conclusion

Rural law enforcement agencies, over the years, have become adept at ‘doing without,’ ensuring the safety of their communities with minimal resources. They are used to competing with other agencies for scarce county and municipal budget line items, being understaffed, losing officers and deputies to larger agencies, and serving as the catchall for challenges in the community. They are increasingly stretched beyond their limits with the seemingly constant flow of illicit gun, drug, and human trafficking and the crime associated with them. Officers are also being asked to adapt every day—to do more, cover more geography, and address more crime and calls for service than ever before. At the same time, these agencies are struggling to compete for federal dollars with larger agencies that have denser populations and higher crime numbers.

These five DOJ *Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders* listening sessions brought the needs of law enforcement agencies in predominately rural states to the forefront. While the key topics, areas of focus, and needs summarized in this report were consistent across the convenings, there were also state-specific and regional resource, technical assistance, and training needs raised during each of the listening sessions.

Providing support that adapts to the needs of our nation’s rural law enforcement, and the communities they serve, is a must. The COPS Office and BJA have already revised some of their solicitations to include increased and more diversified funding categories. They have also reduced the length and application requirements of some of their solicitations, and the frequency and volume of reporting requirements associated with certain grants. Both organizations have also enhanced their marketing of training and technical assistance, resources available to address common challenges, and funding opportunities to rural agencies.

Additionally, understanding the importance of the information that arose from each of the listening sessions, the COPS Office expanded the scope of this program. The COPS Office has already hosted similar convenings in additional states—including Texas, Michigan, Nevada, and New Mexico—and will continue to identify more opportunities to work in partnership with BJA and U.S. Attorneys to gather feedback and suggestions from rural law enforcement leaders, and to act on those recommendations.

Appendix A: Individual Summaries

Following are individual summaries of each of the U.S. Department of Justice *Conversations with Rural Law Enforcement Leaders* listening sessions held from April through June 2019:

South Dakota

Date: April 23, 2019

Location: The Lodge at Deadwood, Deadwood, South Dakota

Number of Attendees: 53 South Dakota state and local law enforcement leaders

Ron Parsons, U.S. Attorney – U.S. District of South Dakota

Gregg Peterman, Supervisory Assistant U.S. Attorney – District of South Dakota

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Jon Adler, Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Identified Needs: Funding, Human/Gun/Drug Trafficking, Staffing, and Substance Use / Mental Health Treatment Options

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in South Dakota discussed operating with reduced budgets and the impacts on staffing and resources. Sheriffs particularly highlighted the effects of these shortages on their ability to participate in interdiction efforts on interstate highways that are known to be channels for human, gun, and drug trafficking from the southwestern border; to have enough space for all the individuals that are arrested as a result of increasing methamphetamine use; and to provide effective substance use and mental health treatment in their correctional facilities. Rural chiefs and sheriffs also discussed the challenges in recruiting new officers to work in areas that do not have adequate housing and entertainment options, as well as retaining experienced officers who can earn more money and have more standard schedules working in larger cities.

Oklahoma

Date: May 20, 2019

Location: Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

Number of Attendees: 59 Oklahoma state and local law enforcement leaders

R. Trent Shores, U.S. Attorney – Northern District of Oklahoma

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Jon Adler, Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Identified Needs: Funding, Staffing, and Officer Training for Addressing Substance Use / Mental Health Issues

Summary: Rural law enforcement leaders in Oklahoma identified being able to effectively cover and address all the community and public safety needs and identifying funding sources to continue to support officers who were hired using grant funds as two main challenges. Attendees also discussed the increasing number of crimes committed by persons with mental health or substance use disorders and the lack of resources to train officers to effectively respond to these calls. A number of chiefs also mentioned the challenge of applying for and managing federal grants and the impacts that has on staffing, resources, and equipment, including body armor, body-worn cameras, vehicles, and emerging technologies.

Utah

Date: June 5, 2019

Location: U.S. Attorney's Office – District of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

Number of Attendees: 27 Utah state and local law enforcement leaders

John Huber, U.S. Attorney – District of Utah

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Identified Needs: Justice Reinvestment Initiative, Border Security, Civil Asset Forfeiture, and Funding

Summary: Rural law enforcement leaders in Utah identified the state's justice reinvestment initiative; southwestern border security; changes in the civil asset forfeiture process; and funding for staffing for drug task forces, training opportunities, and technology as the most significant public safety hurdles in the state. Some attendees perceived the increasing leniency of recent criminal laws and the lack of state-level prosecutions associated with the justice reinvestment initiative as the state's being unresponsive to the needs of law enforcement. Some attendees explained that more support is needed at the state and federal levels to address the cartel-related crime and drug activity crossing the southwestern border. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of civil asset forfeiture, and correlated changes in the process and the amount of funding received from it with reductions in funding for staffing and participation in drug task forces, technology such as automated license plate readers and camera systems, and funding for rural law enforcement leaders to attend trainings at the National Center for Rural Law Enforcement.

Iowa

Date: June 7, 2019

Location: Atlantic Golf and Country Club, Atlantic, Iowa

Number of Attendees: 17 Iowa state and local law enforcement leaders

Marc Krickbaum, U.S. Attorney – Southern District of Iowa

Richard Rothrock, U.S. Department of Justice Bureau Chief, Southern District of Iowa

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Jon Adler, Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Identified Needs: Support from State Legislature and Funding

Summary: Rural law enforcement leaders in Iowa highlighted the perceived lack of support from the state legislature and state law enforcement in a variety of areas, including drug interdiction efforts. Some attendees expanded that they perceived a general lack of federal resources allocated and assigned to western Iowa and noted that federal agents and resources for their area are assigned out of Nebraska. Attendees also discussed the purity of methamphetamines coming into the state, the increasing use of methamphetamines and opioids, and the increasing number of crimes involving firearms and the lack of forensic staffing and equipment needed to respond to these crimes. Despite these shortages, attendees noted that they are hesitant to apply for federal funding because cities and counties are often reluctant to sustain funding beyond the grant.

Montana

Date: June 18, 2019

Location: Hilton Garden Inn, Missoula, Montana

Number of Attendees: 65 Montana state and local law enforcement leaders

Kurt Alme, U.S. Attorney – District of Montana

Matt M. Dummermuth, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs

Phil Keith, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Identified Needs: Staffing, Funding, and Substance Use / Mental Health Treatment Options

Summary: State and local law enforcement leaders in Montana identified staffing and resource shortages as their primary challenge. Attendees explained that some of these shortages are caused by the lack of income from large amounts of state and federal land that do not contribute to the tax base but do contribute to their geographical boundaries. Some sheriffs also discussed the overcrowding of county jails and their inability to provide social services and treatment for inmates with mental health or substance use disorders because of resource shortages. Illicit drugs—particularly methamphetamines and fentanyl—were also mentioned as an increasing challenge. Attendees discussed challenges associated with the inflexibility of federal grants; sheriffs noted that the COPS Office hiring grants are helpful but cannot be used to hire corrections employees, and leaders of small agencies explained that the administrative aspects are not conducive to their agencies applying. Leaders of small agencies also explained that having to compete with larger agencies and not having enough time to pull together all the requirements in grant proposals prevent them from applying, despite needing the funding.

Appendix B: U.S. Department of Justice Resources

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

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

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)

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

2019 COPS Office Anti-Heroin Task Force Program: https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2019AwardDocs/ahtf/Post_Award_Fact_Sheet.pdf

2019 COPS Anti-Methamphetamine Program: https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2019AwardDocs/camp/Post_Award_Fact_Sheet.pdf

“North Texas Sheriffs Work Together to Reduce Drug Smuggling and Human Trafficking” – Community Policing Dispatch, December 2018, Volume 11, Issue 12: https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/12-2018/texas_sheriffs.html

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)

BJA Grants: <https://www.bja.gov/funding.aspx>

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

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

Learn About BJA National Training and Technical Assistance Center Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Criminal Justice Agencies:

https://bjatta.bja.ojp.gov/sites/default/files/uploaded/BJA_NTTAC_IACA_Flyer_090613_final.pdf

Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP):

<https://bjaojp.gov/program/cossap/overview>

Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Program Law Enforcement / First Responder Diversion:

https://www.coapresources.org/Content/Documents/BriefingSheets/BJA_COAP_Law_Enforcement_First_Responder_Diversion.pdf

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

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

VALOR Training Events: <https://www.valorforblue.org/VALOR-Training/VALOR-Training-Events>

About the National Police Foundation

The **National Police Foundation** is America's oldest non-membership, non-partisan police research organization. We were founded in 1970 by the Ford Foundation to advance policing through innovation and science. We integrate the work of practitioners and social scientists to facilitate effective crime control and the progress of democratic policing strategies. We have a wide breadth of projects throughout the U.S. and Mexico. Among other efforts, we conduct scientific evaluations of policing strategies, organizational assessments, critical incident reviews, and police data projects and issue timely policing publications critical to practitioners and policymakers. We also have a strong interest in officer safety and wellness, preventable error in policing, and helping policing enhance community trust and confidence, especially in the area of police use of force.

National Police Foundation information and resources, covering a wide range of topics and research can be accessed on our website, <https://www.policefoundation.org/>.

About BJA

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

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

BJA is led by Acting Director Tracey Trautman.

BJA Mission

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

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

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

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

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

About the COPS Office

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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