

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-521](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Since its 1994 inception, the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) COPS Office has awarded roughly \$14 billion in grants to support the advancement of community policing, which is a policing approach that proactively addresses the conditions that give rise to public safety issues, such as crime and social disorder. GAO was asked to review key grant management practices within the COPS Office. This report focuses on the largest of its programs—CHP, which awards grants to law enforcement agencies to hire law enforcement officers, rehire officers who have been laid off, or prevent scheduled officer layoffs. This report addresses: (1) From fiscal years 2008 through 2012, in what areas of the country was CHP funding disbursed and to what extent did award amounts vary during this period? (2) To what extent does the COPS Office's grant application collect information about how applicants plan to use CHP-funded officers to advance community policing? (3) To what extent does the COPS Office's monitoring process assess whether grantees are using funds to advance community policing?

GAO examined budget data and monitoring reports for 55 grantees, interviewed agency officials, and evaluated CHP applications from a systematic random sample of 103 CHP grants awarded from fiscal years 2010 through 2012.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the COPS Office revise and clarify the CHP application and enhance guidance to require monitors to document their analysis results of non-supplanting in monitoring reports. The COPS Office generally concurred with the recommendations and described actions to address them.

View [GAO-13-521](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or [maurerd@gao.gov](mailto:maurerd@gao.gov).

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## COMMUNITY POLICING HIRING GRANTS

### Grant Application and Monitoring Processes Could Be Improved to Further Ensure Grantees Advance Community Policing

#### What GAO Found

Nearly half of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Hiring Program (CHP) funding from fiscal years 2008 through 2012 was awarded to grantees in six states, and award amounts varied considerably in certain years. During this period, state, county, and city law enforcement agencies nationwide received CHP grant awards to hire or rehire officers to advance community policing, with 48 percent of the funds awarded to grantees in California, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas. For grantees awarded the same number of officers, differences were driven mainly by variation across grantees' respective entry-level officer salaries and benefits. Variation in grantee award amounts were more prominent during 2009, 2010, and 2011, when salary and benefit levels were not statutorily capped, and grantees with higher officer salary and benefit levels generally received more CHP funding relative to other CHP grantees for the same number of officers.

The COPS Office's CHP application collects information required by statute from grant applicants, but could be further enhanced by revising the application to clarify for applicants that CHP-funded officers are required to be the personnel specifically engaged in the community policing activities described on the application. The application asks applicants to provide information on how they plan to implement community policing agency-wide, but does not specifically ask applicants to explain how CHP-funded officers will be deployed in community policing—the primary statutory purpose of the CHP program. According to GAO analysis of a systematic random sample of 103 CHP-funded applications, GAO estimated that less than 20 percent of the applications funded in 2010, 2011, and 2012 contained evidence showing how additional officers would be deployed in community policing. The Domestic Working Group's guide for grant accountability recommends that agencies require applicants to include information describing, among other things, their approach for using the funds and the specific activities that are crucial to the success of the program. Revising the application to clarify for applicants that CHP-funded officers are required to be the personnel specifically engaged in the community policing activities described on the application, consistent with best practices, would better position the COPS office to ascertain from applicants how these particular officers' activities would advance community policing.

The COPS Office's risk-based approach to monitoring assesses how grantees are using funds to advance community policing, but could be improved through additional monitoring guidance. The authorizing statute for the COPS grant programs contains a prohibition against supplanting—using federal funds to replace state or local funds. The COPS Office developed standards and an operations manual for monitors to use in assessing the potential for supplanting. For 5 of the 21 grantees at risk for supplanting, GAO found that the monitors did not document their analyses of supplanting and it was not clear how they reached conclusions regarding supplanting. The manual requires monitors to document their supplanting analysis in instances in which supplanting is identified, but does not have this requirement for non-supplanting. According to internal control standards, the documentation of agency activities is a key element of accountability for decisions. By enhancing the COPS Office's monitoring guidance to require monitors to document their results where the determination is made that supplanting has not occurred, the COPS Office may be better positioned to ensure that monitors are consistently assessing supplanting and that CHP funding is supplementing and not replacing state and local funding.