INTEGRATING CIVILIAN STAFF INTO
POLICE AGENCIES

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COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

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About the Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services

Although consolidating and sharing public safety services has received much attention in recent years, such efforts are not new. Moreover, despite the many communities that have in one way or another consolidated or shared these services, the process of doing so has not become any easier. In fact, to say that changing the structural delivery of public safety services is difficult or challenging is an understatement. At the core of contemplating these transitions, regardless of the form, is the need for open, honest, and constructive dialog among all stakeholders. Key to this dialog is evidence derived from independent research, analysis, and evaluation.

To help provide such independent information, the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice, with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), established the **Program on Police Consolidation and Shared Services (PCASS)** to help consolidating police agencies, and those considering consolidating, increase efficiency, enhance quality of service, and bolster community policing. Together, they also developed resources, such as publications, videos, and the PCASS website, to assist communities exploring options for delivering public safety services. These resources do not advocate any particular form of service delivery but rather provide information to help communities determine for themselves what best meets their needs, circumstances, and desires.

PCASS provides a wealth of information and research on structural alternatives for the delivery of police services, including the nature, options, implementation, efficiency, and effectiveness of all forms of consolidation and shared services. PCASS resources allow local decision makers to review what has been done elsewhere and gauge what model would be best for their community.

For more information on PCASS and to access its resources, please visit http://policeconsolidation.msu.edu/.

PCASS booth at Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police (MACP) conference

Historical Context of Civilian Employees

Historians generally credit Boston in 1838 and New York City in 1844 with creating the first full-time, vocational, permanent police agencies in the United States (Lane 1980, 8). Other major cities soon followed suit and created their own police agencies (King 1999, figure 1). As Klockars (1985, 12) writes, sworn personnel are distinguished by their "general right to use coercive force by the state within the state's domestic territory" (see also Bittner 1971).

Because not all police work required such coercive power, police agencies could also employ individuals who did not have arrest powers: i.e., civilian police employees. Agencies could also enlist the skills of volunteers.[1] (For discussions of police volunteers, see Hilal 2003; King 2005; and Sundeen and Siegel 1986.)

However, police administrators resisted civilianization because it could reduce the ability of police administrators to reward political cronies with sworn officer positions (King 1999). Therefore, civilian police employees were exceedingly rare prior to the 1930s, though the lack of systematic data back then on police agency employment makes historical trends difficult to discern (Uchida and King 2002).

Historical research, the bulk of which dates from the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrates that civilian police employees have a long tradition in the United States with the number and proportion of civilian employees steadily increasing in the mid-1930s and through the 1970s and 1980s (see Chess 1960; Fogelson 1977; Heininger and Urbanek 1983; Schwartz et al. 1975). Police agencies used civilian employees to perform various tasks such as dispatch, record keeping, and clerical duties.

The economic recession of 2008 resulted in difficult budget decisions for many local law enforcement agencies. Those in the most dire straits explored layoffs, furloughs, and even disbanding their organization. Those in less dire straits investigated alternative methods of management and service delivery. For example, agencies re-explored the civilianization of policing, which remains one of the most frequent methods agencies use to continue providing police service to the community while still tending to the pressing management and administration needs of an agency.

As of 2008, 33 percent of full-time local police employees were civilians, and 77 percent of state and local law enforcement agency employees were sworn personnel (Reaves 2011).[2] Yet individual police agencies differ greatly in the proportion of civilian police employees. For example, 65 percent (140 employees) of the 215 full-time employees in the Mansfield (Texas) Police Department were civilians while

1. See also "Volunteers in Police Service," http://www.policevolunteers.org/.

2. This estimate is based on 17,985 local law enforcement agencies (including special agencies and sheriff's offices, among others) reported in the 2008 BJS Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies.

only 0.3 percent (four employees) of 1,210 full-time employees in the Montgomery County (Maryland) Police Department were civilians. Altogether in 2008, local police agencies employed 368,669 full-time civilian employees and 56,278 part-time civilian employees (BJS 2008).

With this history in mind, *Integrating Civilian Staff into Police Agencies* describes issues surrounding the employment and use of civilian employees by police agencies in the United States. This publication illustrates the experiences police agencies have had using civilian police employees in delivering police service, and it is intended primarily for police executives, planners, and employees as well as government officials who oversee police agencies.

While not focused solely on consolidation per se, this publication does provide lessons to practitioners seeking to improve the delivery and efficiency of police service by providing a description of the current state of police civilianization in the United States, the roles civilian employees may play in a police agency, the ways in which police agencies may use civilian employees for alternative service delivery, and the benefits and costs associated with civilianizing. In particular, this publication discusses the following:

- The definition of police civilians and trends in their use

- The contemporary nature of police civilianization and innovative ways that some agencies are using civilians

As of 2008, 33 percent of full-time local police employees were civilians.

- Seven different roles for civilian police employees, such as clerical and dispatch duties, first responders, and strategic leadership positions

- Impediments and facilitators to civilianization

- Benefits of civilian employees, including the increased employment flexibility of civilians (contracts, hiring, dismissal, speed of deployment, reassignment, etc.), the special skills civilians may provide, and the potential cost savings

- Costs of civilian employees, in terms of liability, training, supervision, agency culture, and agency morale

- General recommendations for agencies considering the increased use of civilian employees

In the near future, as police agencies seek to free sworn officers for other duties or even as agencies adopt new duties civilian personnel may perform, the number of both sworn and civilian employees may expand.

Contemporary Roles for Civilian Employees
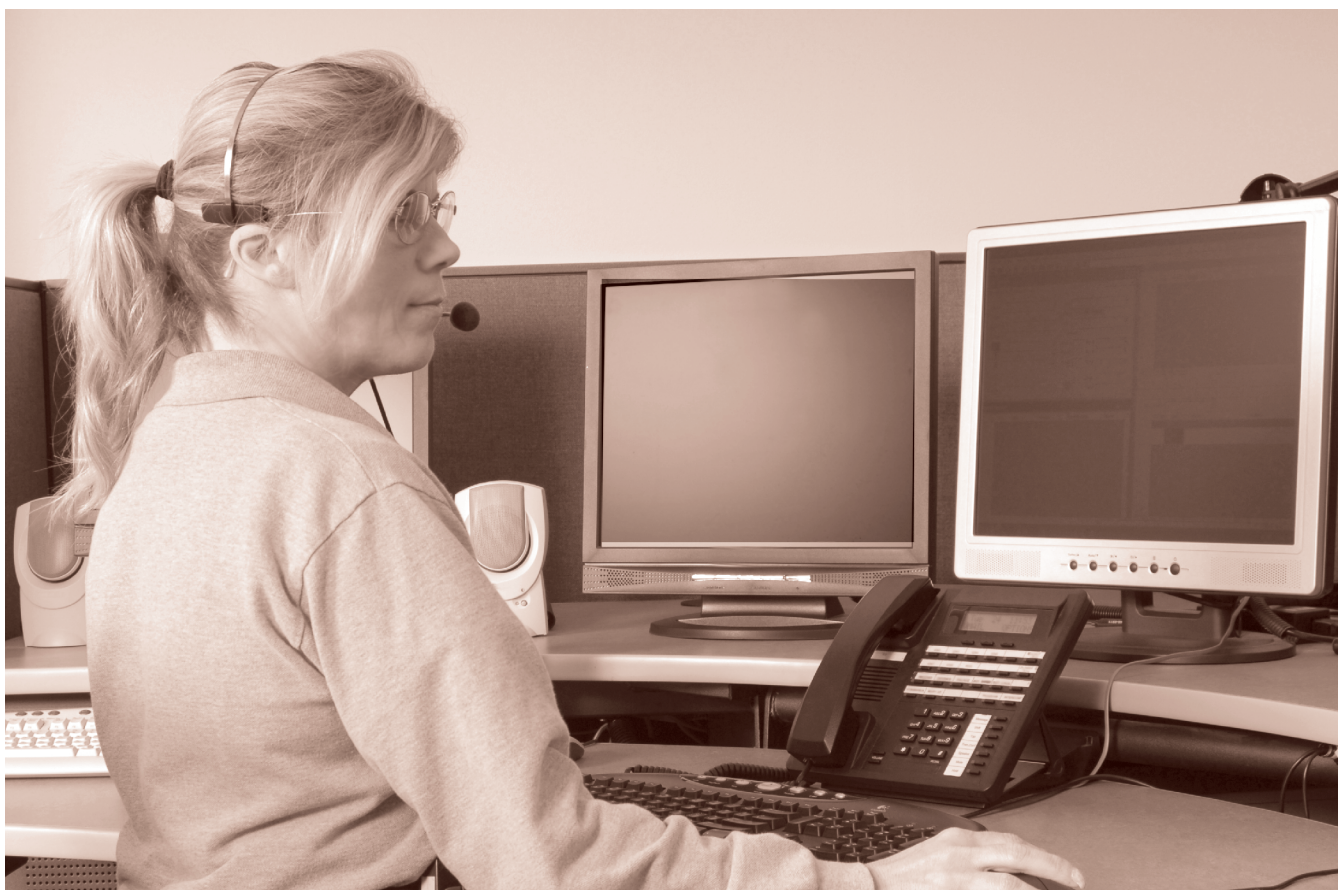
From routine tasks to high-level command positions, police agencies can use civilian employees in management and administration positions and in service delivery to the community. Often, civilians reside outside the formal authority structures of police agencies (Kostelac 2008), except in the case of civilian commanders. Having civilian leaders and employees can have unique benefits and costs.

Currently, U.S. police agencies use civilians for each of the following task areas:

- Providers of clerical, accounting, reception, dispatch, maintenance, custodial, detention, and technical duties

- Uniformed first responders to nonviolent calls for service

- Crime scene processors and forensic crime lab employees

- Crime victim service providers in the field

- Analysts, researchers, and planners

- Community liaisons and public information officers

- Command staff and strategic leaders

Providers of routine administrative and operational tasks

Historically, police civilians have provided a wide range of tasks that vary by agency.[3] Civilians often served as call takers and dispatchers (Shernock 1988) as well as clerical workers providing typing, transcription, filing, and record keeping. In some agencies,

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3. The authors could not find a comprehensive study that addressed the range of duties civilians can perform.

civilians handled accounting, budgeting, and finance. Civilians also performed custodial chores and maintained facilities, vehicles, or equipment, and some agencies hired civilians for detention duties (Schwartz et al.1975). Likewise, today some agencies use civilians to provide technical skills, such as maintaining and repairing computer networks, hardware, and software; operating computers; programming; and repairing and calibrating technological equipment such as Breathalyzers (Forst 2000). Considering this historical context, many agencies may view such tasks as relatively traditional for civilians.

Uniformed first responders to nonviolent calls for service

Some police agencies use civilian employees to serve as first responders to noncritical or nonviolent calls for police services, such as calls for animal control, "cold" burglary scenes, automobile accidents, and calls reporting theft and vandalism. Using civilians as first responders for certain tasks dates back to at least the early-1970s (Schwartz et al. 1975).

Responsibility for animal control rests with the local police in High Point, North Carolina, where the police department employs two civilians for animal control services (HPPD 2013). Since the late-1990s, the Naperville (Illinois) Police Department has used civilians to direct traffic and issue parking tickets (King 2009). In Reno, Nevada, civilians direct traffic and handle 75 percent of cold crime reports (King 2009). The Concord (California) Police Department uses civilian employees located in offices (not in the field) to follow up on leads and take crime reports (King 2009).

Crime scene processors and forensic crime lab employees

Increasingly, the practice of forensic science requires advanced training and academic degrees. As a result, police agencies that operate their own forensic crime labs use civilian employees to perform many forensic duties.

In the past, many agencies typically had sworn first responders or specialty officers process crime scenes. However, over time, agencies have turned to civilian employees to process their crime scenes and gather physical evidence. For example, Knoxville, Tennessee, and Austin, Texas, switched responsibility for the processing of crime scenes from sworn police officers to civilians. In Austin, the civilian Crime Scene Unit employees wear uniforms and carry radios.

Crime victim service providers in the field

Civilian employees can provide services to victims of crime. Victim advocates and victim service providers (VSPs) can help crime victims understand the process of investigation and prosecution and can connect them with compensation funds and other services such as counseling. In some cases, VSPs provide education on issues such as avoiding repeat victimization. In Virginia, 21 percent of VSPs are employed by police agencies (Neff et al. 2012). Police agencies from Rockville, Maryland, and North Las Vegas, Nevada, use VSPs.

Analysts, researchers, and planners

Civilian employees can work as analysts, researchers, or planners. In larger agencies, they can work in specialized research and planning units (RPUs) or crime analysis units (CAUs) (Dawson and Williams 2009; Haberman and King 2011).These civilians often bring specialized skills or training in areas such as statistical analysis, mapping, computer programming, budgeting, and crime analysis.

Some of these RPUs and CAUs employ a mix of sworn and civilian employees. For example, the deputy director of planning in the Houston (Texas) Police Department is a civilian, but some members of his staff are sworn officers (including a police sergeant).

Community liaisons and public information officers

Police agencies face increasing pressure to communicate and develop trust with various communities, and some of these communities comprise recent immigrants not fluent in English. The traditional model for policing ethnic groups calls for a police agency to recruit and train as police officers members of that ethnic group. Thus, a police agency gains officers fluent in the language, which enables it to learn the cultural norms of that group and possibly to increase its legitimacy with that group.

However, many agencies have realized that bilingual members of ethnic groups, especially groups that have only recently appeared in numbers in the United States, may have more attractive career options than working in law enforcement. This is evidenced by some departments offering additional "bilingual pay" for officers who speak multiple languages (Wilson et al. 2010). Also, some immigrant groups originate from countries where citizens do not trust the police. Therefore, recruiting qualified and bilingual members of ethnic groups can be difficult, if not impossible.

Alternatively, some police agencies have successfully employed members of ethnic groups as civilian employees. It is easier to find and hire qualified civilian employees than to find, hire, and train individuals for sworn positions. For example, during the 1980s, Lowell, Massachusetts, experienced large numbers of immigrants settling from Southeast Asia (King 2009). In addition to trying to recruit police officers from these newly established communities, the Lowell Police Department hired two members of these ethnic communities, who were compensated as civilian police employees but served in the community as liaisons between the department and the community. These liaisons monitored their communities and communicated local concerns to the superintendent of the department. The liaisons also communicated messages and information from the department to the community. From all accounts, the civilian liaisons

in Lowell were successful at improving relations and communications between the community and police department.

Public information officers (PIOs) often serve as a point of contact between a police agency and the media and public. PIOs can also provide media advice and coordination efforts for police agencies (Handelman and Domanick 2012). Estimates of the percentage of PIOs who are civilians range from about one in 10 to four in 10 (Chermak and Weiss 2005; Motschall and Cao 2002; Surette 2001).

While PIOs can engage in a range of activities, increasingly they counsel police management about publicity and public relations (Motschall and Cao 2002). PIOs have increased the scope of their activities as more civilians have filled such positions (Surette 2001). Some police agencies rely heavily on civilian PIOs. For example, the Knoxville (Tennessee) Police Department employs 28 civilian PIOs, who work with the public and media and are on-call 24 hours a day (King 2009).

Command staff and strategic leaders

Not all civilian employees serve in ancillary or support roles. Some civilians are upper-division commanders or hold strategic leadership positions within police agencies. Civilians who serve in command positions most often lead the administrative services section of a police agency. Using civilians in command positions is novel in an environment where most authority is traditionally derived from a rank position within a hierarchy of sworn officers.

Yet examples exist of high-level civilian commanders overseeing and supervising sworn officers in large U.S. police agencies. In 2003, the Los Angeles Police Department appointed a civilian to manager of its Counter-Terrorism and Spcial Operations Bureau (Martin 2009). Also, in the early-2000s, the head of administrative services in the Lowell (Massachusetts) Police Department was a civilian (King 2009).The Chicago Police Department appointed a civilian as deputy superintendent of its Administrative Services Bureau, and this civilian became responsible for managing a budget of more than $1 billion and for the Personnel, Information Services, Records Management, and Research and Development Divisions (John Jay College of Criminal Justice 2009). In 2013, the Glendale (California) Police Department also appointed a civilian as a commander over administrative services (GPD 2013).

Benefits and Costs of Using Civilian Employees

Benefits

Civilian employees can offer police agencies a number of benefits. First, they are less expensive than sworn officers in terms of salary, retirement, and benefits (see Chess 1960; Lewin and Keith 1976; Martin 2009; Schwartz et al. 1975). A study of 13 police agencies in the 1970s found that salaries averaged "23 percent less for civilians than for officers and overhead about 10 percent less" (Schwartz et al. 1975, vii). A second 1970s study found civilian salaries and fringe benefits to be about one-fourth the cost for sworn officers. However, studies or data that address the costs of civilian employees since 1981 in the United States could not be found, but one Canadian study projected that the benefits and salaries for civilian employees were 67 percent of that for sworn officers in 2006 (Griffiths et al. 2006).

Second, civilians enable sworn officers to concentrate on a narrower range of functions (Guyot 1979; Schwartz et al. 1975). For example, civilians can help agencies multiply their force by allowing more officers to be on the street or in field services. In addition, civilian employees can free sworn officers from dispatch duties and administrative tasks and make officers available to return to patrol or other assignments that directly affect communities. Finally, civilians may augment agency work in newly created positions (Guyot 1979).

Third, civilians bring specialized skills or formal training that regular sworn officers might not possess, such as formal engineering, legal, or scientific training (Chess 1960). These skills could be valuable in contemporary police agencies for investigations and accident reconstruction, for crafting and revamping policies, or for computer programming and forensics. Civilians can also provide practical skills such as mechanical skills, computer hardware or software programming abilities, and even janitorial and maintenance talents. Some agencies may employ civilians who are multilingual or have specific cultural competencies valuable to the agency's community outreach efforts.

Fourth, civilians can help improve community relations, a benefit especially important for community policing efforts (Kostelac 2008). Police agencies can hire civilians who are more representative of the population without the limitations imposed by the physical or background requirements for sworn officers. Indeed, civilian employees have long helped police agencies increase their gender diversity (Lewin and Keith 1976, 81, table 6). Civilian employees strengthen ties with the community because they serve as ambassadors during their nonwork time (see Crank 1989; Skolnick and Bayley 1986). Civilians also bring the community's perspectives to the police agency, and "the 'outsiders' view on law enforcement may provide the perspective necessary to bridge the gap with the community" (Martin 2009, 24). Civilians in a police agency may de-escalate police-community antagonisms and provide a "humanizing effect" on police officers (see Schwartz et al. 1975, 14, fn. 1).

Last, civilian employees often provide managers with greater flexibility for personnel assignments (Guyot 1979). In many states, civilian employees are exempt from civil service requirements and are rarely unionized. Therefore, civilians are easier to hire, transfer, and even fire. The process for authorizing the hiring and training of a new recruit class of sworn officers is usually measured in months while that of hiring civilians is usually measured in weeks.

All these reasons contribute to the usefulness of civilian employees. Comparatively, empirical research generally finds that more affluent agencies (usually measured by departmental budget) employ a greater proportion of civilians (see Heininger and Urbanek 1983; Kostelac 2008) and that agencies facing budget cuts sometimes lay off civilians instead of sworn officers (Kostelac 2008)—providing further evidence of the greater flexibility civilian employees offer to agencies.

Costs

Employing civilians is not without possible detriment. Sworn officers or their unions may resist increased civilianization because sometimes they see civilians as "depriving a member of the force of a desirable detail or assignment" (Chess 1960, 594). Agencies sometimes hold station-house assignments for officers who are relieved of street duty or injured. If these positions are civilianized, they are no longer available for officer reassignment.

Officers might resist civilians if their assignments run contrary to the stereotypes of appropriate civilian assignments. In particular, sworn officers may resent civilians in positions that officers fear compromise sensitive information, that interfere in sworn officers' exercise of discretion, and that disrupt operations (Forst 2000, 47). In some cases, this resentment might turn into rivalries between sworn officers and civilians and into antagonism toward civilian employees (Chess 1960). Resistance by sworn officers might take various forms, as in the case of the Rockford, Illinois, police union's resistance to a civilian overseeing administrative services (Curry 2012).

Six Promising Practices in Hiring and Deploying Civilian Employees

It may be useful for agencies that are considering the use or expansion of civilians to seek out peer agencies that have employed civilians in similar capacities to learn about the positive and negative implications of their use. In the meantime, a law enforcement agency considering hiring more civilian employees or assigning civilians to new agency tasks should carefully follow these six promising practices, which can help agency administrators plan for success and avoid potential pitfalls:

1. ASSESS THE NOVELTY OF THE ASSIGNMENT FOR THE AGENCY.

In many cases, an agency might add a few civilians to handle tasks that are quite similar to already civilianized tasks. For example, civilianizing the records section when the human resources section is already civilianized would probably be a simple transition. But civilianizing a leadership position, crime scene personnel, or creating civilian first responders requires prudence and building support among key constituents (see no. 3).

2. DETERMINE THE TRUE COSTS AND BENEFITS FOR THE AGENCY.

Civilians are often less expensive in terms of their salary and benefits. Yet there may be less visible costs associated with hiring civilians. These costs can include buying special equipment, making provisions for access to secure facilities, and negatively effecting department culture and morale. For example, if sworn officers view civilians as a threat and this results in substantial conflict within an agency, the costs may be unacceptable for some agencies. Yet civilians may offer benefits that could improve culture and morale (see no. 1).

3. BUILD SUPPORT AMONG KEY CONSTITUENTS.

Police leadership should explain the planned change to line officers, management, and law enforcement unions. Agencies should be transparent in terms of why they plan to civilianize positions, but civilianizing can often be presented as beneficial to sworn officers because it can relieve them of mundane or less-desirable tasks, such as record keeping or responding to vehicular accidents. Or perhaps the civilians can provide services that the agency cannot currently deliver, such as advanced crime analysis, computer support, or liaisons with ethnic communities.

4. DEVELOP A PLAN TO TRAIN CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES.

Training should be delivered initially and as in-service training (Chess 1960). In some cases, civilian employees should be educated about the unique aspects of policing and ways to navigate organization culture and chain of command. Employees should receive training on safety considerations, the importance of keeping documents and records secure, ways to handle confidential information, and other issues important to the agency. Simply, civilians won't receive the benefit of academy and field training; therefore, an agency must provide an appropriate level of training and orientation as well as a career ladder.

5. ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES.

Agencies should evaluate their employees regularly and provide them with feedback. Crafting useful performance criteria is especially important when the position is new for the agency.

6. DETERMINE THE PROCEDURES FOR DEMOTING, FIRING, AND HANDLING GRIEVANCES ABOUT OR FROM CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES.

As with any employee classification, agencies should take care to ensure that proper personnel policies and procedures are in place to account effectively for adverse consequences associated with civilian employees.

Conclusion

As for any organizational change, police decision makers considering the new or expanded use of civilians must assess for themselves whether the benefits outweigh the costs in their unique circumstances. The lessons and promising practices noted throughout this publication provide a first-step in framing such a process.

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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, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.

Rather than simply responding to crimes once they have been committed, community policing concentrates on preventing crime and eliminating the atmosphere of fear it creates. Earning the trust of the community and making those individuals stakeholders in their own safety enables law enforcement to better understand and address both the needs of the community and the factors that contribute to crime.

The COPS Office awards grants to state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders and all levels of law enforcement. The COPS Office has produced and compiled a broad range of information resources that can help law enforcement better address specific crime and operational issues, and help community leaders better understand how to work cooperatively with their law enforcement agency to reduce crime.

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

- To date, the COPS Office has funded approximately 125,000 additional officers to more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the country in small and large jurisdictions alike.

- 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 8.57 million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs.

COPS Office resources, covering a wide breadth of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—are available, at no cost, through its online Resource Center at www.cops.usdoj.gov. This easy-to-navigate website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

Civilianization of policing is one of the most frequent methods agencies use to continue providing service to the community while still tending to the pressing management and administration needs of an agency. *Integrating Civilian Staff into Police Agencies* describes issues surrounding the employment and use of civilian employees by police agencies in the United States. This publication discusses not only innovative ways that some agencies are using civilians but also impediments and facilitators to civilianization and the costs and benefits of increasing civilianization. It also provides general recommendations for agencies considering the increased use of civilian employees.