

Community Policing

Community policing gained a political push during the Clinton presidency. The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services more familiarly known as “the COPS Office”) was charged with putting “100,000 cops on the street,” to fulfill one of the president’s campaign promises. In order to be eligible for funds for new hires, cities and towns had to demonstrate a commitment to community policing (current or future) and to sustaining the positions beyond the three-year period of federal support. Grants for upgrading equipment and programs were also available, if the purchases freed up officer time for street patrol or investigations. A complementary program known as Troops to Cops attempted to reintegrate soldiers demobilizing from the Gulf War by hiring them as police officers.

Whether the program actually increased the number of police officers on the street, and for how long, has been a topic of political contention. The COPS grants came at the end of the 20-year career cycle of the large numbers of police hired in response to the civil unrest of the 1960s and early 1970s. Critics charge that COPS grants helped cities stabilize their numbers from attrition but did not substantially increase the number of officers on patrol.

In 2009, the office of Justice Programs began a new round of hiring and retention grants as part of President Obama’s economic stimulus bill. Those initiatives are more overtly tied to the creation and preservation of jobs in the face of severe economic decline, but they also demand the improvement of criminal justice system functions as a result of the hiring.