National Institute of Justice

STOP School Violence Initiative Metrics: FY 2020 Report to the Committees on Appropriations

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FY 2020 Report to the Committees on Appropriations
STOP School Violence Initiative Metrics

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) provides this report to the Committees on Appropriations on STOP School Violence grant program metrics, consonant with Senate Report 116-127 accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (Public Law 116-93), which requests that:

> [NIJ establish] metrics to determine the effectiveness in deterring school violence through the grants issued by BJA and COPS as part of the STOP School Violence Initiative, and that it should submit] these metrics and … publish an annual report on [its] website of the success of these grants.

Introduction

In FY 2019, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) reported to the Committees on the development of efforts to build an evidence base around the STOP School Violence (STOP) grant program, including enhancing Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) performance measures.

NIJ is working to build that evidence base in two ways. First, it is funding studies to assess the overall effectiveness of school safety activities carried out through grants made under the STOP grant program and to assess the implementation of those activities. Second, NIJ is working with BJA and the COPS Office to help inform and enhance ongoing program development and performance measurement processes.

This report provides an update on these ongoing activities. In particular, the report details the development of metrics (i.e., performance measures) building on the work that BJA and the COPS Office have already undertaken, the metrics themselves, and progress towards publishing annual performance information about the STOP grant program.

Studies of the STOP Grant Program

In FY 2020, NIJ funded a program assessment of FY 2018 and FY 2019 STOP School Violence awards (from both BJA and the COPS Office) through its Research, Evaluation and Technical Assistance (RETA) contract. This program assessment will produce: 1) an explanation of activities undertaken and how funds were expended; 2) information pertaining to the activities funded; and 3) recommendations to guide future work on the STOP grant program. The program assessment will involve, among other activities, a determination of the extent to which funded STOP grant program activities are evidence-based, as it pertains to the effectiveness of the funded interventions in reducing school violence, and site visits to assess project implementation and gather grantee perspectives on their projects. The program assessment, including a final report, will be completed in 2021.

Also in FY 2020, NIJ released a solicitation titled *Research and Evaluation on School Safety*. This solicitation funded rigorous research and evaluation projects to study the effectiveness of activities funded through the STOP grant program. Projects funded under this solicitation

include: evaluating the effectiveness of various threat assessment approaches; examining the factors that may predict who becomes a school shooter; studying bias-based harassment; and assessing the accomplishments of State School Safety Centers (State-level organizations charged with keeping schools safe). In addition, one project is focused on assessing what contributes to the successful implementation of awards funded under the STOP grant program, which will enhance NIJ's understanding of the information on grantee perspectives being collected as a part of the STOP program assessment.

NIJ ultimately intends to produce a report in calendar year 2023 that will integrate the findings of the program assessment and the FY 2020 study on successful implementation of STOP grant program awards, along with a review of the root causes and consequences of school violence. This report will provide information pertaining to the evidence base of the STOP grant program and guide future work on the STOP grant program.

STOP Grant Program Performance Measures

NIJ has recommended to BJA and the COPS Office a performance measurement approach that involves assessing the progress and accomplishments of each STOP grantee through periodic data collection. This approach continues the work BJA and the COPS Office have been engaged in on performance measurement and provides important information on the performance of each award recipient that can be expected to be related to meaningful improvements in school safety. However, NIJ, BJA, and the COPS Office acknowledge that no set of performance measures can produce causal evidence that determines with certainty whether the STOP grant program, or any project funded under the STOP grant program, caused a reduction in school violence.

NIJ developed the performance measure recommendations in this report through ongoing engagement with BJA and the COPS Office. NIJ anticipates that the measures will be refined as work with BJA and the COPS Office continues and as they review grantee feedback. Specifically, BJA and the COPS Office anticipate that they will revisit performance measures once the first cohort of grantees have completed their projects. They will assess the extent to which the measures produce meaningful information on accomplishments while minimizing grantee burden.

As is their standard practice, both BJA and the COPS Office established performance measures for the STOP grant program at the start of program funding in FY 2018. These measures rely on grantees reporting data with their semi-annual progress reports. Independent of NIJ's current activities to develop measures for the STOP grant program, both offices have continued to consider and revise performance measures since FY 2018.

Process

In collaboration with BJA and the COPS Office, NIJ identified and considered the following principles when developing performance measure recommendations:

- Relevance to the overall purpose and specific funding areas under the STOP grant program
- Potential for producing uniform measures for BJA and the COPS Office
- Clarity of data requirements
- Feasibility of data collection
- Reduction of burden on grantees
- Potential for maintaining or enhancing existing measures, when possible, to facilitate analysis over time.

In addition to the series of discussions with BJA and the COPS Office, NIJ performance measure recommendations were informed by a review of relevant documentation including solicitations, draft logic models, performance measures and other materials on the STOP grant program developed by BJA and the COPS Office.

STOP Grant Program Activities

BJA and the COPS Office administer grants to States, units of local government, federally recognized Indian tribes, and other eligible recipients to improve security at schools and on school grounds through evidence-based school safety programs. Funding covers a wide range of activities. Table 1 describes (at a high-level) the various activities funded by the STOP grant program. This list was developed through discussion with BJA and the COPS Office, as well as review of documentation.

Table 1: List of STOP Grant Program Funded Activities

Activity	Theme
Develop/operate anonymous reporting systems/ tip line	Technology/Equipment
Social media monitoring	Technology/Equipment
Acquire communication technology	Technology/Equipment
Acquire identification technology	Technology/Equipment
Acquire computers and/or printers	Technology/Equipment
Purchase GIS software/maps	Technology/Equipment
Purchase tracking systems	Technology/Equipment
Install communication technology	Technology/Equipment
Install security equipment	Technology/Equipment
Create/operate school threat assessment teams	Threats
Create/operate mental health intervention teams	Threats
Coordination between schools and law enforcement	Threats
Develop training curricula	Training
Train school officials (e.g. on student mental health, threat assessment)	Training

Activity	Theme
Train students (e.g., to identify and report potential school violence threats)	Training
Train local law enforcement to improve school safety	Training
Conduct CPTED assessment	Security
Purchase CPTED security equipment (e.g., entry control, lighting, metal detectors, alarms, surveillance)	Security
Conduct other CPTED activities (e.g., upkeep of school grounds)	Security
Develop school safety plans	Personnel/Planning
Hire consultants/personnel	Personnel/Planning

Recommended Measures

BJA and the COPS Office will each maintain their own performance measures for the STOP grant program. Maintaining separate measures will permit each office to track accomplishments unique to their funded awards and interests. Decisions regarding these measures paid particular attention to the principle of keeping or enhancing existing measures, when possible, to facilitate analyses of trends in grantee performance over time. Table 2 includes recommended performance measures and the estimated dates of data availability for these measures.

Shared performance measures are recommended for activities where there is sufficient similarity across the two offices to support a common measure. BJA and the COPS Office both fund activities associated with communication/coordination, technology/equipment, training, and personnel/planning. However, these activities vary by office with, for example, the COPS Office focused on law enforcement trainings and BJA focused on school personnel and student trainings. The recommended shared measures allow for the assessment of the common aspect of the shared activity while retaining the capacity of each office to report on unique features of the activity.

Table 2: STOP Grant Program Performance Measures with Projected Availability

Measure	Office Using Measure		Projected Availability[1]
	BJA	**COPS Office**	
Percent of schools that have conducted a school safety assessment	Yes	Yes	BJA: March 2021 COPS Office: March 2021

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[1] Though some measures on this list will be available as early as March 2021, a number of those measures will rely on data available prior to NIJ's involvement in developing performance measures with BJA and the COPS Office. As such, the first annual report will produce a partial picture of the measures reported in this table. The annual report will provide additional information on departures from the measures referenced here.

Measure	Office Using Measure		Projected Availability[1]
	BJA	**COPS Office**	
Percent of schools responsive to recommendations of the school safety assessment	Yes	Yes	BJA: March 2021 COPS Office: March 2022
Number of individuals trained to improve school safety	Yes	Yes	BJA: March 2021 COPS Office: March 2022
Percent of schools implementing technology intended to improve communication between schools and others (e.g., law enforcement and emergency providers)	Yes	Yes	BJA: March 2021 COPS Office: March 2022
Percent of schools using a evidence based school safety school plan	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of student threats assessed	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of student threats assessed by a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of student threats determined to be a threat to themselves or others referred to a program or law enforcement.	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Number of schools that started a multidisciplinary team	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Number of schools that enhanced or expanded their multidisciplinary team	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of issues or crises responded to by the multidisciplinary team: a. that involved violence or threats of violence b. that involved suicidal threats or attempts	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Number of trainings completed by type	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of reporting solutions completed	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Number of tips received	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of tips determined to be credible and resulting in a formal response by the multidisciplinary team (e.g., threat assessment team), school resource officer, school counselor, or school psychologist (or other licensed clinical professional)	Yes		BJA: March 2021
Percent of schools receiving target hardening or security enhancements		Yes	COPS Office: March 2022

Measure	Office Using Measure		Projected Availability[1]
	BJA	**COPS Office**	
Percent of grantees notifying law enforcement and fire agencies of the STOP award		Yes	COPS Office: March 2021
Percent of grantees that shared comprehensive school safety assessment with local law enforcement and fire agencies		Yes	COPS Office: March 2021

The recommended measures focus primarily on the extent to which the grantees have successfully implemented their planned activities. It is theorized that successful implementation of planned activities will produce the desired outcome: a reduction in school violence. Direct measures of this desired outcome were considered, but ultimately rejected because they are poorly suited for performance measurement. To identify whether the implemented activity funded by the project is responsible for reducing school violence, NIJ is undertaking other activities such as funding evaluations under the FY 2020 solicitation *Research and Evaluation on School Violence* and conducting a program assessment of FY2018 and FY2019 awards under the STOP grant program.

Measures Considered, But Not Recommended

Some measures were considered, but ultimately rejected during the course of discussions with BJA and the COPS Office. Reasons for rejection pertained to feasibility, subjectivity, and prioritization. Table 3 specifies the shared measures that were considered, but ultimately rejected. Again, some of these measures, though seemingly desirable because of their direct relationship to the purpose of STOP grant program funding, are poorly suited for performance measurement and would require more rigorous program evaluation to produce valid results.

Table 3: Shared Measures Considered, But Rejected

Performance Measure	Focus area	Reason for Rejection
1. For awards for purchasing technology to improve communication between schools and law enforcement: percent of projects achieving decreased notification times during school safety incidents	Technology/ Equipment	Not feasible
2. For all awards: Number of school violence incidents averted	All	Not feasible
3. For all awards: Number of incidents of violent crime at school	All	High burden, not feasible
4. For awards improving coordination between schools and law enforcement: perceptions of improved coordination using a 5-point Likert scale	Technology/ Equipment	Too subjective

5. For hiring awards: Number of consultants/personnel hired by type	Personnel/ Planning	Not the primary goal of the program
6. Percent of trained individuals demonstrating improved knowledge on school safety following the training.	Training	Not feasible

Measure 1 pertains to decreased notification times for technology purchases. This measure is not feasible because information on law enforcement notification-times prior to the start of the award is typically not available and/or it would be particularly burdensome for the grantee to obtain. However, this important issue would be better suited for an evaluation on the impact of communication technology purchases.

Measure 2 is a count of school violence incidents averted. This measure addresses a key concern of the STOP grant program, but is not feasible. Assessing whether a school safety project is responsible for averting a particular incident requires a great deal of information to rule out competing explanations or factors that may be responsible for averting such an incident. As a result, this measure is more suitable for a rigorous evaluation focused on identifying causal factors. NIJ has funded evaluations examining the impact of various programs and strategies on school violence. For example, ongoing and completed projects have studied the role of tip lines, various approaches to threat assessment, bullying prevention and intervention programs, school resource officer approaches, school climate improvement efforts, and restorative justice programs.

Measure 3 is a count of the incidents of violent crime at school. This measure raises concerns about the level of burden and feasibility of data collection. This measure would be used to track decreases in violent crime incidents that could be attributed to a school safety project. Tracking decrease in violent crime incidents would require a great deal of data on violent crime incidents prior to project start and, in many instances, following project conclusion. Again, this is a measure more suitable for an evaluation. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, NIJ has funded several evaluations that examine the impact of various programs and strategies on school violence. Many of these use outcome measures that count violent crime incidents at school.

Measure 4 addresses perceptions of improved communication between schools and law enforcement. NIJ does not recommend this measure due to concerns about its subjectivity. It would rely exclusively on grantee perceptions of communication.

Measure 5 concerns the number of personnel hired. Though feasible, NIJ recommends expending efforts to capture information on the work that personnel conduct rather than the number of people hired. The STOP grant program is not intended as a federal hiring program. Therefore, NIJ does not recommend this measure because this activity is not the primary goal of the program.

Measure 6 relates to the proportion of individuals trained on school safety whose knowledge improved after the training. This measure requires development, administration, and analysis, of a pre- and post-test. There are concerns that, though the measure is valuable, grantees do not

have sufficient expertise to carry out the tasks in order to measure this change. As a result, there are significant concerns about the quality of the data that would be produced. As a result, NIJ does not recommend this measure at this time.

NIJ Published Annual Report of Performance Measures

Beginning in March 2021, NIJ will use available data to begin producing and publishing an annual report on the STOP grant program performance measures. NIJ will continue to work with BJA and the COPS Office to access performance measurement data and summarize results for posting on NIJ's website. NIJ will post the first report in March 2021 based on existing performance measures. NIJ will release the first full report that incorporates all performance measure data in March 2022. Thereafter, NIJ will release annual reports in March. Table 2 includes projected availability dates for each performance measure.

Conclusion

This report provides information on the status of NIJ's efforts to determine the effectiveness of the STOP grant program in deterring school violence. Efforts include working with BJA and the COPS Office to help inform and enhance ongoing performance measurement processes, conducting a program assessment, and funding research and evaluation projects to study the root causes of school violence to include the activities funded under the STOP School Violence Act.

This report summarizes coordination between NIJ, BJA, and the COPS Office to examine, revise, and introduce performance measures to serve as metrics for assessing the progress of the STOP grant program. The recommended measures will help BJA and the COPS Office assess the performance of STOP grantees and be responsive to the Congressional requests for performance metrics. These measures include both shared measures that allow for aggregation of results across offices, and unique measures that will allow for office-specific analyses that are tailored to unique program areas.

BJA and the COPS Office will revisit performance measures periodically to ensure that they remain appropriate and useful. BJA has invested in providing support to grantees to help them accomplish their goals. The recommended measures may also be useful for other, more rigorous evaluation efforts to assess whether STOP-funded projects are responsible for reductions in school violence. However, the performance measures alone cannot substitute for a rigorous evaluation. They cannot produce causal evidence that determines whether the STOP grant program, or any project funded under the STOP grant program, caused a reduction in school violence. NIJ is funding some evaluations of activities funded under the STOP School Violence Act; these evaluations will provide evidence of the effectiveness of these projects in reducing school violence.

NIJ will continue to work with BJA and the COPS Office to produce annual reports on STOP grant program performance, and to post these reports on NIJ's website (nij.gov).