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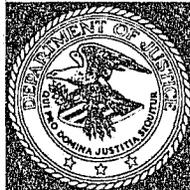
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# NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

*Research in Brief*

Michael J. Russell, Acting Director

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## Drug Control Task Forces Creating and Implementing a Multijurisdictional Unit

by James R. Coldren, Jr., Ph.D.

- What practical lessons have been learned in designing and implementing multijurisdictional task forces to fight drugs?
- What are the critical components and operational practices of task forces?
- How are task force goals, objectives, and strategies developed?
- How does a jurisdiction go about establishing a task force, and what design process is recommended?

These are among the questions addressed in a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study of the creation and implementation of multijurisdictional drug control task forces. About 700 task forces have been formed, using Federal assistance, since passage of the 1986 and 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Acts.

Most States created new task forces or enhanced existing ones by using funding assistance available from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). About two-thirds of State allotments for drug enforcement were assigned to apprehension programs, including task forces.<sup>1</sup> Nationwide, federally assisted narcotics task forces employ more than 10,000 persons and each costs from \$100,000 to more than \$1 million a year.<sup>2</sup>

The extent to which these multijurisdictional task forces for drug control cross geographical and political boundaries distinguishes them from other task force models. Usually they bring together five or more local and State law enforcement agencies, involve prosecutors in planning

and day-to-day operations, and work closely with a host of Federal enforcement agencies.

The National Institute of Justice awarded a 2-year research grant to the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA, formerly the Criminal Justice Statistics Association) in fiscal 1989 for the study summarized in this *Evaluation Bulletin*. Researchers interviewed task force commanders, governing board members, and narcotics officers during 4 to 5 days spent at each of six sites.

The study focused on implementation issues and had two distinct aims:

1. Identify practices that lead to successful implementation.
2. Identify practices that aid in designing impact evaluations.

### Highlights of findings

Efforts to set up a multijurisdictional task force to control a region's drug trade sometimes bring opposition from agency heads who fear loss of budget and "turf." Once a task force operation begins, however, interagency cooperation and understanding usually increase. Steps necessary to establish a successful multijurisdictional anti-drug task force include:

- **Written agreements.** Even when participating agencies agree on broad objectives and funding methods for the task force, carefully phrased written agreements can minimize future questions over activities and responsibilities and serve

as a strong public statement of the task force's intention to set aside turf issues and work as a unit for the benefit of all agencies.

- **Staffing.** Each task force studied named a top supervisor with extensive drug enforcement experience, often with surveillance experience as well. Most supervisors chose seasoned officers to work under them. A few, however, felt that training younger, less experienced officers was preferable to teaching experienced officers a new system.

Officers who completed task force assignments often found returning to regular duty unappealing after working in plainclothes and enjoying broad discretion in handling large cash transactions. Supervisors recommend that police or sheriffs' forces capitalize on such officers' new skills by putting them in specialized investigative or narcotics units.

- **Computerized data.** Growing sophistication in the use of computerized intelligence data bases provides an important information resource and helps set higher intelligence-gathering standards for task force operation.

- **Flexibility.** Use of task forces promotes flexibility by offering local agencies a range of options for participating in drug enforcement efforts. Task forces also are flexible with regard to the arrests they make: most will make drug arrests that are not directly within their area of responsibility and make nondrug arrests whenever the opportunity arises.

**W**hen major new Federal assistance was provided to local law enforcement under the 1986 and 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Acts, most States and localities used a significant part of the funding to create multi-jurisdictional narcotics task forces or enhance existing ones. The National Institute of Justice launched an evaluation by the Justice Research and Statistics Association (formerly called the Criminal Justice Statistics Association) to compare a diverse sample of approximately 700 task forces and provide practical information on how to make new task forces succeed.

The 2-year project revealed that most successful anti-drug task forces include five or more local and State law enforcement agencies, have significant prosecutor participation, and work closely with Federal law enforcement agencies.

"Turf" considerations made some agency directors initially shy away from sharing their jurisdiction with others, but these considerations faded significantly as the task forces became better established. At frequent task force meetings, participating agencies stated their needs while their neighbors and partners discovered ways to help meet both those needs and their own.

Prosecutor participation may not be appropriate in every task force situation: some multiagency task forces have few prosecutorial functions. A greater number, however, found that having attorneys on task forces enabled them to conduct more successful prosecutions, get an early start toward seizing assets from drug traffickers, and secure necessary warrants and surveillance permits.

As law enforcement officers and prosecutors became accustomed to working with each other, professional biases tended to mellow into mutual admiration.

The information developed on how task forces operate in the border country of West Texas, the small towns of Kentucky and Minnesota, and the populous suburbs along both coasts provides a baseline for evaluating new and growing task forces and establishing knowledge from which continuing research and development can elicit still other new ideas.

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● **Prosecutor involvement.** Many anti-drug task forces use prosecutors both to process cases following arrests and to actively participate in planning and devising tactics to guide law enforcement pursuit of warrants, seizures, and surveillance permits. Prosecutors and police learn more about each other's work and help solve mutual problems.

● **Regular meetings.** Frequent meetings help keep task force officers focused on goals and objectives. By building rapport between agencies, the meetings minimize organizational biases.

● **Asset seizure.** Offenders' forfeiture of assets seized in drug arrests has benefits for multijurisdictional task forces both as a practical enforcement tactic and as a means of ensuring the financial viability of the task force.

Two of the task forces studied had each seized and added more than \$1 million worth of funds and property to operating assets within 2 years of operation. But asset forfeiture was not uniformly practiced by the task forces studied, as it is more effective in large urban jurisdictions with high volumes of illicit drug trading.

● **Evaluation criteria.** Task force members recommend that evaluators measure task force efforts using criteria that go beyond such quantifications as arrests, convictions, and narcotics seized. One criterion suggested is how criminals regard the task force—with fear and respect or with scorn.

### **Six task forces**

In selecting sites for the study, the project's advisory board sought varied population concentrations—rural, suburban, and urban. It also sought diversity in the size of task forces studied; in their focus—from street-level or sting operations to upper and midlevel conspiracy investigations—and in geographic regions (North, East, South, West, and Midwest).

The six task forces chosen were:

● **Regional Organized Crime and Narcotics (ROCN) Task Force** in Portland, Oregon. Twenty investigators and supervisors operating in a chiefly urban area to focus on mid- to upper-level narcotics purchase and distribution activities.

● **Ocean County Narcotics Task Force (OCNTF)** in Toms River, New Jersey.

Twenty-four investigators and supervisors operating in a suburban area and focusing on street- and midlevel narcotics distributors and users. This unit also has a community education component.

● **Narcotics Enforcement Team VI (NET VI) Task Force** in Little Falls, Minnesota. One part-time and three full-time investigators operating in a rural area to focus on marijuana distributors and users.

● **West Texas Multi-County Narcotics Task Force (WTNTF)** in El Paso, Texas. Ten investigators and supervisors operating in a rural and suburban international-border jurisdiction and focusing on smuggling and distribution of various types of narcotics.

● **San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force (SMNTF)** in Burlingame, California. A large task force (21 investigators and supervisors) operating in an urban jurisdiction and focusing generally on narcotics trafficking.

● **Western Area Narcotics Team (WANT)** in Paducah, Kentucky. A small task force, its number of investigators varies depending on the case. It operates in a rural area and focuses on street-level distributors and users of cocaine and marijuana.

### **Building on earlier research**

Although this was among the first wave of case studies on anti-drug task forces around the country, it built on a growing body of recent findings on their use.

JRSA had previously gathered data, as part of the Consortium for Drug Strategy Impact Assessment, on more than 250 multi-jurisdictional task forces. Another study<sup>3</sup> presented descriptive information and statistics relating to arrests, drug removals,<sup>4</sup> and asset seizures by task forces created with Federal (formula) grant funding assistance in 15 States.

NIJ published an *Issues and Practices* study of cooperative drug enforcement efforts, featuring case studies in four jurisdictions.<sup>5</sup>

Ongoing and recently completed evaluations contrasted the impact of task forces to that of conventional narcotics enforcement techniques, compared county-level task forces within a single State, examined task

**Exhibit 1. Task Force Practices in Study Sites**

Characteristic	Study Sites					
	Oregon ROCN	New Jersey OCNTF	Minnesota NET VI	Texas WTNTF	California SMNTF	Kentucky WANT
Type of communities served	4 urban counties around Portland	1 suburban county	6 rural counties	6 counties: rural, suburban, & international border	1 urban county	9 rural counties, headquarters in small town
Officer experience and training	Average 15 years, 3 to 4 in drugs. DEA, other training	Home depts. pick people w/DEA training; 4 women lack police experience	State agent commands; State course given 3 officers	Hires retired local officers, adds advanced training	Young, but have drug enforcement experience, DEA or State training	Home depts. lack experience, lack funds for training
Prosecutor involved?	Yes, three, plus board members	Yes, as Director	No	Two, plus sponsorship by El Paso City D.A.	No	No
Computerized intelligence data base?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Nature of interagency agreement	Detailed	Very detailed, with section on each officer	Not very detailed	Not very detailed	Detailed	Very detailed, in State statutes
Source of local (non-Federal) funds	Mostly asset forfeitures	Small percentage municipal	Municipal	No local; State matches Federal	Police depts. (reimbursed by State, Federal)	Most from asset forfeitures
Asset forfeitures benefit task force?	Shared	Shared with local police	Shared	Yes	Shared	Shared
Court jurisdiction	Mostly Federal	Mostly State	State	State and Federal	State and Federal	State
"Rollover" used as intelligence tactic?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Officer rotation	1 to 2 years	Some permanent, some annual	Annual	Assigned indefinitely	Annual	NA, assigned as needed
Task force handles other (nondrug) offenses?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

forces in rural settings, and explored the operation of task forces in conjunction with other law enforcement entities.<sup>6</sup>

**Task force implementation**

Implementing a task force involves three stages—creation, startup, and operations.

**Task force creation**

Creating a task force requires, first, a thorough study and documentation of the jurisdiction's existing narcotics problem. This critical factfinding and planning should assess:

- Current intelligence about drug trafficking, manufacturing, and use.

- Other local crime and substance abuse trends, especially as they affect drug sales and use.

- Current law enforcement, social services, and community efforts to combat the drug problem.

How long this initial process takes may vary, because some task forces are out-

## Notes

1. Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Fiscal Year 1988 Report on Drug Control*.
2. Estimates based on a phone survey of State drug grant administrators, on information provided by BJA's Policy Development and Management Division, and on ongoing task force research by the Criminal Justice Statistics Association (now known as the Justice Research and Statistics Association). The estimated number of operating task forces does not include those that once received Federal funding and now operate without it. Nor does it include those funded by Federal assistance other than that from BJA's State and local program. Many States have been increasing the number of task forces since these estimates were made; the number may now be nearer 1,000 or 1,200.
3. Coldren, James R., Jr., Kenneth R. Coyle, and Sophia Carr, *Multijurisdictional Drug Control Task Forces 1988: Critical Components of State Drug Control Strategies*. Criminal Justice Statistics Association. May 1990.
4. In a "removal," undercover officers posing as narcotics distributors make sales to smaller dealers, then retrieve the narcotics and confiscate the money.
5. Chaiken, Jan, Marcia Chaiken, and Clifford Karchmer, *Multijurisdictional and Drug Law Enforcement Strategies: Reducing Supply and Demand*. National Institute of Justice *Issues and Practices*. December 1990.

6. Summaries of many of these projects appear in *Evaluating Drug Control Initiatives*, Conference Proceedings, the Criminal Justice Statistics Association (1990).

7. Chaiken et al., note above.

8. Chaiken et al., note above.

9. Often task forces will not officially "hire" officers, but will include them in the formal task force operation as one of the donated resources of a local, county, or State law enforcement agency.

James R. "Chip" Coldren, Jr., Ph.D., was principal investigator for this study and coauthor of its final report, *Implementing Cooperative Multijurisdictional Drug Control Task Forces: Case Studies in Six Jurisdictions*, with Kenneth R. Coyle; they were assisted by Sophia Carr, Kellie J. Dressler and John C. Schaaf. Readers may call 800-851-3420 for information about the availability of the report, which was submitted to the National Institute of Justice in partial fulfillment of grant number 89-DD-CX-0058 to the Criminal Justice Statistics Association (now known as the Justice Research and Statistics Association).

Opinions or points of view expressed in this *Evaluation Bulletin* are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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## Three Stages To Implementing A Multijurisdictional Drug Control Task Force

### Stage 1: Creation

- Document existing problems
- Define task force structure
- Secure interagency cooperation
- Determine funding sources

### Stage 2: Startup

- Establish agreements on operating procedures
- Receive and disburse funds
- Recruit and hire personnel
- Hold planning and operational meetings
- Begin building computerized intelligence data base

### Stage 3: Operations

- Refine operating procedures
- Identify and meet training needs
- Enhance problem-solving operations
- Keep informed on status of drug problems
- Monitor and assess progress; if necessary, revise task force goals

growths of earlier cooperative ventures that may have been in the process of creation for a year or more. From initial ideas to approval and funding of the task force concept alone can take from 6 months to a year or longer.

Task forces can be built from the top down, as in Ocean County, New Jersey, where the task force took its structure and composition from the statewide anti-drug plan of the State attorney general's office. Or a task force can grow from the bottom up, as with the Western Area Narcotics Team (Kentucky), where local needs and priorities established the structure and agenda.

Similarly, a task force can involve prosecutors by assigning and funding one or more of them full time to work onsite, or it can establish a close link with the prosecutor's office without a funding component. At the Ocean County, New Jersey, site, the county prosecutor founded the task force and named an assistant prosecutor as task force director. Funding of this site also is administered through the prosecutor's office.

If, however, a task force focuses on eradicating drug traffic or on coordinating statewide resources, it may not be closely involved with a prosecutor's office.

**Task force coordination.** The question of how to coordinate agencies also needs to be resolved early. NIJ's *Issues and Practices* report<sup>7</sup> defines three types of coordination strategies: *horizontal*, cooperating across jurisdictional boundaries; *vertical*, cooperating at some level of government (local, county, State, Federal); and *group*, linking law enforcement with other government, private, business, or community agencies or organizations.<sup>8</sup>

A task force can combine horizontal and vertical structures and may or may not include other agencies and groups. Findings from this research on task force implementation at the six sites suggest that larger task forces in urban jurisdictions tend to be more complex, involving multiple forms of coordination.

Task forces operating along international borders and waterways, such as the one in West Texas, tend more often to be vertically coordinated, because their activities bring them into frequent contact with Federal law enforcement agencies. Rural task forces tend to adopt horizontal coordination strategies to facilitate sharing of scarce resources among jurisdictions.

To secure cooperation of the agencies involved, task force organizers must inform all potential participants of the task force concept; the nature of participation; resources that participants should contribute; and the task force's specific objectives, targets, and methods.

Ideally, each agency will institute effective communication and cooperation not only with the task force itself but with the other participating agencies and organizations as well.

In the New Jersey, Minnesota, California, and Oregon task forces, officers assume liaison roles with their parent agencies. They are expected to meet both formally and informally with members of other agencies and, where permissible, discuss current and future investigations. Discussions focus on prospective informants, ongoing narcotics investigations, comparisons of intelligence activities, and informing parent agencies of task force activities that may take place in their jurisdictions.

Task force organizers must also address funding sources and mechanisms during this stage. Some task forces do not rely on Federal funds but on State and local contributions. Funding strategies should be clearly designed and explicitly stated. They become important in any proposal for Federal, State, and local funding.

Building consensus among prospective participating agencies is probably the most important step toward securing the financial and political support of the local governments whose jurisdictions lie within the task force area. Ranking officers from each agency can provide information on the character and extent of drug problems within their own communities, compare their needs with those of their neighbors, and formulate policies that suit the needs of all participants.

Through such day-to-day cooperation, individual agency heads who may originally have opposed the task force often become its biggest supporters.

**Task force funding.** To what extent can the proceeds of asset forfeiture fund the task force? They can prove essential, especially after initial Federal funding is exhausted. This research found considerable variation by jurisdictions in the use of forfeited assets. Among the variables that prevent any consistent pattern for use of forfeitures:

- Differing State and local statutes governing how forfeiture proceeds can be used.
- Differing levels of expertise to track the derivative assets of drug dealers or of task force resources to set up an automated tracking program.
- Differing levels of satisfaction with the Federal asset forfeiture sharing program.

## Task force startup

When the task force changes from concept to reality, operating agreements must be executed, and a location found to house the task force.

The office space should be secure and unidentifiable, because undercover activities of the task force will require covert interaction with informants. Of the task forces studied onsite, most rented space in inconspicuous office buildings or government buildings unidentified as such. Only one shared space with other law enforcement activities.

Discussions of the funding application probably need to continue during this stage. This stage often lasts up to 3 months, but may take longer. When funding is obtained, money must be received and disbursed in an orderly fashion. This may seem a simple matter, but the need for an efficient financial operation must not be underestimated. The complexities of multi-jurisdictional agreements sometimes require special fund accounting procedures, as does the use of funds for drug buys, paying informants, and the like. Seizure and forfeiture funds must also be accounted for.

Other startup activities include recruiting and hiring personnel and formalizing and documenting operating procedures.

Sometimes a task force adopts or modifies the procedures of a participating agency. This stage involves continuing planning activities and setting implementation goals and priorities.

The task force selects its first cases and sets to work, naming supervisors, making assignments, and starting to build intelligence sources.

**Computerized intelligence data bases.** They perform two essential functions in both the implementation and functioning of task forces:

1. They provide a depository for vital intelligence information (such as data obtained from surveillance activities) and techniques (such as "rollovers," the practice of granting immunity from prosecution in exchange for significant information). Such information is the foundation for building a number of cases that will eventually produce arrests and convictions.

2. They provide a standard by which the task force codes, analyzes, and otherwise uses intelligence information. Computerizing these data facilitates coordination among task force members by aiding the cross-referencing of names of suspects, associates, charges, and past contacts. It also provides easy access to information needed for search warrants, seizure orders, and warrants to arrest.

The task forces selected for this study demonstrated great skill and imagination in building intelligence arsenals. Although "rollover" is not a universal practice, all these task forces established one—granting informants immunity from prosecution for tips that lead to more arrests or more important arrests (or also, presumably, to especially important intelligence).

## Task force operations

Solidifying the task force involves putting into place the processes adopted earlier, adjusting them when necessary, and starting to set up monitoring and self-evaluation activities.

Many task forces find regular, institutionalized meetings are helpful. They promote problem solving, develop trust and working relationships, and reaffirm task force goals and objectives. Community leaders sometimes participate. Such meetings can be used to coordinate cases with other law enforcement agencies, especially Federal agencies, that are not officially part of the task force.

**Training needs.** Once the core staff is hired or actively engaged,<sup>9</sup> training needs should be identified and met. Although many task force officers may be experienced in narcotics operations, inexperienced personnel need basic training.

The task forces observed in this evaluation displayed remarkable similarity in training curriculums. In addition to the police academy training required of all, five out of six sites sent their officers either to a 2-week Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Basic Narcotics Investigation course or to a 2-week State narcotics investigation seminar. Some officers did advanced work in financial investigations, asset forfeiture, and drafting search warrants.

**Procedural and assessment needs.** Progressive development of a task force requires constant monitoring, assessing, and

if necessary, revising of task force goals, targets, procedures, and enforcement activities. This period demands strong leadership at the advisory board level and a strong supervisor as well.

Procedures to be followed include frequent review of cases and surveillance operations; continually following trends in arrests, new cases, prosecutions, and forfeitures; checking the condition of vehicles and equipment; and maintaining morale among officers and investigators.

Finances must balance and the level of agency support must remain high. Task force supervisors should continually monitor the nature of the jurisdiction's drug problem and other law enforcement efforts as a means of gauging success and making decisions on whether to modify task force goals and targets.

## Conclusion

Before the impact of multijurisdictional drug control task forces is fully known, more analytic work is needed on task force structures, the roles of task force participants, and the long-term impact of task force participation on the work of law enforcement officers and local jurisdictions.

These future process and impact evaluations should include non-law enforcement issues, since most task forces target communitywide problems. Evaluators should also consider development of new quantitative and qualitative indexes of task force impact.

Task force members believe success should be weighed by not only traditional indicators, such as numbers of arrests and drug removals, but also by alternative indicators they find more appropriate and more likely to promote improvement. These include:

- Creation and growth of intelligence data bases.
- The task force's image among targeted criminals.
- Impact of rollovers (new arrests generated, new intelligence records generated).
- Extent of interagency cooperation and communication.