Application: EPD ORT Grant Program 23-25

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Organized Retail Theft Grant Program 23-25

Summary

ID: 0000000028
Last submitted: Jul 1 2024 04:26 PM (PDT)

Application

Completed - Jul 1 2024

Application

CJC's Comments Regarding Application Questions:

1. These narrative application questions focus on how the applicant addresses the following funding priorities:

- Ability to address organized retail theft that places retail employees, the public, or both, at risk of physical injury.
- Ability to identify and address fencing networks connected to organized retail theft.
- Ability to identify and address the underlying causes of organized retail theft by focusing on individuals or groups who have committed or are at risk of committing organized retail theft.
- Evidence of collaboration with retailers or law enforcement agencies to support the reduction of organized retail theft in the jurisdiction served by the grant.
- Grant-funded operations designed to have a regional or statewide beneficial effect on the reduction of organized retail theft.
- Other criteria that the Commission chooses to include in the Organized Retail Theft Grant Program solicitation.

2. It is strongly recommended that applicants first read through all application questions and closely review the list of required documentation listed in the Grant Solicitation.

1. Describe the jurisdiction your program will serve if awarded funds.

The proposed program will serve Eugene, Oregon, and the greater Lane County area. This area is characterized by a diverse population and a mix of urban and suburban retail environments, ranging from large shopping centers and malls to smaller independent stores. Key commercial zones include Valley River Center, Oakway Center, 5th Street Market, and various downtown retail districts. The presence of the University of Oregon further adds to the dynamic retail environment.

Lane County encompasses both urban areas like Eugene and Springfield and extensive rural regions. The Eugene Police Department (EPD) focuses on urban crime prevention and response within the city of Eugene, while the Lane County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) provides law enforcement services to the wider county, including rural areas and smaller communities. Collaboration between EPD and LCSO, along with other local law enforcement agencies, is crucial for addressing organized retail theft comprehensively.

The retail landscape of this region features a mix of high-traffic retail stores often targeted by organized retail theft rings, which has significant economic implications for local businesses, impacting both revenue and community safety. The program described in this application aims to enhance public safety, support local businesses, and contribute to the overall economic well-being of the region by deploying License Plate Readers (LPRs) at key locations to monitor and analyze vehicle movements associated with these crimes. This initiative will involve close collaboration with local retailers, leveraging their insights and resources to bolster law enforcement efforts across both urban and rural areas within the jurisdiction.

2. Describe the organized retail theft-related problem within the defined jurisdiction that your program seeks to address.

The organized retail theft problem within Eugene, Oregon, and the greater Lane County area is a significant and growing concern. Eugene and Lane County experience a high incidence of organized retail theft, particularly in commercial zones such as the Valley River Center, Oakway Center, the West 11th Avenue shopping area, and various downtown retail districts. These diverse retail environments coupled with the jurisdiction's geographic scope present a unique challenge to law enforcement. Eugene's location along the heavily traveled Interstate 5 corridor makes it highly susceptible to organized retail theft rings.

The retail theft rings impacting the Eugene area consist of well-organized groups that target high-value items and use coordinated methods to evade detection. Thieves employ sophisticated techniques, including the use of multiple vehicles, disguises, and technology to coordinate thefts and avoid apprehension. The mobility and coordination of these groups make it difficult for traditional law enforcement methods to address the problem effectively.

The negative impacts of organized retail theft reach far into the community. This crime has severe economic implications for local businesses, causing significant financial losses, increased security costs, and higher prices for consumers. Small and independent retailers are heavily affected as they lack the resources to combat these thefts effectively on their own. Organized retail theft also contributes to a sense of insecurity within the community, affecting not only businesses but also shoppers and residents. The presence of organized theft groups can lead to other associated crimes, further deteriorating the quality of life in affected areas.

3. How does your organization identify or intend to identify the underlying causes of organized retail theft by focusing on individuals or groups who have committed or are at risk of committing organized retail theft?

EPD will identify the underlying causes of organized retail theft by focusing on individuals or groups who have committed or are at risk of committing these crimes using a multifaceted approach. LPRs will be deployed at strategic locations to capture vehicle data entering and exiting areas prone to organized retail theft and will be analyzed to identify patterns, such as frequent visits by certain vehicles to multiple retail locations where thefts have occurred. License plate data will be cross referenced with theft reports to capture links between different incidents, providing a clearer picture of organized activities.

EPD will work closely with retailers to share data on known organized retail theft operations. Retailers will provide additional information such as surveillance footage, employee observations, and transaction records, which corroborate findings from LPR data. Intelligence gathering will be significantly enhanced by combining LPR data with other sources, such as informants, open-source investigations, and surveillance operations, to build comprehensive profiles of suspects. This holistic approach will help us understand the broader network and hierarchy of organized theft groups. EPD may increase targeted operations or intervene with suspects to prevent further thefts. Insights gained from LPR analysis will also contribute to developing strategies aimed at reducing organized retail theft.

4. How does your organization identify or intend to identify and address fencing organizations connected to organized retail theft?

To effectively combat fencing organizations EPD will use strategically deployed LPRs to monitor vehicle movements in areas prone to retail theft and suspected fencing operations. By analyzing data collected from LPRs, EPD will identify vehicles frequently visiting both retail theft hotspots and suspected fencing locations, revealing patterns indicative of organized criminal activities.

EPD will also continue its close partnerships with local retailers, loss prevention teams, and regional law enforcement agencies. Through shared intelligence, including surveillance footage, employee insights, and transaction records, we aim to gather robust evidence against suspected fencing operations. Additionally, EPD will conduct targeted surveillance and utilize financial analysis tools to track the flow of stolen goods and money and will attempt to uncover the financial transactions underlying retail theft activities.

In addition, undercover operations will complement these efforts, involving sting operations and controlled sales to infiltrate and gather evidence against fencing networks. Legal actions will be supported by comprehensive evidence derived from LPR data, surveillance operations, and undercover work.

5. Does your organization have existing infrastructure (i.e. personnel, equipment) with a primary focus of addressing organized retail theft?

No

6. How will your organization use grant funds to investigate, disrupt, deter or reduce organized retail theft within the program's jurisdiction?

As described above, EPD will deploy LPRs at strategic locations to monitor and analyze vehicle movements associated with retail theft. Data analytics will be employed to identify patterns and connections between theft incidents and suspected offenders. EPD will continue to cultivate and foster partnerships with local businesses to enhance information sharing and coordinate prevention strategies, strengthening community and business involvement in combating organized retail theft. Grant funds will also be used to conduct targeted undercover operations, including controlled sales of stolen goods and to trace and identify key players in criminal networks facilitating organized retail theft. Additionally, EPD will support regional task forces to facilitate coordinated efforts and intelligence sharing across agencies.

7. How does your organization address or intend to address organized retail theft that places retail employees, the public, or both, at risk of physical injury?

EPD will address organized retail theft that places retail employees and the public at risk of physical injury through a variety of safety and prevention measures. EPD provides information to retail employees on recognizing potential threats, handling confrontations safely, and responding to theft incidents without escalating violence. EPD has in the past and will continue to deploy an increased presence in high-risk retail areas to deter criminal activities and ensure swift response to incidents. EPD encourages retail partners to bolster in-store security measures, including hiring security personnel, utilizing electronic article surveillance (EAS) systems, and implementing controlled access points. EPD also actively encourages the public to report suspicious activities and provides guidance on how to do so safely, minimizing risks to themselves and others.

8. How does your organization currently track or plan to track your efforts to reduce organized retail theft? What concrete measures (i.e. number of individuals charged, items recovered, value of items recovered) will you use?

EPD plans to track its efforts to reduce organized retail theft using a variety of tracking mechanisms and concrete measures. EPD's Crime Analysis Unit will collect, analyze, and interpret available data and intelligence related to organized retail theft incidents, including tracking theft patterns and identifying suspects and groups. These data will provide insights into trends, the effectiveness of interventions, and highlight areas requiring more attention. EPD participates in the Lane County Property Crimes Intel Meetings and collaborates closely with adjacent agencies to share information on organized retail theft cases, suspect activities, and emerging trends.

Concrete measures include tracking the number of individuals apprehended and charged with organized retail theft-related offenses, documenting offenders' names, charges filed, and case outcomes. EPD will continue to maintain detailed records of items recovered during investigations, including descriptions, quantities, and serial numbers, while calculating and reporting, where available, the total value of recovered stolen property to gauge our financial impact. Success stories and case studies are documented to highlight significant arrests, disruptions of theft rings, and recoveries, and will serve as benchmarks of the program's effectiveness.

9. Does your organization have collaborative partnerships in place with local law enforcement?

Yes

a. If yes, describe these partnerships and explain how they will be utilized to support and measure the reduction of organized retail theft within the program's jurisdiction.

The Lane County Property Crimes Intel Meeting serves as the cornerstone of EPD's collaborative partnerships with local law enforcement agencies to combat organized retail theft in the Eugene area. This collaborative partnership includes 16 law enforcement organizations from various jurisdictions within Oregon who have come together to foster a unified approach to combating property crimes. These meetings occur monthly and serve as a platform for local agencies to share intelligence, discuss emerging trends, and coordinate strategies. Agencies share detailed reports on organized retail theft incidents, suspect profiles, and operational tactics, which enhance collective knowledge and response capabilities. Agencies also share key metrics, such as number of individuals charged, items recovered, and the value of recovered property to measure the impact of different organized retail theft reduction strategies.

10. Does your organization have collaborative partnerships in place with retailers, community groups, or associations impacted by organized retail theft?

Yes

a. If yes, describe these partnerships and explain how they will be utilized to support and measure the reduction of organized retail theft within the program's jurisdiction.

EPD has developed strong partnerships with retailers, community groups, and associations to combat organized retail theft within Eugene and the greater Lane County area. These partnerships are instrumental in supporting and measuring the reduction of such thefts through coordinated efforts, information sharing, and targeted enforcement actions. Business associations provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of enforcement actions and crime prevention strategies, helping to measure progress and adjust approaches as needed. EPD routinely conducts focused enforcement operations at retail stores in Eugene throughout the year. These operations are designed to assist retailers in the apprehension and investigation of individuals responsible for ongoing and repeated theft issues. Funding provided through this grant will support the continuation of these types of operations.

EPD also hosts the Lane County Organized Retail Crime Association (ORCA) chapter that meets every other month. These meetings bring together law enforcement agencies from Lane County and representatives from 12 different retailers who are frequently targeted by organized retail theft. During these meetings, participants identify and share information regarding theft groups operating throughout Oregon. Loss preventions numbers provided by retailers help to measure the efficacy of the different organized retail theft reduction strategies deployed within a given period.

11. Describe your program's specific and achievable time-based goals to reduce organized retail theft within your jurisdiction.

EPD has identified the following time-based goals in association with its organized retail theft reduction program:

Month 0-2: Grant Award and Initial Planning – Form a dedicated project team consisting of officers, detectives, and crime analysts. Develop a detailed project plan outlining timelines and responsibilities for the deployment and implementation of the LPR system. Draft Requests for Proposals (RFP) for LPR system.

Month 3-6: Deployment of LPR System – Procure and install the LPR system at strategic locations identified through crime analysis and collaborative input from retailers. Integrate the LPR system with existing law enforcement databases and analytical tools to ensure seamless data flow and accessibility.

Month 6-9: LPR System Activation and Monitoring – Activate the LPR system and begin active monitoring of identified vehicles associated with organized retail theft rings.

Ongoing from Month 6: Intelligence Sharing and Investigation Support – Utilize existing information-sharing avenues to distribute intelligence on identified vehicles to partner agencies, supporting both local and broader investigations. Allocate resources for investigators to follow up leads generated by the LPR system, ensuring timely and thorough investigations.

Ongoing from Month 9: Enhanced Enforcement Operations – Conduct targeted enforcement operations based on intelligence gathered from the LPR system. These operations will focus on intercepting and apprehending individuals involved in organized retail theft. Work closely with retailers during enforcement operations to ensure coordinated efforts and support for the prosecution of offenders.