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Fighting the War on Drugs Requires a Cohesive and Balanced Strategy

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**By
Robert B. Wieners**

**Friendswood Police Department
Friendswood, Texas 77546
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ABSTRACT

The Texas war on drugs has not achieved a major impact on traffickers and dealers of illegal drugs in the greater Houston-Galveston area. The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question considering whether or not Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies have developed cohesive strategic and operational plans for controlling supply and demand factors associated with illegal drug use. It is hypothesized that Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies have not executed a cohesive and balanced approach in the war on drugs. This paper reviews selected federal, state and regional programs that have been developed for use in the war on drugs. A survey of Galveston County law enforcement agencies is conducted to identify the programs and practices that are in place to fight the war on drugs. The Galveston County law enforcement agencies that participated in the survey validate the hypothesis that Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies are not employing a cohesive and balanced approach in fighting the war on drugs. Interviews conducted with agency executives reveal that strategic plans are negatively impacted by a lack of support for implementing and/or expanding demand reduction programs in local schools. The law enforcement profession will benefit from this research because this paper proposes that there is sufficient interest and effort being shown at the operational level by peace officers. These peace officers efforts to achieve desired results are being hampered because of the ineffective leadership at the local level, which is manifested in inadequate intra-agency cooperation and insufficient funding.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	9
Findings	10
Discussions/Conclusions	14
References	17
Appendix	19

INTRODUCTION

The Texas war on drugs has not achieved a major impact on traffickers and dealers of illegal drugs in the greater Houston-Galveston area. There is no doubt that vigorous law enforcement activity has occurred, as evidenced in the *Houston Chronicle* article published on December 12, 2002, where author, Rachel Graves, reported that “58,000 drug convictions were won in local courts over the last five years. An analysis of these convictions indicates that 77 percent of the convictions [or about 44,660 cases] involved less than a gram of a drug. [In Harris County], 35,000 minor offenders were sentenced to time in jail or prison” (p. 1). These statistics indicate that the Houston-Galveston area drug war has been largely waged against petty offenders who are targets of opportunity (p. 2). Enforcement activity appears, for the most part, to have been directed against small-time users through self-initiated peace officer activity or in response to citizen complaints.

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question considering whether or not Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies developed cohesive strategic and operational plans for controlling supply and demand factors associated with illegal drug use. It is hypothesized that Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies have not executed a cohesive and balanced approach in the war on drugs. As a result, these law enforcement agencies have not effectively and efficiently employed available resources. This disjointed effort has yielded highly questionable results in the quantity and quality of arrests and prosecutions. Supply and demand issues associated with the trafficking and illegal use of drugs in local

Houston-Galveston area communities do not seem to have been effectively addressed.

This paper will review federal, state and regional programs that have been developed for use in the war on drugs. An assessment of the strategies will be conducted to determine if the plans were sufficiently comprehensive and balanced to have a meaningful impact in reducing illegal drug activity. A survey of Galveston County law enforcement agencies will be conducted to identify the programs and practices that are in place to fight the war on drugs. Selected interviews with local agency leaders will also be conducted to gain insight into obstacles that may exist in prosecuting a meaningful campaign against illegal drug activity.

The anticipated outcome of this research is to show that strategic plans have been developed at the federal and state level, and these plans are, for the most part, comprehensive and balanced. However, planning and implementation at the local-regional level does not reflect the cohesion and balance necessary to achieve favorable results. These deficiencies are believed to be the result of a lack of cooperation among agencies at all levels. This lack of cooperation is exacerbated by an absence of political will, ineffective leadership and insufficient funding at the local level. The law enforcement profession will benefit from this research because it will highlight the sufficient interest and effort being shown by local rank-and-file peace officers. These peace officers efforts to achieve desired results are being hampered because of the ineffective leadership at the local level, which is manifested in inadequate intra-agency cooperation and insufficient funding.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In 1976, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) published its Regional Drug Abuse Plan in order to establish a cohesive regional strategy to address the illegal use of drugs. The regional plan contains assumptions regarding the incidence, prevalence and trends relating to drug-related problems in the Houston-Galveston area. The plan acknowledges that drug-abuse, especially the illegal use of opiates, marijuana, barbiturates, inhalants and hallucinogens, is a serious problem for the region. (H-GAC, pp. 3-4). The plan establishes the requirement for a comprehensive strategy that incorporates the use of treatment, education and prevention programs. Of special note, the H-GAC (1976) plan identifies the need for “values-based curriculum designed to promote the development of responsible and fulfilled citizens” (p. 5).

The conclusion of the report indicates that there are several functional areas where performance gaps existed, to include: lack of treatment programs, deficient use of values-based education programs, and lack of prioritization for prevention programs, lack of performance based review of programs and deficient funding. The H-GAC (1976) plan was intended “to act as a catalyst to the alleviation of identified gaps in service” (p. 6). A noteworthy observation is made in its analysis of regional demographics where H-GAC (1976) states that there is a “fragmentation of units of local government” (p. 6). The plan notes that 80 municipal and seven county jurisdictions existed in the Houston and Galveston standard metropolitan statistical areas. It is also noted that this fragmentation caused an inefficient use of resources

that negatively impacted upon the coordination of activities addressing drug and alcohol abuse problems (H-GAC, 1976).

The Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) published *The History of Drug Abuse in Texas: Selected Metropolitan Areas* in 1993. This study validates many of the findings of the H-GAC (1976) analysis conducted 18 years earlier. This study specifically establishes “cocaine, especially crack cocaine, [as] the primary drug of abuse in Houston” (Maxwell & Spence, 1993, p. 46). The study supports this finding by analysis of drug-seizure, arrest and treatment data compiled from federal, state and local sources. In addition to highlighting Houston’s significant drug-abuse problem, the study also identifies Houston as a major hub for the entry and shipment of illegal drugs. The study reports 11,500 drug arrests by Houston-area police in 1991 and increased seizures of cocaine, crack, heroin, hashish and LSD. Of special interest in this study, is the correlation of drug-related crime to other serious crime in the City of Houston. “The Houston Police Department reported that over one-third of Houston’s murders and 58 percent of its robberies are drug-related” (Maxwell & Spence, 1993, p. 46).

From a treatment perspective in 1992, “cocaine comprised 80 percent of all drug-only admissions in Houston” to public funded programs (Maxwell & Spence, 1993, p. 55). In 1975, there were seven cocaine admissions in Houston; by 1992, the number of admissions had grown to 6,145. In contrast to the exponential growth in cocaine during this 17 year period, heroin use decreased by 61 percent with 1,368 addicts admitted for treatment to publicly funded programs in 1975; by 1992, the number of heroin admissions to publicly funded programs had decreased to 531. The number of admissions for amphetamines and methamphetamines remained

virtually unchanged during this period with an average of 61 addicts admitted for treatment each year (Maxwell & Spence, 1993, pp. 55-56). Another study conducted by TCADA in 1997 shows that cocaine addiction admissions to publicly funded programs had increased by two percent over the 1993 figures. The study further notes that by 1986 cocaine had taken over as primary drug of abuse in the Houston area (Maxwell, 1999, p.48).

In 1979, Governor William Clements declared a war on drugs in the State of Texas (TWAD). Clements believed that Texas needed to address the drug problem as a matter of priority, especially in view of the State's natural border with Mexico. The strategy adopted by Governor Clements was similar to the strategy being utilized by the federal government - "apprehend high level drug dealers" (Bodapati, 1993, pp. 25-26). The TWAD strategy employed three main components. First, an educational program was directed at parents and educators to teach kids about the hazards of drug abuse. Second, a legislative agenda was undertaken to put a tough anti-crime program in place to support law enforcement agencies. Third, a comprehensive intelligence system was established within the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to help support the identification, arrest and prosecution of major drug dealers (Bodapati, 1993, p. 26). In 1989, Jean Newberry, who had become the new director of TWAD, developed a vigorous demand reduction strategy. This plan called for a shift of main effort from supply reduction to demand reduction, with implementation to occur on the local level across the State of Texas (Bodapati, 1993, p. 30). An analysis of arrest data for the period 1980-1989 indicated that law enforcement agencies responded favorably to the war on drugs by arresting an increasing number of drug offenders. During the decade, the drug

arrest rate per 100,000 of Texas residents increased 41 percent from 275 to 389 (Bodapati, 1993, p.52).

A review of judicial activity conducted during the same period by Bodapati indicated the state judicial system capably supported the war on drugs with drug convictions increasing from 5,393 in 1980 to 23,126 in 1989 (Bodapati, 1993, p.59). It should be noted that the state prison's space capacity was unable to keep pace with this increased level of convictions. The inability of the state prison system to provide the needed capacity to house convicted offenders caused the judiciary to reconsider and modify sentencing options in many drug-related cases due to prison overcrowding (Bodapati, 1993, p.59).

In 1996, the Texas Narcotic Control Board (TNCB) noted that the Office of National Drug Control Policy had designated the Houston area as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). The TNC also identified several disturbing trends in the Gulf Coast area that included money laundering, stash houses for traffickers, and violent, drug-related gang activity. Of special note was the TNCB finding that crack cocaine was a major problem in the Gulf Coast Region (Criminal Justice Division, p. 22). Governor Bush announced in August 1996 a shift in the focus of main effort in the war on drugs to better address the needs of local communities and to emphasize the need for regional, multi-disciplinary programs. The establishment of regional task forces were highlighted as being essential for a cooperative effort, and future funding decisions would be based on how well local and regional entities worked together to address drug- abuse related issues (Criminal Justice Division, 1996, pp. 1-2).

The most well known and widely used anti-drug abuse education program employed during this period has been the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) Program. The program has been funded through federal, state and local resources not only in the State of Texas, but on a national level as well (Morris, 1999, p. 3). At best, the DARE Program has achieved mixed results. Positive comments made about the program include: strong community support, the donation of vehicles, few direct costs for school districts, minimal direct costs for law enforcement agencies beyond personnel costs, and strong support from parent-teacher school associations. Negative comments provided by participants in the program included: inflexible curriculum, too long a period of instruction, concerns about effectiveness, negative impact on other programs and efficiency of funding allocation (Morris, 1999, p.4).

By design, the DARE program was conceptualized with several components in mind. These components included: short visitations by police officers to kindergarten through fourth grade classes, a 17-week core curriculum for fifth grade classes, a 10-week junior high school program for seventh grade classes and a 10-week high school program (Bosworth, 1997, p. 217). An analysis of school districts that have participated in the DARE program showed that visitations were used in 33 percent of the districts. 81 percent of the districts used the core curriculum. 22 percent of the districts used the junior school program and only six percent of the districts used the high school program (Bosworth, 1997, p.217). To be sure, data exists that suggests that the DARE program has not been effective in reducing drug abuse (Bosworth, 1997, p.218). It is clear that deficiencies exist in DARE curriculum design and content, but there also is an issue with program implementation that has

yet to be fully addressed through independent study. According to Bosworth (1997), research into the field of demand reduction has found that “while solid theory-based curriculum and active, engaging classrooms are important, education alone has a limited impact” (p.10). Most drug abuse in a community does not take place on school campuses; it occurs in the community as whole. The development of anti-drug abuse programs must address school, community, family and social competency skill development. “Such activities include affecting public policy, generating media awareness and advocating for prevention and enforcement” (Bosworth, 1997, p. 11).

A study conducted commissioned by the Rand Corporation in 1994 found that the current cocaine epidemic began in the 1960s and peaked in the early 1980s with an estimated 9 million users of the drug. By 1992, the number of cocaine users had decreased to about 7 million, but the study cautioned against drawing premature conclusions (Rydell & Everingham, 1994, p.1). The study shows a decrease in light users as compared to heavy users (weekly users), and it classifies about 20 percent of all users as heavy users. The study highlights the fact that the consumption level of cocaine at its peak of approximately 300 metric tons annually has not decreased. This finding indicated that heavy users were consuming larger quantities of the drug (Rydell & Everingham, 1994, pp. 2-3). The study advocated for a reduction in funding of supply control efforts and an increase in funding for demand control efforts. The study further suggested a greater effort should be undertaken to provide treatment for heavy users of cocaine as a more cost effective strategy to reduce cocaine abuse (Rydell & Everingham, 1994, p.50).

METHODOLOGY

The research question posed in the introduction to this paper is formulated to determine if the Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies have developed cohesive courses of action for controlling supply and demand issues associated with illegal drug use. The anticipated outcome of this research is to show that strategic plans at the federal and state level have been developed, and these plans are for the most part comprehensive and balanced. However, planning and implementation at the local level does not reflect the cohesion and balance necessary to achieve favorable results.

A survey of 14 Galveston County law enforcement agencies is conducted to identify the programs and practices that are in place to fight the war on drugs. Selected interviews with local agency leaders are also conducted to gain insight into obstacles that may exist in conducting a meaningful campaign against illegal drug use. A questionnaire containing 12 questions is developed to provide a demographic overview of participating agencies and to assess the scope of supply and demand programs that are being utilized by these agencies. The questionnaire is also intended to assess funding support for supply and demand reduction programs within each community. A total of 14 questionnaires are distributed with 10 agencies responding; this level of participation equates to a response rate of 71 percent. In addition, eight agency executives are interviewed as an integral part of this research effort, including one agency executive whose agency did not respond to the questionnaire.

The information obtained from this research effort is organized into two functional areas of analysis: a strategic data analysis and an operational data analysis. The subjects evaluated in the area of strategic analysis are: agency and community demographics, local counter-drug strategy and political ownership for fighting the drug problem. The area of operational analysis includes a review of the agency assignment practices of peace officers to regional task forces and local drug enforcement efforts. Also, local drug demand reduction efforts in partnership with local school districts were assessed. In order to provide confidentiality to the respondents, agencies were been assigned a number (1-10). The respondents have also been sorted for analysis into three subgroups: small agencies (1-20 peace officers), medium agencies (21-70 peace officers) and large agencies (80-250 peace officers). This grouping of agencies facilitates the study by organizing individual agencies and placing agencies into subgroups.

FINDINGS

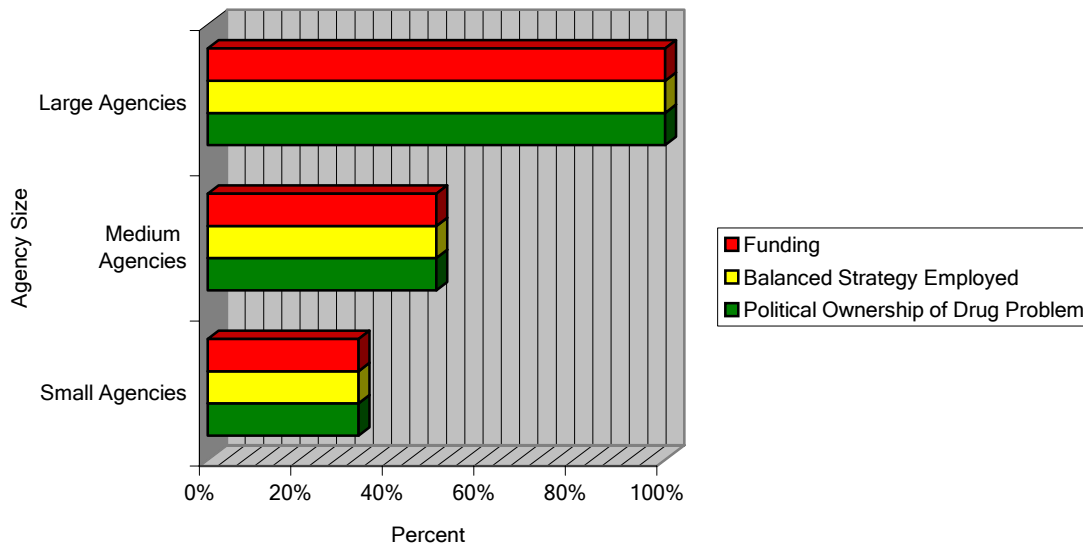
The research conducted as an essential element of this research project supports the hypothesis presented in the introduction to this paper. The Galveston County law enforcement agencies that participated in the survey validates the hypothesis that Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies are not employing a cohesive and balanced approach in fighting the war on drugs. A review of Table I and Chart 1 indicates that 40% of individual law enforcement agencies are experiencing a lack of political ownership for the illegal drug problem. In agencies where this situation existed, no balanced plans were present to address supply and demand issues relating to illegal drug activity. It should be noted that strategic deficiencies were especially prevalent in small and medium size agencies where

57% of the respondents reported that no strategy was in place. Interviews conducted with agency executives reveal that strategic plans were also negatively impacted by a lack of support for implementing and/or expanding demand reduction programs in local schools. These executives express concerns about school districts being unable to help with funding these programs due to budget constraints. Agency executives also state that a lack of cooperation between elected and appointed municipal and school district officials create competing priorities within their respective communities that result in demand reduction programs not being funded.

Table I: Strategic Data Analysis by Agency

	Political Ownership of Drug Problem	Balanced Strategy Employed	Funding
Small Agencies			
Agency 1	0	0	0
Agency 2	1	1	1
Agency 3	0	0	0
	33%	33%	33%
Medium Agencies			
Agency 4	1	1	1
Agency 5	1	1	1
Agency 6	0	0	0
Agency 7	0	0	0
	50%	50%	50%
Large Agencies			
Agency 8	1	1	1
Agency 9	1	1	1
Agency 10	1	1	1
	100%	100%	100%
All Agencies	60%	60%	60%

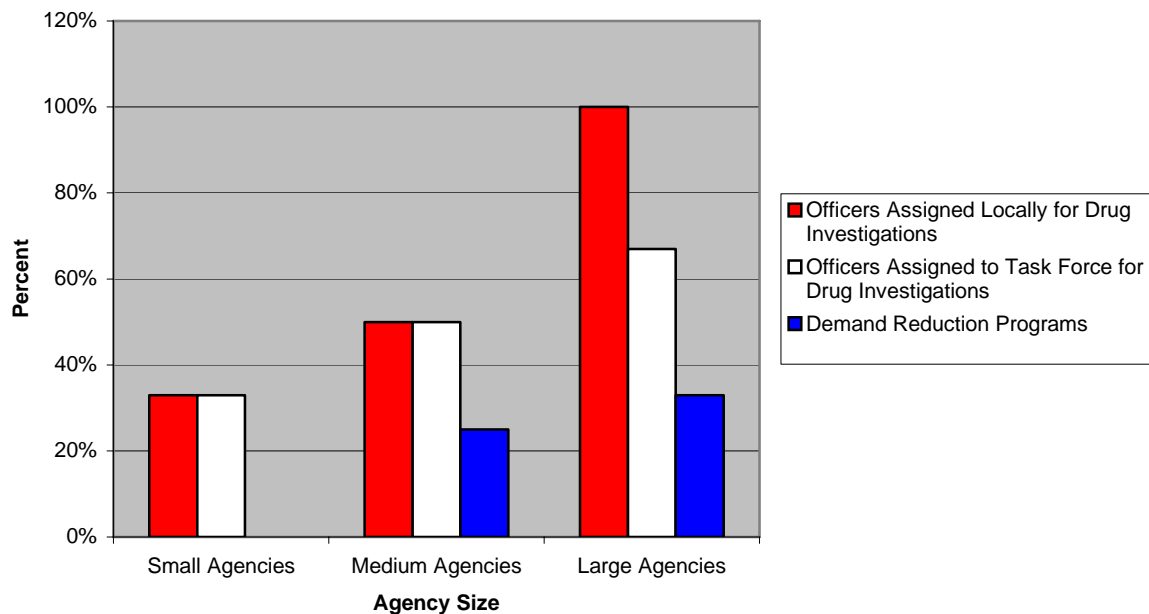
Chart 1: Strategic Data Analysis by Subgroup



Further key findings were documented in responses pertaining to operational programs employed by individual agencies and across the agencies as subgroups. In this analysis, it is evident that there is a major disconnect between information presented in answers relating to strategy and methods utilized by the large law enforcement agencies to deal with supply and demand reduction requirements. This is especially notable because these agencies report adequate funding and political support for fighting the war on drugs. The research shows that officer assignment practices appear to be disorganized and reflect a lack of unity of effort, especially in the medium and large subgroups. Demand reduction efforts are notably deficient in all three subgroups. A review of Table II and Chart 2 shows that operational plans are not balanced in any of the three subgroups. The large agencies show a robust effort for supply reduction and a meager effort for demand reduction.

Table II: Operational Data Analysis by Agency

	<i>Officers Assigned Locally for Drug Investigations</i>	<i>Officers Assigned to Task Force for Drug Investigations</i>	<i>Demand Reduction Programs by Agency</i>
Small Agencies			
Agency 1	0	0	0
Agency 2	1	1	0
Agency 3	0	0	0
	33%	33%	0%
Medium Agencies			
Agency 4	1	1	0
Agency 5	1	1	1
Agency 6	0	0	0
Agency 7	0	0	0
	50%	50%	25%
Large Agencies			
Agency 8	1	1	0
Agency 9	1	1	1
Agency 10	1	0	0
	100%	67%	33%
Total Agency %	60%	50%	20%

Chart 2: Operational Data Analysis by Subgroup

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question determining whether or not Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies have developed cohesive strategic and operational plans for controlling supply and demand factors associated with illegal drug use. It is hypothesized that Houston-Galveston area law enforcement agencies have not executed a cohesive and balanced approach in fighting the war on drugs. An assessment of strategies and operational practices of 10 Galveston County law enforcement agencies is conducted to determine if the plans are sufficiently comprehensive and balanced enough to have a meaningful impact in reducing illegal drug activity. The outcome of the research shows that planning and implementation at the local and regional levels does not reflect the cohesion and balance necessary to achieve favorable results in the war on drugs. These deficiencies are believed to be the result of a lack of funding and an inadequate unity of effort among law enforcement agencies, county governments, municipal governments and school districts.

The 1976 Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) Regional Drug Abuse Plan was published in order to establish a cohesive regional strategy to address the illegal use of drugs. The regional plan contained assumptions regarding the incidence, prevalence and trends relating to drug-related problems in the Houston-Galveston area at the time. During the last 29 years, the variety of illegal drugs being sold and trafficked in the Houston-Galveston area have somewhat changed, but the 1976 document offers perhaps some of the best insight into the conclusions documented in this research effort. The large number of jurisdictional entities in the Houston-Galveston area appears to remain the major cause of fragmentation at the

local and regional levels. This situation has negatively impacted the unity of effort of the jurisdictional entities, and it has resulted in an inefficient use of resources. The research shows that the problem of fragmentation documented in 1976 has become more pronounced when the independent school districts are factored into the analysis. Poor cooperation between local municipal governments and school districts has adversely affected funding and implementing comprehensive demand reduction education programs. Law enforcement agency executives interviewed in conjunction with this research effort underscored the fact that the lack of consensus by elected and appointed officials of municipalities and school districts was the one of the most serious detriments to implementing comprehensive, values-based demand reduction, education programs.

To be sure, the lack of cooperative working measures among local law enforcement agencies at the operational level is disconcerting. Agency leaders interviewed regarding this issue stated their frustration with competing priorities and funding constraints within their respective communities. Once again, these agency leaders cited the problem of no political consensus for how to best address the need for balanced supply and demand programs within their respective communities. In July 2003, the State of Texas discontinued funding for the Galveston County Drug Task Force due to a lack of multi-jurisdictional cooperation. This event should have been a wake-up call for community leaders, but the context of the State's decision was largely blurred by leadership and operational problems were experienced by other regional task forces in the State of Texas.

It should be noted that this research project encountered limitations with the availability of data specifically related to Galveston County. The researcher was

compelled to use data for the greater Houston-Galveston area in order to provide a general context for a discussion of the illegal drug problem.

In conclusion, the law enforcement profession will benefit from this research because this paper proposes that there is sufficient interest and effort being shown at the operational level by peace officers. These peace officers efforts to achieve desired results are being hampered because of the ineffective leadership at the local level, which is manifested in inadequate intra-agency cooperation and insufficient funding.

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Appendix

Counter Drug Strategy Survey

1. Agency name and location?

2. How many officers does your agency employ?

3. What is the population of your City?

4. Has your City developed a balance strategy to address drug abuse?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, what are the components of your program?

5. Are political leaders of your community engaged in this strategic effort?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Has adequate funding been provided to address supply and demand reduction?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What are the funding sources?

7. What specific educational programs does you City employ to address demand? (DARE, GREAT, Consequences, LETS)

K-4th grade

5th-6th grade

7th-8th grade

9th-12th
grade

8. Does the local school district financially support and participate in the education effort?

☐ Yes ☐ No

9. Do you have officers in your schools?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, who pays for the officers?

10. Does your department have personnel trained and specifically assigned to conduct proactive drug investigations in your community?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11. Does your department participate in any regional task force or local drug task force organizations?

☐ Yes ☐ No

12. Is your City's effort to address drug abuse adequate?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If not, what should be done?