

Operation Weed and Seed: A Vision of Safe and Thriving Communities

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Abstract

Violent crime in many American communities remains unacceptably high despite the significant accomplishments in crime reduction during the past decade. The US Department of Justice implemented Operation Weed and Seed to address violent crime, gang activity, drug use and drug trafficking in neighbourhoods hardest hit by violence and eroding social and economic stability.

Weed and Seed is a comprehensive strategy — not simply a grant program. The four fundamental principles are collaboration, coordination, community participation and leveraging resources.

The Weed and Seed strategy involves a two-pronged approach:

1. Law enforcement agencies and crime justice officials cooperate to 'weed out' violent criminals to prevent them from victimising residents in the designation area.
2. Social services and economic revitalisation are brought in to 'seed' the area to ensure long-term change and a higher quality of life for residents.

The primary objectives at each of the 300+ Weed and Seed sites are to: 1) develop and implement comprehensive community-based strategies to control and prevent violent crime, drug trafficking and drug-related crime; 2) coordinate existing and new public and private resources in designated neighborhoods to maximise their impact; 3) mobilise community residents to assist law enforcement in identifying and removing criminal elements, and to assist social service providers in identifying and responding to community needs; and 4) encourage full participation in neighbourhood decision-making processes.

Each Weed and Seed site is managed locally. At the national level, the Community Capacity Development Office is responsible for policy development and supervision.

Keywords

Weed and seed, community, crime prevention, police, neighbourhoods

Introduction

Across the world, public safety is a concern of national governments. The United States Government undertakes numerous efforts to increase the safety of its citizens. In this paper, one of the many federal efforts to reduce crime in the US is presented — the Department of Justice’s Operation Weed and Seed program. Operation Weed and Seed represents a collaborative effort of federal, state, and local governments, and non-profits and private and faith-based organisations, to reduce crime and restore communities in the highest crime neighbourhoods found across American cities. This paper is intended to explain why, what, where, when, and how Operation Weed and Seed works. It is our desire to share our successes, and disappointments, so others can have the benefit of our efforts. It is our hope that others see the value in this initiative and apply it, if and where appropriate.

Chapter one is a brief historic perspective. Chapter two covers the guiding principles behind Operation Weed and Seed. It discusses the vision, mission, and goal statements that drive Operation Weed and Seed, and the four fundamental principles of the program. Chapter three provides the reader with an understanding of how Operation Weed and Seed works in the field and explains how a community becomes a Weed and Seed site and what happens during the time a community is a Weed and Seed site. Chapter four discusses program administration from the view of the national office. In chapter five the funding process is explored. Chapter six focuses on evaluating Operation Weed and Seed and determining whether it truly works. In chapter seven the most important recent and proposed policy changes are highlighted. Chapter eight explains the importance of networking and partnerships, while chapter nine notes the success of Operation Weed and Seed and its charge for the future.

Chapter 1: Take it from the top

In 1991, the Department of Justice (DOJ) established Operation Weed and Seed as a community-based multi-agency approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and neighbourhood restoration. DOJ implemented Operation Weed and Seed to address violent crime, gang activity, drug use, and drug trafficking in neighbourhoods hardest hit by violence and eroding social and economic stability. Weed and Seed is designed to ‘weed’ out criminals to prevent them from victimising residents in the designated areas, and to ‘seed’ the neighbourhoods with prevention, intervention, and treatment services.

This initiative is a comprehensive strategy — not simply a program — to assist communities in bringing together people and resources to prevent and control crime and improve the overall quality of life. The Weed and Seed strategy stresses collaboration, coordination, and community participation. This approach gives communities experiencing high crime and social and economic

decay a comprehensive structure, critical planning tools, and access to a national network focussed on crime prevention, citizen safety, and neighbourhood revitalisation. This initiative is unique in that communities use the Weed and Seed strategy to develop and undertake efforts tailored to the issues, needs, and concerns of each individual neighbourhood.

Operation Weed and Seed began under President George H Bush in three pilot sites in 1991. It has since spread to over 300 high-crime neighbourhoods across the United States. As shown in Figure 1, Weed and Seed can be found in 50 of the 54 American states and territories. Today the Community Capacity Development Office (CCDO) administers the program; in the fiscal year 2005 the budget was \$62 million.

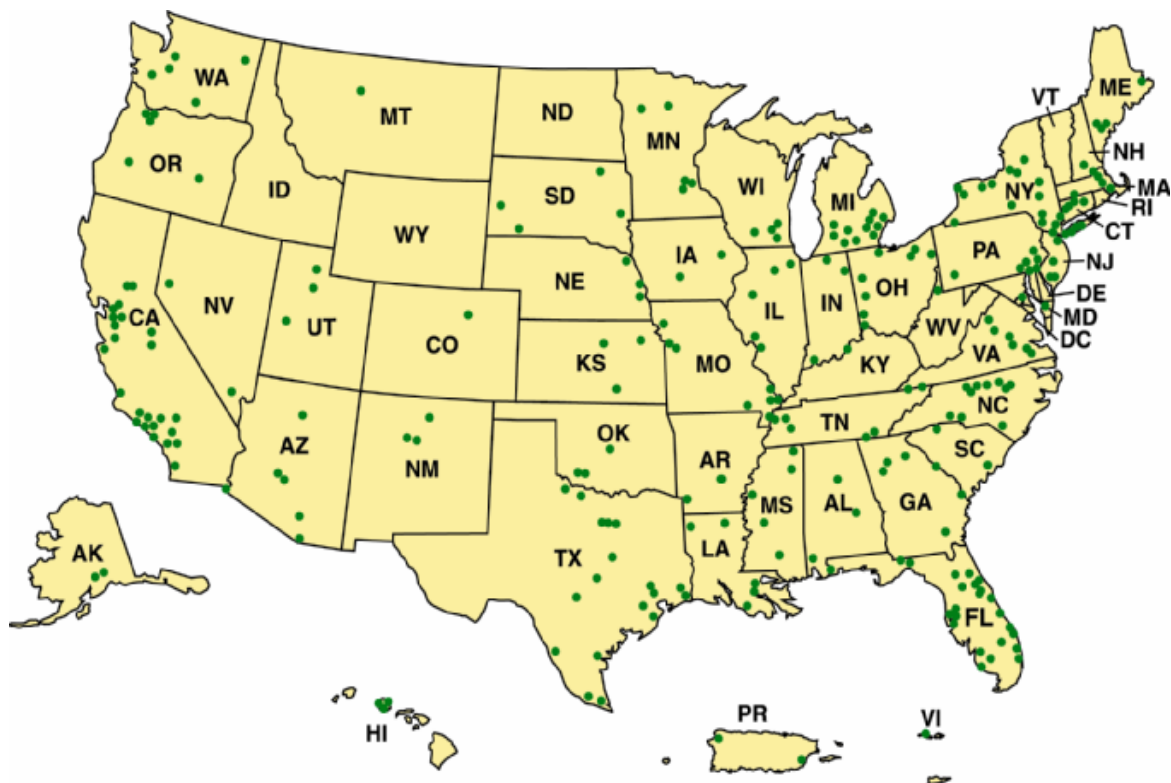


Figure 1. Weed and Seed across America (as at April 2005)

Chapter 2: Policy principles

Operation Weed and Seed functions under a simple and clear vision statement: Safe and Thriving Communities. Our mission is to promote comprehensive strategies to reduce crime and revitalise communities.

The Weed and Seed strategy recognises the importance of coordinating across all levels of government; law enforcement agencies; and criminal justice initiatives with social service providers and private-sector and community efforts. This coordination maximises the impact of existing programs and resources and fills in gaps in services. It also recognises the importance of citizen participation. Neighbourhood residents must be directly involved and empowered to help in solving problems in their neighbourhood. The private sector brings expertise, tremendous potential resources, and is a key to long-term sustained results.

Operation Weed and Seed has three fundamental goals:

1. *Enable communities to reduce violent and drug crime (weed)* — Law enforcement agencies and justice officials cooperate to ‘weed’ out criminals
2. *Strengthen community capacity to increase the quality of life (seed)* — Social service and economic revitalisation are brought in to ‘seed’ the area to ensure long-term change and a higher quality of life
3. *Promote long-term community health and resilience (sustain)* — Public and private partnerships are formed in order to sustain the effort beyond the limited federal involvement.

Four fundamental principles underlie the Weed and Seed strategy. These principles guide Operation Weed and Seed, set it apart from other approaches, and are a key to its success.

- Collaboration — Government departments across all levels; social service agencies; community organisations; faith-based groups; private sector; and residents play important roles. Each has a responsibility to the community and a stake in its future. Collaboration leads to permanent channels of communications among stakeholders, partnerships among organisations with similar goals. Furthermore, such efforts encourage innovation, help build broad support for the Weed and Seed strategy, and may bring about additional resources.
- Coordination — The number of government agencies and community organisations providing services to citizens can be overwhelming. Stakeholders are often unaware of the many service providers in the area, the goals and objectives of each organisation, and whether there are overlapping and duplicative services. Weed and Seed helps bring together the officials who represent these organisations and assists in coordinating their activities. The Weed and Seed Steering Committees (see chapter three) concentrate resources in designated neighbourhoods, match appropriate services with community needs, and eliminate overlap

and duplication. Both vertical coordination, e.g. across disciplines, and horizontal coordination, e.g. across levels of government, are critical.

- **Community Participation** — Communities that are empowered to solve their own problems function more effectively than communities that depend on services provided by outsiders. Homeowners take better care of homes than renters and workers who own part of the company are more committed than those who simply collect a paycheck. Therefore, initiatives that empower communities to help themselves, involve residents in the decision making processes, and encourage broad citizen involvement will be more effective than those that do not.
- **Leveraging Resources** — CCDO distributes funds to local sites in support of their Weed and Seed strategies, but these funds are limited. The amount provided cannot, and should not, provide the entire amount of resources needed to transform and revitalise a neighbourhood. Therefore, the Weed and Seed strategy is an opportunity for communities to leverage the available resources that will enable them to tap into additional funding streams and receive in-kind resources from federal, state, and local agencies, foundations, corporations, and other organisations. Weed and Seed sites are expected to leverage all available resources to fully fund the strategy.

Chapter 3: Securing Weed and Seed designation — a view from the field

Attaining Weed and Seed designation is a labour-intensive and time-consuming process. Generally, it takes about two years from the time the community first meets to the time the application is approved by the national office. Essentially, the process involves five steps and extensive participation from the government, non-profits, the private sector, and residents.

Step 1. Organising the Weed and Seed Steering Committee

Operation Weed and Seed is a collaborative effort among organisations. This collaboration is reflected in the Steering Committee, which provides a structure for building a commitment to Weed and Seed, identifying areas of greatest community need, coordinating programs and services for local residents, and ensuring everyone involved is working toward the same goals. The membership must include: the local US Attorney or his/her designee (see below for more information concerning US Attorneys); residents of the designated neighbourhood; city or county government representatives; and local law enforcement officials. The committee may also include representatives of the local prosecutor's office, other law enforcement agencies, social service providers, affordable housing organisations, workforce agencies, schools, faith-based institutions, and the private sector.

The Steering Committee is the governing body for Operation Weed and Seed at the local level. It serves as the highest authority within an organisational structure that includes subcommittees for the various component areas of Weed and Seed, a Weed and Seed coordinator, and links to other programs or initiatives that complement a site's goals and objectives. The following are the roles and responsibilities of a typical Steering Committee:

- Develop a future vision of the designated neighbourhood
- Conduct an in-depth community needs assessment
- Establish subcommittees for strategy development
- Oversee development of the strategic plan
- Identify resource commitments from each member.

Upon approval of a Weed and Seed application, the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee will focus on policy, management, and advocacy and include:

- oversight and management of goals and objectives and implementation issues
- development and integration of weeding and seeding policies
- monitoring of progress on evaluation and effectiveness of the Weed and Seed strategy
- leadership and advocacy for the Weed and Seed strategy.

The US Attorney is the top federal law enforcement official within his/her district. There are a total of 93 US Attorney Districts in the United States. US Attorneys are involved in several ways during the planning of a Weed and Seed application. First, the US Attorney should initially meet with community leaders to educate them about Weed and Seed and gain widespread commitment to the concept. Second, the US Attorney can help create a core group of local officials to start the planning process and be responsible for selecting some members of the Steering Committee members and, if necessary, the designated neighbourhood. Third, the US Attorney should serve as the Steering Committee Chair.

Step 2. Neighbourhood selection

The selected neighbourhood must have a population of 3000 to 50,000 people. The city should be willing to publicly commit to promoting the success of the complex undertaking. The city must also be willing to redirect or redeploy existing resources to assist law enforcement and restoration efforts in the designated neighbourhood.

Selection of a neighbourhood entails the collection and analysis of information that highlights community conditions, the level of readiness among community leaders, and the willingness of stakeholders to commit the necessary resources to make a positive and long-lasting change in the neighbourhood. Some might argue that the most disadvantaged communities in a city should

have priority, but the ability to mobilise residents to participate at different levels is what determines the success of a local strategy.

To assist communities with neighbourhood selection, CCDO recommends data from the following sources be collected and analysed: census tract data; a city's master plan; crime data; school data; social services; economic development data; and resident surveys.

Step 3: Submission of an Operation Weed and Seed Application

Operation Weed and Seed applications are submitted annually under a two-step process. A Letter of Intent indicates a local community intends to submit an official Operation Weed and Seed application. This initial stage serves to provide the national office with an indication of how many final applications to expect, thus helping CCDO manage its workload. Second, because the Letter of Intent contains certain crime data, it serves as a preliminary assessment of whether the application will be viable.

The official application has four mandatory sections. The management structure section provides the reader with an explanation of who is on the steering committee, their respective duties, the persons and organisations responsible for day-to-day management, and an organisational chart. Basically, section one explains how the local communities intend to manage and administer the program, including fiscal accountability.

Section two, Neighbourhood Selection and Assessment, identifies the selected neighbourhood and gives a social-economic profile of the neighbourhood. The application will generally discuss crime data, poverty rates, unemployment, property values, housing information and other pertinent data.

Section three is the proposed response to the problems described above. Goals, objectives, and strategies for both weeding and seeding are explained. The law enforcement section asks the applicant to explain specifically what the police are going to do to reduce crime: What special initiatives will the police undertake in the neighbourhood? Who will be the target of their efforts? But building the trust and cooperation of community residents is central to reducing crime so the weeding section must also include a community policing strategy. CCDO defines community policing as increasing police visibility and developing cooperative relationships between the police and citizenry. Actions may include assigning dedicated policemen to the designated neighbourhood, putting officers on foot and bicycle patrol, inviting residents into the police station, establishing neighbourhood watch clubs, opening a police substation, etc.

The seeding plan contains two elements: prevention/intervention/treatment and neighbourhood restoration. Prevention/intervention/treatment (PIT) revolves around social services designed to prevent social problems, intervene where they exist, and/or treat issues. Often such services include: drug abuse education, avoiding gang membership, literacy, job training, English as a second language, etc. Weed and Seed sites can undertake a variety of initiatives under neighbourhood restoration such as graffiti removal, community cleanups, and beautification.

Chapter 4: Operation Weed and Seed — an insider’s perspective

Operation Weed and Seed receives national direction and supervision from CCDO, which is a part of the Office of Justice Programs, the grant-making arm of the US Department of Justice. CCDO is responsible for development and enforcement of national program policy, regulations, and rules. CCDO approves all applications for Operation Weed and Seed designation and monitors performance for program and fiscal compliance during the five-year time period a community is an officially recognised Weed and Seed site.

Step 1. Receipt of the Letter of Intent

In the Letter of Intent applicants must answer the following three questions:

1. Describe what the crime data says about the proposed designated area
2. Describe why you believe Operation Weed and Seed will reduce crime and restore the neighbourhood
3. If your city previously had an Operation Weed and Seed neighbourhood indicate how the original site is being sustained and what lessons you can apply to the proposed area.

The applicant receives an assessment of violent crime rates, drug incident rates, and law enforcement resources compared to the site’s local and state jurisdiction, as well as the national picture. No application is rejected based on the Letter of Intent; it is only used to inform applicants.

Step 2: ‘Official Recognition’

Applications must consist of the elements described in chapter three. After receipt of the applications, CCDO undertakes a review and looks for responsiveness. We consider: does the application analyse the data? Does the application develop strategies corresponding to the problems? Will the management structure facilitate collaboration and resident participation? In November 2004, CCDO received 110 applications but only 22 were approved. The most common reasons for denial were improper neighbourhood selection and inadequate strategies, followed by management structure and resident participation.

Successful applicants are given a conditional approval pending a site verification visit. Assuming the information is verified, CCDO approves the application and 'Official Recognition' status is granted for five years. Unsuccessful applicants are provided a copy of the reviewers' score cards to give them an opportunity to view the analysis and to assist them to prepare a better application in the next cycle, if they choose to do so. Giving the applicant a copy of the score card also affords an opportunity to appeal the decision.

Chapter 5: Money matters

Operation Weed and Seed has a unique funding process. Unlike most federal programs, plan approval, or in the case of Weed and Seed, Official Recognition (OR), does not result in funding automatically. Rather, it permits a Weed and Seed site, upon securing OR, to compete for funds. The focus of the competitive funding application is production of a work plan and a corresponding budget for said work. The application covers a one-year time period.

All applications are scored by CCDO. The point system reflects policy priorities, such as aiding jurisdictions with the highest crime rates, encouraging leveraging of funds, and participating in other federal crime reduction and/or neighbourhood revitalisation efforts. We also award points to applications from rural areas, Indian tribes, and to US Attorney districts that do not have any Weed and Seed sites within the corresponding districts.

Communities that pass the Official Recognition and competitive application tests are awarded funding and are authorised to begin implementation. First-year funding is for \$175,000. During years two to five, funding is for \$175,000 plus an additional \$50,000 for special emphasis projects such as gun law enforcement, faith-based projects, methamphetamine initiatives, re-entry programs, and others. Half of the money is to be spent on 'weeding' activities, and half on 'seeding' activities. Generally speaking, the Weed and Seed funding is not a large enough award for new programs; the money is intended to be used toward expansion of programs.

Funding is contingent on programmatic and fiscal compliance by the site, and to ensure compliance CCDO requires semi-annual progress reports from the field. CCDO conducts verification visits every 18 months, and sites also undergo a financial audit by the Office of the Controller. Sites that fail either their programmatic or fiscal review are suspended. A final report is due to CCDO at the end of the five-year OR period.

Chapter 6: That's all well and good, but does it work?

In 1999, eight years into the life of Operation Weed and Seed, a national evaluation was conducted. The evaluation was supervised by the National Institute of Justice, the research

branch of the US Department of Justice charged with evaluating major federally-sponsored crime control initiatives.

To find answers about the effectiveness of Operation Weed and Seed, seven cities with a total of nine sites were chosen for the national evaluation. Each site had distinctive crime problems but they all shared high rates of violent crime related to drug trafficking and drug use.

Table 1. Demographics and crime statistics for Weed and Seed cities chosen for national evaluation

Designate area	Population	Weed and Seed start date	Part 1 crime rate per 1,000 residents in year prior to Weed and Seed	Impact on Part 1 crime* after two years of Weed and Seed (%)
Hartford	1,300	January 1995	199.2	-46
Meadows Village (Las Vegas)	4,819	October 1994	206.3	+9
West Las Vegas	10,103	October 1994	118.0	-6
North Manatee	3,327	October 1994	73.9	-18
South Manatee	8,620	October 1994	85.3	+2
Pittsburgh: Hill District	4,244	April 1992	246.6	-24
Salt Lake City: West Side	22,000	March 1995	55.1	+14
Seattle Central District	13,812	January 1993	172.6	-10
Shreveport: Highland/Stoner Hill	12,686	February 1995	211.6	-11

* Part 1 crimes include homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft. Data from Salt Lake City based only on five-month periods. For comparison, the national average crime rate per 1000 residents in 1995 was 52.8.

After two years, six of the nine sites showed a reduction in Part 1 crime. The most successful Weed and Seed efforts required the full cooperation of human services programs, community buy-in, and, perhaps most important, systemic commitment beginning with police officers on the street and extending through the sites' political structure and prosecutors' offices. The initiative

also relied on strong seeding programs, including prevention and intervention programs for youths, neighbourhood beautification, community building and development efforts, adult employment and economic advancement programs, family support services, and general community economic development.

The evaluation focussed on the following four key areas:

- Community Setting — Strong social and institutional infrastructure increased the likelihood of success. Those sites with severe crime problems and those sites with geographic advantages favoring economic development had more success. Sites with significant transient population did not perform as well.
- Program Design — The mix of weeding and seeding activities as well as the approach to programming appear to be important factors in gaining community support. The data suggest early seeding, sustained weeding, high-level task forces combined with community policing, and an active prosecutorial role all lead to success.
- Concentration of funds — Sites appeared to have greater success if they concentrated their program resources on smaller populations, especially if they could similarly channel other public funds and leverage private funds
- Leadership and Partnership — A less tangible ingredient that seemed to characterise the more successful programs was the active and constructive leadership of key individuals. By its very nature, Operation Weed and Seed places a great premium on effective coordination among groups with different organisational missions that are responding to different constituencies. The most effective implementation strategies were those that relied on bottom-up participatory decision-making approaches, especially when combined with efforts to build capacity and partnership among local organisations.

The evaluation report determined that the Weed and Seed program was showing positive results. Residents of sites and participants in seeding programs said they noticed more services and felt more secure. The evaluation states while it is impossible to precisely state what effect Weed and Seed has had, the overall impact on the target areas was positive.

In 2004, the Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) conducted a program assessment of Operation Weed and Seed. The OMB assessment rated Operation Weed and Seed across four areas: program purpose and design; strategic planning; program management; and program results. According to OMB, Operation Weed and Seed scored as follows:

- Program Purpose and Design — Score 100 per cent. Is the program purpose clear; does the program address a specific problem or need; is the program effectively targeted; and is the program redundant of other federal efforts.

- Strategic Planning — Score 75 per cent. Is the program focussed on a number of limited outcome-based performance measures; does the program have ambitious short and long-term targets; do all partners commit to working together over a long-term period; are independent evaluations being conducted; and have meaningful steps been taken to correct program deficiencies.
- Program Management — Score 90 per cent. Does the agency collect timely and credible performance information; are federal manager and program managers held accountable for performance; are funds obligated and spent in a timely manner; does the program effectively collaborate and coordinate with other federal programs; and are grant awards based on merit and competition.
- Program Results — Score 33 per cent. Has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term goals; has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its short-term goals; do independent evaluations indicate success.

It should be noted OMB gave a low score in this last section because the sample size of the independent study noted above was considered too small by OMB to draw definitive conclusions. OMB did note however, the decrease in homicides within Weed and Seed Sites. In 1998, the homicide rate was five per Weed and Seed site and by 2002 it had dropped to 3.8.

CCDO and the Office of Management and Budget have agreed to use homicide as the one national program measure. It will be the measure used by the federal government to determine whether Operation Weed and Seed is reducing crime. We agreed to homicide as the sole measure because it counted consistently across police jurisdictions and it is a good surrogate for other neighbourhood problems, e.g. drug dealing, gangs, etc.

Chapter 7: Thinking about tomorrow

Operation Weed and Seed is in its fourteenth year. Much like a person, Operation Weed and Seed has matures. At one time it was a demonstration program, but it is now fully institutionalised within the US Department of Justice, and it enjoys strong bi-partisan and geographic support; however, much like a 14-year-old, Operation Weed and Seed remains a work in progress.

In 2004, CCDO instituted a number of policy changes. First, we instituted a prohibition against 'expansion.' Prior to 2004, an existing site was permitted to expand by submitting a new application for Official Recognition of a site that included significant portions of the current site. But the policy did not encourage sustainment and due to strong demand and level funding, Operation Weed and Seed can no longer fund every approved Official Recognition application.

We do, however, permit applications from new sites that shared one common street border. We did so because sometimes crime is displaced from one neighbourhood to an adjoining one.

CCDO also began enforcing the five-year Official Recognition period. Before 2004, some sites were permitted to stay well beyond the five-year rule. The old policy made sense when funds were plentiful and demand was limited. But in times of limited funds combined with strong demand, the old policy could not be continued.

We also took steps to encourage greater compliance with program rules. One such step involved enforcement of the 'one grant per fiscal year' rule. In essence, this rule states that grantees are to receive only enough funds to implement one year's worth of activities. So, for example, if a grantee's balance is high enough at the end of the fiscal year (30 September 2005) to pay for the activities scheduled to take place during fiscal year 2006 (October 2005–September 2006), we would not provide additional funding. Moreover, the reason for a high balance is because they are not implementing their plan in a timely manner, so we offer those sites technical assistance and/or training to help them fix their problem.

In 2004, we began awarding additional points on competitive applications to those sites that leverage funding from outside of the US Department of Justice. This was our way of reinforcing the notion of Weed and Seed being a strategy and not a grant program, and of rewarding those who successfully seek additional partners.

What's next

Important changes are in the queue for Operation Weed and Seed. The changes described below were announced by the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Office of Justice Programs earlier this year. However, the mechanics of how to implement the changes are still in development.

1. Official Recognition (OR) will be competitive

Beginning in fiscal year 2006, Official Recognition designation will be competitive. Our intent is to rank applications in comparison to one another. The current practice is to rate applications against a general standard. There is no current limit on the number of Official Recognition designations, but beginning in 2006 there will be. By ranking applicants against one another, we intend to select only those who scored the highest rather than all who pass the test.

2. Official Recognition (OR) will be linked to funding

Starting in 2006, all sites with Official Recognition will be funded. Although all OR sites used to receive funding, over time as the program grew in popularity and became over-subscribed CCDO

could no longer fund every OR site. This led to tremendous frustration in the field among local communities and the local US Attorney's Offices. CCDO believes a return to the original policy is needed.

3. Funding Modifications

Operation Weed and Seed provides \$1,075,000 as the maximum grant total over five years. Over the years, CCDO has noticed sites often have difficulty spending their funds in a timely manner during the first two years. The first couple of years are often spent building local capacity while in subsequent years sites have the capacity to handle an increase in funding. Therefore, beginning in 2006 Weed and Seed Sites will be given smaller awards in years one and two; years three and four will have larger awards; but funding in year five will be reduced in order to emphasise the need for sites to sustain their effort beyond the five years of federal funding.

Chapter 8: It's who you know and who knows you

Communities, like people, need friends and partners. Among the challenges facing Weed and Seed communities is the lack of an extensive support network. One of the goals of Operation Weed and Seed is to try and link Weed and Seed communities with the local power structure so that they are not left outside looking in when decisions about their communities are made. Moreover, by connecting Weed and Seed Sites to the power structure they can better implement the plan during the five years of Official Recognition and sustain it thereafter.

A major emphasis of CCDO is to expand the national network of Weed and Seed supporters. This year, CCDO signed three agreements with sister federal agencies. One was with the US federal tax agency, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS administers a tax rebate program for low-income workers. Families who earn less than \$36,000 a year are eligible for the rebate; our data shows 60 per cent of families living in Weed and Seed sites fall into this category. CCDO and IRS signed an agreement to establish 50 voluntary income tax assistance centers where low-income families could get their taxes done for free and claim the rebate. The rebate can be as much as \$4300 but generally averages \$1900.

CCDO also signed an agreement with the federal agency responsible for banking supervision, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). FDIC has an aggressive financial education program aimed at the 10 per cent of all families in America who do not have a bank account. The agreement is to launch the financial education initiative in at least 75 Weed and Seed sites. Our third agreement is with the Corporation for National Service (CNS), which is responsible for managing volunteer programs. Under the terms of the agreement, volunteers will be sent to selected Weed and Seed sites for the purpose of helping those sites develop and implement

programs at successfully reintegrating offenders re-entering society. We are also in discussion with a third sister federal agency about establishing a program that would match the savings of low-income people for the purpose of buying a home. The idea is to increase homeownership rates in Weed and Seed sites and private investment.

A famous American actress once said “It’s better to be looked over than over looked.” We know how she feels. It’s a terrible feeling to know you are part of something good and few know it. CCDO wants to better inform the public and policy makers regarding our efforts and results. Our new website will be engaging, interactive, and comprehensive. We also intend to raise the visibility of Weed and Seed. CCDO has formed an advisory committee consisting of local Weed and Seed site members to work on ways local sites can better publicise their programs.

Chapter 9: All done

Fourteen years ago the architects of Operation Weed and Seed had a vision — a vision of safe and thriving communities. They understood partnerships among federal, state, and local governments, and private, non-profit, and faith-based organisations were critical in crime fighting efforts. They understood the importance of national leadership in crime fighting. But equally important, they understood local problems need local solutions.

Good ideas stand the test of time while trendy ideas come and go. Weed and Seed has stood the test of time because quite simply it is a common sense approach. Distressed neighbourhoods need security and community development in a coordinated and concentrated fashion. Using law enforcement and community policing to weed out the criminal element and using prevention/intervention/treatment services and community development to plant seeds in tough neighbourhoods is a winning combination. It combines the two core hopes and aspirations of every community — security and opportunity.

Hopefully, the next 14 years will see the continued evolution of Operation Weed and Seed. As we learn what works the program needs to reflect those good ideas. Today, 5.5 million people live in a Weed and Seed site. They are hard-working Americans who earn low wages. They have as much right to security and opportunity as all other Americans. Operation Weed and Seed is doing its part to realise the vision of safe and thriving communities.

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