
RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the technological needs of state and local law enforcement agencies, informed decisions should take into account an overall assessment of what technologies are in use across the nation and how well or poorly they are presently performing. For the most part, that information is lacking.

Thus, it would be useful to hold federal hearings or commission studies to determine what is happening around the country, as input to policy planning. A well-conceived study would probably more than pay for itself in cost savings and improved public safety. Such a study would probably best include both a broadly based survey of agencies across the nation and more-detailed operationally oriented site visits to a representative sample of agencies. It could provide a sound basis for establishing realistic performance goals for each element of the proposed initiative.

Presently lacking the comprehensive, empirical data we would like, this report has provided a number of anecdotal examples suggestive of broader problems and solutions.

In summary, our findings and recommendations are these:

- The *technology assistance* provided by the existing NLECTCs and their partnering organizations appears to be paying high returns on investment, helping law enforcement agencies solve crimes and protect both the public and the police. Although we cannot rigorously quantify it, there appears to be considerably more latent demand for this assistance than can currently be supplied. The pilot effort has proved itself and should be continued on an

expanded scale. It would seem sensible and efficient to collocate new NLECTC sites with national laboratories or universities.

- *Technology deployment* efforts—including technology development, testing, commercialization, and acquisition support—appear to be a much needed and efficient use of federal monies. There may be a role for Department of Energy labs in advancing more-fundamental research efforts. Many technological advances in law enforcement are currently on the drawing board or in development. The need for technology deployment support will continue and will grow.
- Modern *crime labs* are essential to solving crimes, supporting successful prosecutions, and clearing innocent suspects. If the California Auditor’s report is indicative of the condition of labs across the country—and we believe it is—then there are substantial needs for improved facilities, modern equipment, continuing training, and quality control. Accreditation by a central accrediting organization, as is conducted by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board, is a useful adjunct to technology modernization—and sometimes drives modernization.¹
- *Training* is commonly short-changed in the budgeting process. It is not uncommon for modern equipment to be bought and either to sit unused or misused for lack of trained operators. Failure to provide adequate training is a false economy. The federal government has a role to play in making law enforcement training more accessible and affordable.

More study is needed, but that should not delay making prudent investments, such as are being proposed by the crime-fighting technology initiative.

¹About 50–60 percent of the nation’s crime labs have gone through the accrediting process. The accrediting process for crime labs looks at operating procedures but not at adequacy of equipment or budgets. It is a step toward more-comprehensive recommended standards and practices.