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# TRAFFIC TECH

## Technology Transfer Series



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# High-Visibility Enforcement: Assessing Change and Identifying Opportunities

High-visibility enforcement (HVE)—enforcement that includes earned and/or paid media activities to publicize the enforcement efforts—is an effective strategy for reducing risky traffic safety behaviors (Richard et al., 2018). However, HVE countermeasures may not be used by all law enforcement agencies (LEAs). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has anecdotal evidence that some State Highway Safety Offices (SHSOs) believe support for HVE among LEAs and officers has declined in recent years. Law enforcement officers are often offered overtime pay to conduct HVE, but this strategy for encouraging participation cannot be used if overtime funds are not available or if officers are unwilling to work overtime hours. In response, some State and local LEAs have developed other tactics for promoting HVE participation among law enforcement.

In the current study, the research team interviewed nine SHSO officials to determine whether they believed there had been any changes in participation in or support for HVE over the past 10 years (*perception interviews*). The research team also conducted six interviews with SHSO and LEA officials to document eight innovative strategies being used to increase officers' participation in HVE (*case study interviews*). The U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe National Transportation Systems Center conducted this study for NHTSA and the Governors Highway Safety Administration (GHSA) under the National Cooperative Research and Evaluation Program.

## Method

States were selected for the perception interviews based on recommendations from NHTSA Regional Offices and to obtain diversity in selected States' geography, population, and traffic safety challenges (e.g., motor vehicle crash fatality rates). States selected for perception interviews were Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New York, Rhode Island, and Texas. Additionally, NHTSA Regional Offices recommended interviewees knowledgeable about eight innovative strategies being used by LEAs to increase participation in HVE. Table 1 lists the States, agencies, and strategies for case study interviews.

The research team conducted both perception and case study interviews in August 2019, in-person at the 2019 GHSA Annual Meeting or via conference call. Interviewers adhered to questions in two separate guides developed for each interview type. The perception interview guide contained questions

**Table 1. Strategies Selected for Case Study Interviews**

State/Agency	Strategy
Colorado/Aurora Police Department	Highway Enforcement of Aggressive Traffic Unit
Colorado/Loveland Police Department	Pro-traffic safety departmental model
Delaware/SHSO	Paperwork reduction and pay equity
Illinois/SHSO	Comp time model
Iowa/SHSO	"High Five" program
Iowa/SHSO	Operational plans
Maryland/SHSO	Operations spreadsheets
Maryland/SHSO	Training programs

about HVE, including types and amount of HVE the SHSO conducts; perceived safety impacts and challenges of conducting HVE; and perception of whether participation in and support for HVE had changed in the past 10 years. The case study interview guide contained questions about innovative strategies, including details of the strategy; background and motivation for the strategy's development; impact of the strategy on officers' participation in HVE; and challenges in implementing the strategy.

Based on detailed notes taken during each interview, as well as information sheets completed by the interviewers after the interviews, the research team coded responses to each question. Then the team examined responses for key themes and relationships among responses by identifying responses common to multiple interviewees.

## Results

### Perception interviews

SHSO officials most frequently reported targeting alcohol-impaired driving with HVE activities, followed by occupant protection, speeding, and distraction. All nine officials indicated their law enforcement partners engaged in HVE outside of grant-funded HVE, although there was significant variability in the extent. Five officials perceived rural LEAs as less likely to participate in HVE activities than urban LEAs. All officials believed their offices' HVE efforts had a positive impact on traffic safety in their States, including reductions of the number of unbelted or impaired-driving fatalities.

SHSO officials noted several challenges for law enforcement participation in and implementation of HVE (Table 2). Additionally, eight of nine SHSO officials indicated they

believed there had been a decrease in HVE participation among law enforcement over the past 10 years. All but one official noted decreases in hours billed by law enforcement partners in grant reimbursement requests for HVE activities.

**Table 2. Most Frequently Mentioned Challenges for HVE Participation and Implementation**

Lack of manpower/staffing shortages	8
Multiple/easier overtime details available	8
Concerns about public perception of law enforcement	6
Making data-informed decisions/understanding data	5
Generational differences in HVE interest among officers	4
Leadership buy-in (within law enforcement)	4
Working within NHTSA and 2 CFR 200 requirements	3
Funding decreases (from both State and Federal sources)	3

<sup>1</sup> Number of officials (N = 9) who mentioned a challenge.

### Case study interviews

Each of the officials interviewed about innovative strategies indicated their strategy was developed to increase law enforcement participation in HVE. Since implementing, all but one official reported noticing an increase in HVE participation by law enforcement officers. The case study interviewees all noted positive support within the law enforcement community in implementing the strategies.

### Matching challenges to solutions

As the research team analyzed the results of the perception and case study interviews, the innovative strategies appeared to address many of the HVE challenges noted in the perception interviews. While details about specific strategies are included in the full report, Table 3 briefly describes key attributes of innovative strategies that may address these challenges.

## Discussion

The current project links challenges noted by SHSO officials for officers' participation in HVE with possible solutions from innovative strategies being used to increase participation. Ultimately, it may take a combination of several strategies or further innovation to fully address these challenges. Additionally, formal evaluation of innovative strategies would provide information about whether and how these strategies could be successfully translated for use in other jurisdictions. Finally, HVE, like all traffic safety enforcement, should be applied even-handedly.

## References

Richard, C. M., Magee, K., Bacon-Abdelmoteleb, P., & Brown, J. L. (2018, April). *Countermeasures that work: A highway safety countermeasure guide for State Highway Safety Offices, 9th edition* (Report No. [DOT HS 812 478](#)). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.



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**Table 3. HVE Challenges and Attributes of Case Studies That May Address Them**

Goes to law enforcement with identified traffic safety problems.
Simplifies the grant application process for LEAs.
Pays a uniform rate for all overtime activities across the State.
Maintains communication with law enforcement partners.
Finds opportunities for consistent data reporting across LEAs.
Allows flexible scheduling of HVE activities.
Builds advanced alcohol-impaired-driving enforcement skills.
Conducts trainings in real-time (e.g., videoconferencing).
Trains front-line supervisors to encourage buy-in.
Uses highly trained officers with interest in traffic safety.
Creates "ownership" of road segments by law enforcement.
Encourages ownership of safety efforts by community partners.
Creates team operational times to motivate officers.
Uses traffic safety data to focus on problem areas.
Selects messaging in a strategic and careful way.
Participates in community events; maintains contact with media.
Starts with a small program, and builds it over time.
Listens to partners' ideas for increasing HVE participation.
Offers non-traditional compensation methods (e.g., comp time).
Creates talking points/messaging to expand implementation.
Is patient and persistent when making major shifts.
Champions traffic safety to community, officers, leadership.
Uses a data-driven enforcement model.
Sets the expectation that HVE is a focus for an LEA.
Trains officers to be able to address HVE areas of concern.
Partners with other law enforcement organizations.
Envisions SHSO's and LEA's relationship as partnership.
Creates operational plans in a self-assessment format.
Monitors production and highlights success by sharing results.
Creates collaborative and multi-jurisdictional opportunities.
Encourages competition between participating LEAs.
Communicates constantly with law enforcement partners.
Encourages coordinated law enforcement efforts.
Establishes liquidation expectations; adjusts grant allocations.

## How to Order

Download a copy of *High-Visibility Enforcement: Assessing Change and Identifying Opportunities* (DOT HS 813 066) through the National Transportation Library: <https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/>.

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