

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention****[OJP (OJJDP) Docket No. 1376]****Program Announcement for the
Internet Crimes Against Children Task
Force Program****AGENCY:** Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention, Office of
Justice Programs, Justice.**ACTION:** Notice of solicitation.

SUMMARY: The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is requesting applications from state and local law enforcement agencies interested in participating in the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program. In an effort to expand ICAC Regional Task Force coverage to areas that do not currently have an ICAC Regional Task Force presence, this solicitation is limited to State and local law enforcement agencies in the following states and localities: Arkansas; New Jersey; northern Florida;¹ the Los Angeles, California, metropolitan area;² and the northern Virginia/Washington, DC metropolitan area (excluding Maryland).³ Only one grant will be awarded per State/locality listed above. This program encourages communities to develop regional multidisciplinary, multijurisdictional task forces to prevent, interdict, and investigate sexual exploitation offenses committed by offenders who use online technology to victimize children.

DATES: Applications must be received by July 7, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Chris Holloway, 202-305-9838, ICAC Program Manager, Child Protection Division, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Purpose**

Due to an increase in funding, this solicitation is being extended to further

expand the ICAC Task Force program to provide national coverage beyond that established through grants awarded under this program in 2002. Funding the specific states and regions identified in this solicitation will further this goal.

The purpose of this program is to help state and local law enforcement agencies enhance their investigative response to offenders who use the Internet, online communication systems, or other computer technologies to sexually exploit children. Throughout this program announcement, "Internet crimes against children" refers to the sexual exploitation of children that is facilitated by computers and includes crimes of child pornography and online solicitation for sexual purposes.

Background

Unlike some adults who view the benefits of the Information Age dubiously, children and teenagers have seized the Internet's educational and recreational opportunities with astonishing speed. Adapting information technology to meet everyday needs, young people are increasingly going online to meet friends, get information, purchase goods and services, and complete school assignments. Currently, 28 million children and teenagers have access to the Internet; industry experts predict that they will be joined by another 50 million globally by 2005. Although the Internet gives children and teenagers access to valuable resources, it also increases their risk of being sexually exploited or victimized.

When online, large numbers of young people encounter sexual solicitations they do not want and sexual material they do not seek. In the most serious cases, they are targeted by offenders seeking children for sex. Research conducted by the University of New Hampshire revealed that one in five children between ages 10 and 17 received a sexual solicitation over the Internet in 1999. One in 33 received an aggressive solicitation from someone who asked to meet them somewhere, called them on the telephone, or sent them mail, money, or gifts.

Cloaked in the anonymity of cyberspace, sex offenders can capitalize on the natural curiosity of children and seek victims with little risk of detection. Preferential sex offenders no longer need to lurk in parks and malls. Instead, they can roam from chat room to chat room, trolling for children susceptible to victimization. This alarming activity has grave implications for parents, teachers, and law enforcement officers because it circumvents conventional safeguards and provides sex offenders with

virtually unlimited opportunities for unsupervised contact with children.

Today's Internet is also rapidly becoming the new marketplace for offenders seeking to acquire material for their child pornography collections. Child pornography depicts the sexual assault of children and is often used by child molesters to recruit, seduce, and control their victims. Child pornography is used to break down inhibitions, validate sex between children and adults as normal, and control victims throughout their molestation. When offenders lose interest in their victims, child pornography is often used as blackmail to ensure the child's silence; when posted on the Internet, pornography becomes an enduring and irretrievable record of victimization and a relentless violation of that child's privacy.

OJJDP recognizes that the increasing online presence of children, the lure of predators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims, and the proliferation of child pornography present a significant threat to the health and safety of children and a formidable challenge to law enforcement today and into the foreseeable future. Three main factors complicate law enforcement's response to these challenges.

First, conventional definitions of jurisdiction are practically meaningless in the electronic universe of cyberspace; very few investigations begin and end within the same geographical area. Because they involve multiple jurisdictions, most investigations require close coordination and cooperation between Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.

Second, evidence collection in ICAC investigations typically requires specialized expertise and equipment. Because preferential sex offenders tend to be avid recordkeepers, their computers, magnetic media, and related equipment can be valuable sources of evidence. However, routine forensic examination procedures are insufficient for seizing, preserving, and analyzing this information. In addition, the seizure of computers and related technology may lead to specific legal issues regarding property and privacy rights.

Third, routine interviewing practices are inadequate for collecting testimonial evidence from child victims of Internet crimes. Some children deny they are victims because they fear embarrassment, ridicule from their peers, or discipline from their parents. Other victims bond with the offender, remain susceptible to further manipulation, or resent what they perceive as interference from law enforcement. Investigators who do not

¹ For the purpose of this solicitation, northern Florida is defined as counties and cities north of, and including, Hillsborough County, Indian River County, Osceola County, and Polk County.

² For the purpose of this solicitation, the Los Angeles metropolitan area is defined as cities and towns within, and including, Los Angeles County, Orange County, Riverside County, San Bernardino County, and Ventura County.

³ For the purpose of this solicitation, the northern Virginia/Washington, DC, metropolitan area (excluding Maryland) is defined as the cities of Washington, DC; Alexandria, Virginia; and Falls Church, Virginia, and the cities and towns in Virginia within, and including, Arlington County, Fairfax County, Loudoun County, Prince William County, and Stafford County.