Spotlight: CATPA Funding Q & A

With the recent announcement of FY-14-15 grant awards, we asked CATPA Director Robert Force and CATPA President Jerry Cole to share insights into the steps the board is taking help ensure the long-term success of statewide task forces and achieve CATPA’s ultimate goal of reducing auto theft.

Q: How do the CATPA board and staff view their role as stewards of insurance consumer dollars?

RF: Although CATPA is a small staff of three full time personnel, the staff takes great care in the responsibility to diligently care for collected fees, manage expenses and document responsible investment in, and accountability to, the intended purpose in reducing and preventing auto theft crime within Colorado. CATPA staff is ever cognizant to ensure these financial resources are given utmost care in assuring there is a direct benefit to the citizens of Colorado and to the insurance industry. As a forum of financial accountability, CATPA is answerable to the CATPA Board and the Colorado Department of Public Safety financial section for monthly financial reporting, reconciliation and reviews.

JC: Our stewardship of the funding derived from consumers and dedicated to the CATPA mission is a very important responsibility. To that end we have endeavored to create a lean and efficient entity that operates within strict legislative guidelines to provide the essential objects of prevention and reduction of motor vehicle thefts in Colorado.

Q: CATPA recently instituted some significant changes to the grant application and award process. Why were those changes implemented and can you help demystify how the board awards grant dollars?

RF: CATPA began collecting insurance fees in 2009, and has consistently strived to increase accountability in the deliberation and delivery of grant programs and awards. These experiences have led to developing and implementing consistency in the grant application and award processes to elevate cost-efficiency while providing qualitative services to citizens of Colorado. The Board utilizes quantitative and qualitative standards - incorporating risk factors of auto theft to the citizens, the technical strength of the grant proposal, the ability of the agency to manage the funded programs and delivery of cost-benefit to the communities being served.

JC: Those changes, I believe, have simplified and created some definable guidelines to be used to justify awards to grant applicants based on both the statutory requirement to address problems throughout the state and to concentrate resources proportionally in those areas of the greatest need.

Q: There are always questions about how to best measure the success of task forces, what are the metrics and results prioritized by the board in investing grant dollars?

RF: CATPA has historically used the overall reduction of auto theft, either statewide or by region, as a benchmark to effectiveness. Measurements vary upon the type of
initiative funded by CATPA. For example, public education programs are typically measured by not only the number of people affected in an outreach campaign, but measuring the perception variances or changes the public may have about risks involved with auto theft. In sum, CATPA is working on improving the cost-benefit analysis of funded programs, such as using the value of recovered stolen vehicles per grant program/project for calculating a cost-benefit to reported activities (e.g., number of arrests, number of cases investigated, etc.). Likewise, the cost of recovered stolen vehicles identified by automated license plate readers funded by CATPA is considered with the total amount of funding for the technology.

JC: Raw statistics and effectiveness is not the same thing and the answer to this question is a mixture of objective statistics and subjective judgment. First, there has been a huge reduction in the number of motor vehicle thefts in Colorado since the inception of CATPA and that is a very positive result for everyone concerned; consumers, insurance and law enforcement. However, at the same time, the remaining numbers of thefts that are occurring are showing a declining recovery rate. The explanation for this trend is that there are professional criminal organizations (large and small) as well as active repeat offenders operating in Colorado. These entities represent much harder targets and are exactly why dedicated auto theft task forces of specialist investigators, who are not encumbered by jurisdictional barriers, are needed to fill the gap that exists among the various existing law enforcement agencies in the state that rightfully are focused on addressing what happens within “their” area to the exclusion of addressing a problem that has multi-jurisdictional tentacles. Targeting and marginalizing these major players is exactly the purpose of CATPA. The activities of these criminal groups represent the sustaining damage to citizens, insurance policies and the general condition of insecurity in a society. As motor vehicle theft is often linked to other criminal behaviors, reductions in auto theft result in reductions in other crime and disorder categories. Finally, holding grantees to high standards of performance is essential. Grant recipients are responsible for achieving their stated goals or else funding will be reduced or withdrawn in favor of more effective task forces or programs. CATPA grants are not a soft give-away funding mechanism.

Q: The amount of grant money being requested has continued to increase while the CATPA funding remains fixed based on the number of Colorado’s insured vehicles—how is the CATPA Board attempting to address that gap? What role do task forces and law enforcement agencies play?

RF: This past year, CATPA faced funding limitations in comparing the requested applications to actual revenue, which was almost a $1 million dollar gap. As a result of these variances, CATPA used several decision matrixes to address priorities and allocate funding on a statewide problem to reduce auto theft. The roles of the task forces and multi-agency applicants play a large role in filling in the gap. Some task forces were provided CATPA funding which was augmented and otherwise supported by local agency participation. Although CATPA cannot require matching funds of the grants, all task forces have additional financial support to ensure continuation of the task force or program.

JC: This squeeze is becoming more apparent in each grant cycle. Even maintaining the status quo is impossible given rising costs of everything. Current
and future grant applicants must exercise flexibility and ingenuity in combining with other agencies, grantees or funding sources to off-set or share costs as CATPA can’t furnish it all with the resource currently established.

Q: The statute that created CATPA in 2008 has a legislative sunset requirement in 2018. What impact could that have on CATPA and task forces that currently dependent on state funding? As that deadline approaches, what steps can CATPA and grantees take to help ensure the future of CATPA?

RF: CATPA has experienced that most law enforcement agencies do not have the ability to provide resources or funding to support enforcement strategies that specifically target auto theft reduction. As such, many agencies give priority of their resources to crimes against persons (e.g., murder, robbery, assault, etc.), and conversely use a generalized approach to report and investigate property crimes, including auto theft. CATPA has proven effective in supporting law enforcement with the ability to target the crime of auto theft, which has been linked to other property crimes and crimes against persons. Unfortunately, without continuation of the CATPA statute, these agencies will be left to handling priority crimes, where auto theft would typically not be a crime of intensive investigation.

Anticipating the aforementioned, CATPA has developed stronger reporting requirements from enforcement grantees which identify the public’s interest in auto theft reduction and reporting. For instance, CATPA has been collecting the number of case investigations involving organized criminal activities (premised upon auto theft), effectiveness of the investigative processes, and number of defendants arrested by CATPA funds. These activities would otherwise not be achieved without CATPA funds to local law enforcement.

JC: CATPA has been very effective and is on track to remain so. The sunset hearings in 2018 represent a clear stopping point and abandonment of the CATPA, unless an extension is granted. It is essential that CATPA performance, through its efficient management and grantees achievement of clear results, demonstrates that continued reduced crime and increased public safety is being achieved with the minor funding contribution made by insured policy holders.