

Grantee Spotlight

In this section, we feature interviews with some of our grantee organizations' directors and key staff members, who share their thoughts on their work and the particular fields they're involved in.



Executive Director Interview: David Kass David Kass is president and CEO of Fight Crime, Invest in Kids which mobilizes law enforcement leaders to advocate for increased investments in children and young people. David received his undergraduate degree at Amherst, his master's from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy and another master's in political science from the University of Missouri. He has worked in Washington D.C. for 18 years, worked on the Hill, primarily on children's policy issues. He

What appealed to you regarding Fight Crime as a strategy?

I had worked on children's policy issues for many years and grew frustrated; as good as the arguments were for investing in kids, they were largely ignored by policymakers. At Fight Crime, here was a group of people from the districts of policymakers, chiefs of police, unexpected messengers with an unexpected message: invest in kids. Police chiefs were saying that if you want to benefit our communities, invest in kids, and these investments will make a big difference. And I respected the fact that Fight Crime always bases its message in research.

How do you determine what the needs in the field are that Fight Crime can impact?

We talk to people on the ground, find out what the challenges are that they are facing. It may be that if a state is facing a big decrease in children's investments, we will mobilize Fight Crime there. We pick the areas where there is the potential for the biggest wins. We will also work in a proven area, where fewer people have been working, such as home visiting, where the research is very strong.

How do you know which battles to undertake?

We struggle with that every year. We do not have unlimited staff or resources so we go to places where our resources can make the biggest difference, where we really have added value.

Why do police chiefs and other law enforcement officials join Fight Crime?

Many police chiefs work their way up from being a beat cop. You cannot walk a beat without locking up kids year after year, and finally recognizing that this, alone, is an inadequate strategy. You start to think about what kinds of investments can make a difference so a kid doesn't end up in the back of a squad car. They recognize that you cannot lock your way out of a problem, that you have to have prevention. Police chiefs are busy, busy people with hundreds of staff and multi-million dollar budgets. They trust Fight Crime to provide them with information based on research, to make it easy for them to get involved. They feel like they really make a difference when they testify before Congress on why a certain investment will make a difference for kids.

How far are they willing to go beyond signing letters; do they call Congresspeople?

I am so impressed by what they are willing to do. They will travel to state capitals, Washington D.C. and put their credibility on the line when they make a request for investments in an op ed piece.

I remember this one instance in which a police chief, right out of central casting, was meeting with the chairman of the House Budget Committee. He said, "Just a couple of days ago I locked up a young man for murder and asked him to sign his statement. He said he could not sign, he did not know how to read or write." The chief then said, "I do not know what led this young man into this situation, but I tell you that if there are no investments in early education there will be too many young men like that." You could have heard a pin drop in that room.

How do you prepare military and law enforcement leaders to address the media on a campaign issue such as the importance of quality preschool programs?

We talk to them about the research on high quality early childhood programs and make sure they understand what questions might come from the media, to stay on message. We really emphasize the importance of putting into their own words why they care. We have a sibling organization, Mission: Readiness, comprised of 200 retired admirals and generals who frame investing in kids and high-quality early childhood education as a national security issue. One of our retired admirals testified that when he was in active duty he had command of 40,000 men and women, a fleet of ships, the best technology but at the end of the day it was not about the best ships or guns, it was about the best people and that is why early investments in children were so critical for this country.

How has Fight Crime grown?

When we started in 1996, we were hoping to get 20 or 30 police chiefs. We now have 5,000 members and 11 state offices. Our hope is to continue to grow, to have more members for bigger impact for kids. But it is not just about the recruitment, it is also about cultivating the relationship with our members. It is very time and resource intensive to build the relationships.

What is the staffing like at Fight Crime?

We have 50 people on staff, half are in the states and half are here in Washington D.C. We have a communications department, a research department, membership department, a federal policy office and state policy directors.

What is the biggest challenge Fight Crime faces?

Without a doubt it is operating in the current environment of slash everything in the budget. In this environment, our message is that we need to prioritize among the things that do work, and early childhood investments clearly do. Cuts will ultimately cost more money in lost lives.