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## ATPA Best Practices for Bait Cars

### Strategic Focus: Strategy on Bait Car Programs

#### Purpose

The purpose of the document is to provide a strategic focus for Auto Theft Prevention Authorities (ATPAs) when considering funding programs focused on the use of Bait Cars.

#### Definition

Bait Car. A Bait car, also referred to as a “hot car” or “trap car,” is a vehicle owned by and utilized by law enforcement agencies to capture car thieves or property thieves who steal items from the car. Bait cars are normally purchased and owned by law enforcement and are typically modified with audio/video surveillance technology which can be remotely monitored and controlled. Many Bait Cars are set up to catch car thieves, or articles left inside a vehicle, and may include GPS tracking system. A “kill switch” may be installed in the vehicle allowing police to remotely disable the engine and lock all doors remotely, preventing escape. A car set up to catch thieves who steal items from cars may have “bait property” placed in the vehicle and be disabled so that it cannot be started.

#### Funding

Many ATPAs have provided funding for procurement of equipment and vehicle to perform Bait Car project. Many of these projects have demonstrated a heightened visibility to the general public regarding the actual video release of perpetrators either attempting or stealing a motor vehicle. The efficiency and effectiveness of Bait Car operations appears to vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, primarily based on selection of areas, times and days for the Bait Car deployment as well as other factors, such as criminal thieves’ awareness or ability to identify a Bait Car from other target vehicles. Appropriate funding of law enforcement Bait Car operations can evidence efficient investment value return when simply considering the amount of funds expended to support the Bait Car program contrasted with the immediate effect of reducing auto theft in hot spots or problematic areas. The following strategies are offered for an ATPA to consider when contemplating the funding a Bait Car program.

#### Strategy 1: General Considerations for Planning and Implementing a Bait Car Program

When an ATPA is considering a funding request or otherwise implementing a Bait Car Program, the following guidelines are offered for assistance towards success.

- A. Evaluate how the Bait Car Program fits or otherwise aligns to the organization’s overall auto crime enforcement strategy. Consider whether or not the Bait Car Program stands alone or is it expected to work in conjunction with other enforcement or education strategies.



- B. Identify the relevancy of the Bait Car Program to the jurisdiction's auto crime problem. Understanding what vehicles or property from vehicle are being stolen, the manner in which the thefts occur, conditions such as owner's leaving keys inside the vehicles and other factors will assist in success or application of a Bait Car Program.
- C. Determine the level of partnerships needed for a Bait Car Program. Bait Car Programs can require intense coordination and control, therefore identifying a central agency to perform coordination of the Bait Car activities is important. Also consider funding agencies, cooperative participation to offset costs (e.g., overtime or equipment), and legislative laws that may be needed at the local, state or federal level. Consider private organizations to aid in the partnerships or funding needs, such as large parking lot operators, large shopping center management companies, airport authorities, insurance companies, etc.
- D. Identify necessary operational funding needs. If vehicles are loaned to agencies, what are the operational and support costs, who will facilitate or champion these needs and how much funding may or may not be available. Funding costs should consider personnel, insurance, fuel, specialized technology, maintenance and support, repair, upgrades, storage, and training.
- E. Monitoring and leadership of the Bait Car Program should be clearly identified and commitments should be obtained prior to the Bait Car Program's deployment. Consider who will be responsible for identifying the needs, areas for deployment, policies and procedures for use, monitoring activities and overall fiscal responsibility.
- F. Research legal issues and implications of a Bait Car Program. As laws vary among jurisdictions, it is important to determine the type of technology that may be used in a Bait Car Program and ensuring legal vetting has occurred for its use. The use of video and/or audio surveillance and GPS trackers may or may not be permissible in whole or part, depending upon the jurisdiction's legal authority.
- G. Ascertain the level of support for advertising and publicity for a Bait Car Program. Oftentimes advertising a Bait Car Program through the use of temporary signs or placards may enhance the scope of the Bait Car Program. Creating public awareness can strengthen public support and participation. Consider three (3) phases of advertising a Bait Car Program:
  - 1) What is a Bait Car? The answer to this question educates the public and potential/active thieves about a Bait Car Program and how it works. This may be an earned media opportunity.
  - 2) What happens if you get caught in a Bait Car? The answer to this question emphasizes the punitive consequences if you get caught; "Bait Cars. Steal One. Go to Jail."
  - 3) What are the results of a Bait Car Program? The answer to this question provides general resultant data, such as the number of arrests and convictions. If positive, this may practically decrease auto crime and further assist to advertise and emphasize the scope of the program; "Any Car Can Be A Bait Car."

**Strategy 2: Cost Evaluation.**



When considering funding a Bait Car Program, it is strongly encouraged that the ATPA identify the overall costs associated with the entire program. Costs typically incurred involve not only the vehicle, equipment, technology, but also the supportive impacts to an effective program. The direct costs normally involve the purchase of specific vehicle(s), computer equipment, GPS tracking systems and audio/video equipment. Supportive costs should be considered on the level of crime analysis needed to identify hot spots, whether the Bait Car meets existing vehicle target profiles, personnel allocation for maintaining the Bait Car, resources required for deploying and retrieving the Bait Cars in/out of target areas, and other indirect or supportive costs associated with monitoring and responding to the Bait Car once it has been deployed.

### **Strategy 3. Policies and Procedures.**

Bait Cars may create challenges brought upon by general public perception, legal contentions and administrative concerns. Bait cars may be viewed as being an 'entrapment' of offenders to commit a crime that the otherwise would not have committed. Additionally, Bait Cars may be viewed as netting inexperienced offenders, as experienced auto thieves are aware of Bait Cars and they can easily identify them. To assist in mitigating these concerns, the ATPA should identify policies and procedures for use of the Bait Car. Typically, these policies and procedures may include the purpose of the Bait Car program, responsibilities for using Bait Cars, deployment criteria and advisories related to police pursuits, evidence, and maintenance.

### **Strategy 4. Measurements.**

The ATPA should consider what objective measurements are best applicable to determine the effectiveness or efficiency of funded Bait Cars. These measurements may be based upon an investment return analysis, outcome based expectations (e.g., number of arrests, number of deployed hours, number of repeat offenders, etc.), or reduction in crime in a specific area. Generally, Bait Vehicles have not been observed to demonstrate a high yield of offender attempts to steal the vehicle, subsequently a low yield of arrest rate. However, some agencies give greater weight that Bait Cars may be a directed tool for prevention or otherwise a deterrent to auto theft, where numerical valuation is secondary to qualitative observations.

### **Strategy 5. Deployment and Use.**

The ATPA should consider what plan(s) are in place, and their reasonableness of achieving goals, objectives and measurements, in funding a Bait Car program. Depending upon the objective of the program, Bait Cars may have a higher success rate when evaluating where planned activities are expected (e.g., hot spots), existing crime trends, deployment timing and how the specific Bait Car(s) and their usage would align with the aforementioned. Deployment plans should include the primary purpose to reduce auto theft within a high auto theft crime area, in conjunction with public awareness through advertising and promotion of the program. Although public awareness on using Bait Cars is an integral part of the program; many aspects, such as vehicle types, number of vehicles, locations of



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deployment, equipment type and setup and operational response procedures and tactics, are considered confidential as part of an ongoing covert operation.

**Strategy 6. Public Education.**

The ATPA should assess the project proposal to identify the level of public education necessary for deployment of a Bait Car program. When applicable, the education program should identify goals, objectives, measurements and/or project reporting standards to inform the community on the purpose, experience and intended effectiveness in using a Bait Car program to combat motor vehicle crimes. The funding ATPA should consider an education plan that addresses the problem of motor vehicle crimes in the intended project area, the goals of funding the Bait Car program and, and how the project may demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of the investment return as related to the prevention, enforcement and apprehension of stolen vehicles and associated criminal offenders.

The above strategies are provided to assist in the continuation or initiation of Bait Car Projects to prevent, educate, enforce and prosecute offenders of motor vehicle crimes.