

Violent Crime Coordinating Council Report to the Legislature

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**Minnesota Department of Public Safety
Office of Justice Programs**

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This annual report, covering the period of Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2021, details the activities of the Violent Crime Coordinating Council (VCCC), summarizes peer review site visits, and reports on audits of criminal gang investigative data.

VCCC Activities

The Minnesota Legislature established the VCCC in 2010. The VCCC provides guidance related to investigation and prosecution of gang and drug crimes, especially violent crimes associated with gang activity. The council also provides direction and oversight to multijurisdictional VCET grants located throughout the state.

The council's primary duty is to develop an overall strategy to reduce the harm caused to the public by gang and drug crimes in Minnesota. The council works closely with the commissioner of the Department of Public Safety and is responsible for:

- Developing a policy and procedure manual to guide gang and drug investigations.
- Recommending an individual to serve as statewide coordinator.
- Developing grant eligibility criteria and an application review process.
- Recommending termination of funding to VCETs that fail to operate effectively.
- Developing an information-sharing process to improve investigation and prosecution of gang and drug offenses.
- Developing impartial policing policies that prohibit improper use of personal characteristics to target individuals for law enforcement, prosecution or forfeiture actions.
- Adopting objective criteria and identifying characteristics to determine whether individuals are or may be members of gangs involved in criminal activity.

The Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs (DPS-OJP) employs a grant manager to administer law enforcement grant funding. DPS-OJP also employs a statewide gang and drug coordinator (statewide coordinator) to provide training and technical assistance for VCETs. In addition, these staff positions provide administrative support for the VCCC.

Sartell Police Chief Jim Hughes serves as the VCCC chair, and Ramsey County Sheriff's Office Undersheriff Mike Martin is the vice chair. A list of members is attached as Appendix A.

A new statewide gang and drug coordinator began work in January, 2021 and immediately began meeting with VCET commanders and regional advisory boards. In addition, the Statewide Coordinator planned the training workshop for VCET commanders, facilitated peer review site visits, and coordinated bi-annual regional VCET networking sessions.

DPS-OJP staff continue to collaborate with other state and federal agencies on the Industrial Hemp Pilot Project, the Drug Monitoring Initiative, the Anti-Heroin Task Force, and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) projects.

In 2021, the VCCC held their regular meetings using a combination of Web-Ex, hybrid, and/or in person meetings.

The annual joint meeting with VCCC members and VCET advisory board chairs was held in person in October. Feedback from participants indicated that board members appreciated meeting VCCC members, networking with other city and county law enforcement leaders, and discussing VCET oversight responsibilities.

The VCCC Committee on Professional Standards and Accountability met once this year to review peer review reports and recommended changes to the VCET Guidelines Manual. The changes were reviewed and accepted by the VCCC at their December meeting and updates were forwarded to VCET commanders.

The other two VCCC committees--Governance and Legislation and Community Engagement and Prevention—did not hold separate meetings this year.

VCET Funding and Audits

DPS-OJP managed a competitive application process in 2021 that resulted in the funding of 21 multijurisdictional VCET grants in 2022 with state and federal Justice Assistance Grant funds. A VCET list is attached in Appendix B. All current grantees were determined to be eligible for the competitive grant process.

In 2021, DPS-OJP forwarded all of the 2020 VCET on-site procedural reviews to the VCCC Professional Standards Committee for review. The statewide coordinator also reviewed each audit report, discussed specific findings with VCET commanders, and provided technical assistance for developing corrective action plans.

The 2021 VCET Commanders Training, held in May at Camp Ripley, provided an additional opportunity to review audit findings, highlight the Guidelines Manual, provide updates from key state and federal partners, and provided task force leadership training.

The statewide coordinator conducted comprehensive site visits at all VCET locations in 2021, with other VCET commanders participating in a peer review process. All commanders were required to participate in a site visit of another VCET, and most reported that they gleaned information that would help their VCET make continued improvements. Areas were identified for additional oversight and training, including:

- Operational plans.
- Records management and shared case information from partner agencies.
- Documentation of confidential informant debriefing, updates and file review.
- Cash seizure counting, packaging and timely depositing.
- Forfeiture file management and reporting to the Office of the State Auditor.
- Commander continued oversight of confidential funds, evidence and case files.

DPS-OJP staff are planning a training workshop for all VCET commanders in March of 2022 to review key provisions of the Guidelines Manual and highlight areas noted in peer-review site visits. OJP-DPS is also working with the state Management Analysis Division to subcontract with a preferred vendor to conduct on-site procedural reviews of 21 VCET grants in 2022.

BCA Criminal Gang Investigative Data System Audit

The BCA conducts random audits of data in the Gang Pointer File and reports annually to the DPS commissioner. All subject records are reviewed during the audit process to determine if they have a qualifying conviction for a gross misdemeanor or felony offense within the previous three-year review period.

The most recent audit of the Gang Pointer File was conducted from Sept. 2, 20 to Sept. 1, 21, and included data from the following entities:

- The Metro Gang Strike Force (subjects transferred to BCA Investigations).
- The Minnesota Fusion Center.
- The Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office.

BCA Training and Auditing staff reviewed 58 criminal histories on those entries that are within the required 3 year auditing period.

Out of the 58 records reviewed, 18 subjects did not have any additional qualifying criminal convictions and were accordingly purged from the Minnesota Gang File.

As of Sept. 1, 2021, 40 subjects are in the Gang Pointer File.

Conclusion

In 2022, the VCCC will continue to meet bimonthly, including a joint fall meeting with VCET Advisory Board Chairs. DPS-OJP will continue to manage VCET grants, deliver training and provide technical assistance. There will be a spring VCET commanders' meeting and external review of VCET operations. The BCA will continue to manage the Gang Pointer File and the Statewide Coordinator will plan attend VCET Advisory Board meetings and plan for peer review site visits in 2023.