



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

Violent Crime Coordinating Council Report to the Legislature

2023 Annual Report

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2023 Annual Report

This annual report details the activities of the Violent Crime Coordinating Council (VCCC), summarizes independent reviews of multi-jurisdictional entities and reports on audits of criminal gang investigative data. It covers the period of January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023.

Background

VCCC's primary duty is to develop a strategy to reduce the harm caused to the public by gang and drug crimes in Minnesota. The council helps guide investigations and prosecutions of gang and drug crimes, especially violent crimes associated with gang activity. The council also provides direction and oversight to multi-jurisdictional Violent Crime Enforcement Teams (VCET) located throughout the state.

Established in 2010, VCCC works closely with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) and is responsible for:

- Developing a policy and procedure manual to guide gang and drug investigations (Guidelines Manual).
- Recommending an individual to serve as statewide gang and drug coordinator (statewide coordinator).
- Developing VCET grant eligibility criteria and an application review process.
- Recommending termination of funding for VCETs that fail to operate effectively.
- Developing an information-sharing process to improve investigations and prosecutions of gang and drug offenses.
- Developing impartial policies that prohibit use of personal characteristics as the basis 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.

DPS' Office of Justice Programs (OJP) employs a grant manager to administer law enforcement grant funding. OJP also employs the statewide coordinator to provide training and technical assistance for VCETs. These positions provide administrative support for the VCCC.

VCCC activities in 2023

Statewide coordinator

The statewide coordinator worked primarily in the field, attending VCET advisory board meetings, providing technical assistance to VCET commanders and administering training. He planned the 2023 annual training workshop for VCET commanders at Camp Ripley and a training on constitutional policing. He also organized two trainings on electronic search warrants and an undercover class for narcotics investigators.

The statewide coordinator served on the board of the Minnesota State Association of Narcotics Investigators (MSANI) and regularly attended meetings of the North Central High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). He is

DPS' representative on the Felony Murder Task Force and Psychedelic Medicine Task Force. The grant manager is DPS' representative on the Treatment Court Initiative Advisory Committee.

2023 meetings

The VCCC held five in-person meetings in 2023. An online option was available for members who could not attend in person.

During the first meeting held in 2023, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office Undersheriff Mike Martin was elected chair and Renville County Sheriff Scott Hable was elected vice chair for two-year terms. Members are listed in Appendix A.

Every VCCC meeting included updates from the statewide coordinator, grant manager, partner agencies and a guest speaker. The guest speakers were from:

- Central Minnesota VCET
- Anoka-Hennepin VCET
- Dakota County VCET
- St. Paul Police Department A St. Paul Intervention and Recovery Effort (ASPIRE) Program
- Intensive Comprehensive Peace Officer Education and Training (ICPOET) grant program

Annual meeting of VCCC and VCET chairs

One of the five VCCC meetings was the annual joint meeting of VCCC members and VCET advisory board chairs, which was held in person in October 2023 at the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA).

There were presentations on the Guidelines Manual, open meeting law, constitutional policing, peer review site visits and the VCET application review process. There were also updates from High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA), National Guard Counter Drug Program, BCA forensic science lab and Drug Crimes and Overdose Dashboard.

A highlight of VCCC meetings is the information exchange with federal, state and local partners. This includes the U.S. Attorney's Office, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), HIDTA, Office of the Minnesota Attorney General, the BCA and National Guard Counter-Drug Program.

In attendance were VCCC members from state councils representing Minnesota communities of color and Indigenous communities, the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association, Minnesota Sheriffs' Association and Minnesota County Attorneys Association. OJP also provide updates on statewide coordinator activities and VCET grant administration.

In 2023, there were no changes to the VCET Operational Procedures and Guidelines Manual, or the 9-Point Gang Criteria recommended by the VCCC.

VCET funding

OJP administered 21 multi-jurisdictional VCET grants across the state in 2022-2023.

The Northwest Metro Drug Task Force disbanded at the end of 2022. OJP closed their grant, and remaining funds were redistributed to the Hennepin County Violent Offender Task Force, which serves that area.

OJP managed a competitive application process in 2023. It resulted in the funding of 21 multi-jurisdictional VCET grants for 2024-2025 with state and federal Justice Assistance Grant funds. The VCCC approved revised eligibility criteria requiring multi-county VCETs to have full-time officers assigned from at least two separate counties.

A new VCET grant for the West Metro Drug Task Force was added, merging with the Southwest Hennepin Drug Task Force and supervised by the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office. VCET grants and contacts are listed in Appendix B.

All VCET grantees are required to attend an annual training at Camp Ripley to review grant requirements and operational procedures. The 2023 VCET Commanders Training included presentations on use of social media in investigations, drug overdose death investigations for third-degree homicide cases and human trafficking. Key state and federal partners provided updates, including the Minnesota National Guard Counter Drug Program (who sponsors the training), the Office of the Minnesota Attorney General, DEA, Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC) and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

VCET audits

The statewide coordinator conducted comprehensive site visits at all VCET locations in 2023. Other VCET commanders participated in a peer review process. All commanders were required to participate in a site visit of another VCET, and most reported they learned information that would help their own VCET make improvements.

Of the 70 confidential informant (CI) and case files reviewed, they noted a few CI files were missing required information, including a photo, driver's license and documentation of contacts with investigators. They also noted that some case files with seized firearms were missing documentation of checks with the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms' (ATF) eTrace system. The statewide coordinator conducted follow-up training on CI file management and deactivation procedures. He also sent a reminder to all commanders about saving documentation of eTrace checking of seized firearms in the case file.

The statewide coordinator conducted follow-up spot checks with all the VCETs who had missing information and verified the files were complete. All current grantees were determined to be eligible for the competitive grant process.

BCA criminal gang investigative data system audit

The BCA conducts random audits of data in the Gang Pointer File. Subject records are reviewed 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 September 2, 2022, to September 1, 2023, and included data from:

- Metro Gang Strike Force (subjects transferred to BCA Investigations)
- Minnesota Fusion Center

- Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office
- Koochiching County Sheriff's Department
- Willmar Police Department

BCA reviewed 38 criminal histories on those entries that are within the required three-year auditing period. Out of the 38 records reviewed, seven subjects did not have any additional qualifying criminal convictions and were accordingly purged from the Minnesota Gang Pointer File.

As of September 1, 2023, 31 subjects were in the Gang Pointer File.

VCCC activities in 2024

The VCCC will continue to meet on a bi-monthly basis to strengthen statewide coordination, share intelligence, evaluate emerging trends and support collaborative violent crime reduction strategies. This will include a joint meeting with VCET advisory board chairs to enhance communication, reinforce regional partnerships and align operational priorities across jurisdictions.

OJP will continue administering VCET grants while also coordinating specialized training opportunities and providing ongoing technical assistance to support effective enforcement efforts, investigative capacity and interagency collaboration throughout the state.

In the coming year, a spring VCET commanders' meeting will provide an opportunity to review operational challenges, highlight successful initiatives and identify best practices. In addition, an external review of VCET operations and the biennial review of the 9-Point Gang Criteria will help ensure accountability, consistency and continued effectiveness in addressing gang-related and violent criminal activity.

The BCA will continue management of the Gang Pointer File and will expand its efforts by implementing tracking measures for violent crime investigations. Enhanced data collection and analysis will improve statewide intelligence-sharing capabilities, support strategic decision-making and help measure the long-term impact of VCET initiatives on violent crime reduction.

Appendix A: VCCC members in 2023

NAME	AGENCY	STATUTORY REPRESENTATION
Mike Martin, undersheriff (chair)	Ramsey County Sheriff's Office	Ramsey County Sheriff's Office
Scott Hable, sheriff (vice chair)	Renville County Sheriff's Office	Minnesota Sheriff's Association (Greater Minnesota)
Drew Evans, superintendent	Bureau of Criminal Apprehension	Minnesota Department of Public Safety
Andy Dunne, assistant U.S. attorney	District of Minnesota	United States Attorney's Office
David Voigt, assistant attorney general	Office of the Minnesota Attorney General	Office of the Minnesota Attorney General
Jeff Stiff, deputy chief	St. Paul Police Department	St. Paul Police Department
Jason Case, commander	Minneapolis Police Department	Minneapolis Police Department
Jeff Tate, chief	Shakopee Police Department	Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association (metro)
Dan Starry, sheriff	Washington County Sheriff's Office	Minnesota Sheriff's Association (metro)
Rick Palaia, major	Hennepin County Sheriff's Office	Hennepin County Sheriff's Office
Matt Grochow, chief	St. Peter Police Department	Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association (greater Minnesota)
John Melvin, director	Office of Special Investigations	Minnesota Department of Corrections
Hao Nguyen, assistant county attorney	Ramsey County Attorney's Office	Minnesota County Attorneys Association (metro)
Shane Baker, county attorney	Kandiyohi County Attorney's Office	Minnesota County Attorneys Association (Greater MN)
David Hester, chief	Lower Sioux Indian Community	Tribal Police Representative
Rosa Tock, executive director	Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs	Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs
Sia Her, executive director	Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans	Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans
Linda Sloan, executive director	Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage	Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage
Derrick Naumann, deputy chief	Mille Lacs Tribal Police	Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
John Gross, assistant attorney general	Office of the Minnesota Attorney General	Legal counsel

Appendix B: VCETs in 2023

VCET	COMMANDER	FISCAL AGENCY	ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR
AIM Task Force	Sgt. Greg Payment	Aitkin County Sheriff's Office	Aitkin County Sheriff Dan Guida
Anoka-Hennepin Task Force	Lt. Derek Schuldt	Anoka County Sheriff's Office	Blaine Chief Brian Podany
Brown-Lyon-Renville-Redwood Task Force	Cmdr. Joel Bill	New Ulm Police Department	Redwood Falls Chief Jason Cotner
Buffalo Ridge Task Force	Cmdr. Christopher Lewis	Pipestone County Sheriff's Office	Pipestone County Chief Deputy Mike Hamann
Cannon River Drug & Violent Crimes Task Force	Cmdr. Scott O'Brien	Rice County Sheriff's Office	Northfield Chief Mark Elliot
CEE-VI Task Force	Sgt. Ross Ardoff	Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office	Meeker County Sheriff Brian Cruze
Central Minnesota Violent Offender Task Force	Lt. Luke Dingmann	Central Minnesota MCIU	Benton County Sheriff Troy Heck
Dakota County Task Force	Capt. Joshua Fahey	City of Eagan	Dakota County Capt. Dan Bianconi
East Central Drug Task Force	Cmdr. Miranda Goringa	Pine County Sheriff's Office	Kanabec County Sheriff Brian Smith
Hennepin County Violent Offender Task Force	Lt. Jeff Kirchoff	Hennepin County Sheriff's Office	Major Rick Palaia
Lake Superior Drug and Gang Task Force	Lt. Chad Nagorski	Duluth Police Department	Duluth Deputy Chief Nick Lukovsky
Minnesota River Valley Task Force	Lt. Chad Ruch	Blue Earth County Sheriff's Office	Sheriff Jeff Wersal
Paul Bunyan Drug and Gang Task Force	Sgt. Dave Hart	Beltrami County Sheriff's Office	Bemidji Chief Mike Mastin
Pine to Prairie Task Force	Sgt. Aeiiso Schrage	Crookston Police Department	East Grand Forks Chief Mike Hedlund
Ramsey County Violent Crime Enforcement Team	Cmdr. Ryan O'Neill	Ramsey County Sheriff's Office	Ramsey County Undersheriff Mike Martin
South Central Drug Investigative Unit	Sgt. Ben Johnson	Owatonna Police Department	Albert Lea Chief JD Carlson
Southeast Minnesota Gang and Drug Task Force	Capt. Tim Parkin	Olmsted County Sheriff's Office	Wabasha County Sheriff Rodney Bartsh

VCET	COMMANDER	FISCAL AGENCY	ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR
Southwest Metro Task Force	Sgt. Jon Howard	Shakopee Police Department	Carver County Sheriff Jason Kamerud
Washington County Task Force	Sgt. Chris Howard	Washington County Sheriff's Office	Washington County Sheriff Dan Starry
West Central MN VCET	Sgt. Brandon Cruse	Douglas County Sheriff's Office	Douglas County Sheriff Troy Wolbersen