



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

Legislative Report

Violent Crime Coordinating Council 2024 Annual Report

February 1, 2025

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2024 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 Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2024.

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 multijurisdictional 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 2024

Statewide coordinator

The statewide coordinator worked extensively in the field throughout 2024, attending VCET advisory board meetings, providing technical assistance to VCET commanders and coordinating training opportunities. He organized the 2024 annual VCET Commanders' Workshop at Camp Ripley, as well as a leadership training for VCET commanders and team leaders in St. Cloud.

The statewide coordinator also serves on the board of the Minnesota State Association of Narcotics Investigators (MSANI) and regularly participates in meetings of the North Central High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). In addition, he serves as DPS' representative on both the Felony Murder Task Force and the Psychedelic Medicine Task Force. The grant manager represents DPS on the Treatment Court Initiative Advisory Committee.

2024 meetings

The VCCC held five in-person meetings during 2024; the June meeting was canceled. Ramsey County Sheriff's Office Undersheriff Mike Martin and Renville County Sheriff Scott Hable continued serving as VCCC chair and vice chair, respectively. A complete membership list is included in Appendix A.

Each VCCC meeting included updates from the statewide coordinator, grant manager and partner agencies. Guest presentations during the year included representatives from:

- Minnesota Office of Cannabis Management (OCM)
- Office of Tribal Safety Cannabis-Impaired Driving Pilot Project
- Minnesota Office of Addiction and Recovery

One of the five meetings was the annual joint session between VCCC members and VCET advisory board chairs, held in October 2024 at the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Presentations included recommendations from the VCCC Professional Standards Committee regarding updates to the Guidelines Manual, as well as an overview of the 9-Point Gang Criteria and the review process.

A key component of each VCCC meeting is the exchange of information among federal, state and local partners. Participating agencies included 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 Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) and the National Guard Counter-Drug Program.

Meetings also included participation from representatives of state councils serving Minnesota communities of color and Indigenous communities, as well as the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association, Minnesota Sheriffs' Association and Minnesota County Attorneys Association.

At the December meeting, the VCCC approved several updates to the Guidelines Manual recommended by the Professional Standards Committee, including:

- Revisions to Section 3-12.3 regarding digital retention of informant file records.
- Addition of Section 1-11.4 requiring notification to the statewide gang and drug coordinator when a task force member is the subject of an internal affairs complaint, criminal investigation or suspension.
- Revisions to Section 1-6 establishing required foundational and advanced training for new investigators within six months of assignment to a task force. Required training topics include:
 - Narcotics investigative techniques
 - Covert, plainclothes and undercover operations
 - Search warrants, entries, raid planning and execution
 - Physical surveillance and countersurveillance awareness
 - Informant control
 - Electronic surveillance capabilities and limitations
 - Evidence collection, testing, handling, packaging and documentation

Additional recommended training areas include:

- Gang investigative techniques, gang criteria, available databases and impartial policing

- Crime scene management
- Interview and interrogation techniques
- Formal complaints, charging procedures and grand juries
- Civil process and forfeiture procedures
- Trial preparation and courtroom testimony
- Conspiracy investigations and major case investigative strategies

As required by statute, the VCCC also conducted its biennial review of the 9-Point Gang Criteria. Following review, the council made no recommendations for changes to the criteria.

VCCC meeting schedules, past meeting minutes, annual reports and the 9-Point Gang Criteria are available on the OJP website (<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/about-ojp/violent-crime-coordinating-council-vccc>). Copies of the Guidelines Manual are available to law enforcement officers upon request.

VCET funding

OJP administered 21 multi-jurisdictional VCET grants statewide during the 2024-2025 grant period. VCET grantees, commanders and advisory board chairs are listed in Appendix B.

Throughout the grant cycle, grantees submitted quarterly reports detailing enforcement activities, arrests, seizures, operational updates, program income and expenditures. Grantees also submitted quarterly financial status reports for reimbursement of approved expenses. OJP oversight activities included an initial risk assessment, two monitoring visits, a financial reconciliation of quarterly expenditures and a closeout performance evaluation for each grant.

All VCET grantees are required to attend the annual VCET Commanders Training at Camp Ripley, which reviews grant requirements, operational standards and emerging enforcement issues. The 2024 training included presentations from OCM, DEA Diversion Unit, HIDTA drug intelligence officer and the Ramsey County Attorney's Office regarding third-degree homicide investigations involving drug overdoses.

Additional updates and presentations were provided by key state and federal partners, including the Minnesota National Guard Counter Drug Program, which sponsors the training, as well as the Office of the Minnesota Attorney General, DEA, Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC) and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

VCET audits

In 2024, OJP contracted with Alliant Consulting to conduct a procedural review of VCET operations statewide. Site visits were conducted at 20 VCETs to evaluate compliance with the Guidelines Manual in the areas of confidential funds management, narcotics case evidence, and property seizure and forfeiture procedures. West Hennepin VCET, which began operations in 2024, was not included in the review.

Confidential funds accounts

More than 130 confidential fund transactions were reviewed. Findings included:

- In one case, a task force agent failed to obtain a confidential informant's signature documenting payment for a controlled buy.

- One task force's confidential informant expense forms did not consistently include descriptions of evidence being purchased.
- One task force did not maintain a confidential informant buy fund ledger, spreadsheet or accounting log for review.

Narcotics case evidence

More than 150 cases were reviewed to track narcotics evidence from purchase or seizure through submission into evidence storage. Findings included:

- One task force could not produce chain-of-custody documentation for two narcotics cases in which evidence had been maintained outside the home agency.
- One task force lacked evidence documentation due to implementation of a new evidence management system that reportedly did not generate evidence receipts or chain-of-custody reports.

Property seizure and forfeitures

More than 100 cases involving seizures of cash, vehicles and weapons were reviewed. Some cases involved multiple seized items.

Cash

Most of the cases involved seizure of cash.

- One case identified a discrepancy between the initial documented cash count and the amount listed on the Notice of Seizure. Documentation reflected both the original and corrected amounts throughout the case file.
- In another case, a discrepancy between the reported cash amount and the deposited amount was identified by the bank during deposit. The commander subsequently re-served the suspect with amended property receipt and Notice of Seizure documentation, and a memorandum explaining the discrepancy was added to the case file.

Vehicles

Thirty-six vehicle seizures cases were reviewed.

- Three task forces had cases in which towing receipts were not included in the case file.
- In three cases, task force officers transported seized vehicles directly to evidence locations, but documentation of those transfers was insufficient or informal.

Weapons

Fifty-five weapon seizure cases were reviewed.

- Two task forces were initially unable to locate the ATF e-Trace documentation during the on-site review but later provided the documentation.
- One task force was unable to locate a required ATF e-Trace document during the on-site review and could not locate it post-review.

Summary

The procedural review identified several opportunities for process improvement across VCET operations, including:

- Establishing standardized naming conventions for VCET files

- Improving reporting procedures within the Office of the State Auditor Form Entry System (SAFES)
- Clarifying evidence disposal and destruction procedures and storage locations
- Developing guidance regarding the use of cash application systems
- Strengthening documentation related to the movement and towing of seized vehicles

The statewide coordinator followed up on identified training and compliance issues and conducted additional site visits to VCETs with audit findings to provide technical assistance and operational support. The contractor also provided recommendations to improve on-site review procedures for 2025.

BCA criminal gang investigative data system audit

The BCA conducts periodic, random audits of data maintained within the Minnesota Gang Pointer File to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and data accuracy. Subject records are reviewed to determine whether individuals have qualifying gross misdemeanor or felony convictions within the required three-year review period.

The most recent audit was conducted between September 2023 and September 2024 and included data submitted by:

- Metro Gang Strike Force (subjects transferred to BCA Investigations)
- Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office
- Koochiching County Sheriff's Department
- Willmar Police Department

As part of the audit, the BCA reviewed 30 criminal history records that fell within the required three-year audit period. Of those records, four subjects did not have additional qualifying criminal convictions and were subsequently removed from the Minnesota Gang Pointer File in accordance with statutory requirements.

As of Sept. 4, 2024, the Gang Pointer File contained 26 active subjects.

VCCC activities in 2025

Beginning in 2025, the VCCC will transition from bi-monthly meetings to a quarterly meeting schedule to streamline operations and focus resources on strategic priorities. The annual joint meeting with VCET advisory board chairs will be discontinued.

OJP will continue administering VCET grants, coordinating training opportunities and providing technical assistance to support effective task force operations statewide. Planned activities for 2025 include a spring VCET commanders' meeting, peer review site visits focused on operational compliance and best practices, and a December leadership training for VCET commanders and team leaders.

The BCA will continue management and oversight of the Gang Pointer File to support statewide criminal intelligence sharing and compliance with gang investigative data requirements.

Appendix A: VCCC members in 2024

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
Allen Slaughter, 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
Emily Olson, 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 prosecutor)
Shane Baker, county attorney	Kandiyohi County Attorney's Office	Minnesota County Attorneys Association (Greater Minnesota prosecutor)
David Hester, chief	Lower Sioux Indian Community	Tribal police representative
Rosa Tock, executive director	Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs	Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

NAME	AGENCY	STATUTORY REPRESENTATION
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 2024

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	Rogers Police Chief Dan Wills
Brown-Lyon-Renville-Redwood Task Force	Cmdr. Joel Bill	New Ulm Police Department	Lyon County Sheriff Eric Wallen
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	Faribault Police Chief John Sherwin
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	Apple Valley Deputy Chief Greg Dahlstrom
East Central Drug Task Force	Cmdr. Zach Griffin	Pine County Sheriff's Office	Kanabec County Sheriff Brian Smith
Hennepin County Violent Offender Task Force	Lt. Steve Lorentz	Hennepin County Sheriff's Office	Major Rick Palaia
Lake Superior Drug and Gang Task Force	Lt. Jason Tanski	Duluth Police Department	Duluth Deputy Chief Nick Lukovsky
Minnesota River Valley Task Force	Lt. Chad Ruch	Blue Earth County Sheriff's Office	Blue Earth County Sheriff Jeff Wersal

VCET	COMMANDER	FISCAL AGENCY	ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR
Paul Bunyan Drug and Gang Task Force	Sgt. Dave Hart	Beltrami County Sheriff's Office	Bemidji Police Chief Mike Mastin
Pine to Prairie Task Force	Sgt. Aeiiso Schrage	Crookston Police Department	East Grand Forks Police Chief Mike Hedlund
Ramsey County Violent Crime Enforcement Team	Cmdr. Rick Clark	Ramsey County Sheriff's Office	Ramsey County Undersheriff Mike Martin
South Central Drug Investigative Unit	Sgt. Ben Johnson	Owatonna Police Department	Albert Lea Police Chief J.D. Carlson
Southeast Minnesota Gang and Drug Task Force	Capt. Tim Parkin	Olmsted County Sheriff's Office	Wabasha County Sheriff Rodney Bartsh
Southwest Metro Task Force	Sgt. Mike Penning	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
West Hennepin Task Force	Lt. Sean Sweeney	Hennepin County Sheriff's Office	Major Rick Palaia

