

Violent Crime Coordinating Council Report to the Legislature

Feb. 1, 2020

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

This annual report, covering the period of Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2019, details the activities of the Violent Crime Coordinating Council (VCCC), summarizes site visits and reviews of multijurisdictional entities, and reports on audits of criminal gang investigative data. There is also a brief summary of Violent Crime Enforcement Team (VCET) program activities and outcomes for 2019.

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.

At the February 2019 meeting, Washington County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Brian Mueller was elected as VCCC chair, and St. Paul Police Department Commander Ken Sass and was elected vice chair. After Sass resigned from the VCCC because of reassignment to another unit, Sartell Police Chief Jim Hughes was elected vice chair at the October meeting. A list of members is attached as Appendix A.

The VCCC met bimonthly to review gang and drug information. Three committees report at VCCC meetings: Professional Standards and Accountability, Governance and Legislation, and Community Engagement and Prevention. Members also review VCET performance data and grant updates. The statewide coordinator provides activity reports and coordinates presentations from others involved in investigating and prosecuting narcotics cases, gang cases and associated violent crime.

In 2019, VCCC guest speakers represented the following organizations:

- Minnesota Treatment Court Initiative
- Minnesota Department of Health, Syringe Services Program
- Minnesota Department of Corrections, Challenge Incarceration Program
- True North Constitutional Policing Training
- Minnesota County Attorneys Association
- League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust
- Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Forensic Science Lab
- Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Fusion Center
- Hennepin County Attorney's Office
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Industrial Hemp Pilot Project
- Minnesota Department of Human Services

VCET commanders are also invited to bimonthly VCCC meetings to provide a brief presentation of partners, operations and outcomes. In 2019, the following VCETs presented to the VCCC:

- Paul Bunyan Gang and Drug Task Force
- South Central Drug Investigation Unit
- Northwest Metro Drug Task Force
- CEE-VI Gang and Narcotics Task Force

Additional VCET presentations are planned for 2020.

In October, the VCCC held a joint meeting with VCET advisory board chairs at the Minnesota County Attorneys Association, which was well attended and highly rated. Board members appreciated meeting VCCC members and discussing oversight responsibilities.

2019 VCCC Committees

The Professional Standards and Accountability Committee, chaired by Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) Superintendent Drew Evans, reviewed the Alliant Consulting report on 2018 VCET operational reviews and statewide coordinator follow-up. They also reviewed reports on peer-review site visits conducted by the statewide coordinator and fellow VCET commanders in 2019. There were no additional changes to the Multijurisdictional Task Force Operating Procedures and Guidelines Manual (Guidelines Manual) this year.

The VCCC also reviewed and approved the VCET eligibility requirements for the 2020 Request for Proposals (RFP).

The Governance and Legislation Committee, chaired by Chief Deputy Mueller, monitored legislative issues of interest to law enforcement, including asset forfeiture, medical marijuana expansion and opiate funding.

DPS-OJP staff continue to collaborate with the Minnesota departments of Human Services and Health in the State Substance Abuse Strategy and State Opioid Oversight Project. The statewide coordinator is working with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to refine policies in the Industrial Hemp Pilot Project. He also served on a workgroup with the Department of Health to develop recommendations on the sale of cannabinoid products.

DPS-OJP staff continue to consult with BCA staff on the Drug Monitoring Initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Anti-Heroin Task Force, funded by the DOJ Community Oriented Policing Services Office.

VCET grants coordinate with High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) projects in the seven-county metro area and will be working with expansion projects in St. Louis and Olmsted counties in 2020.

The Community Engagement and Prevention Committee, chaired by Shakopee Mdewakanton Conservation Officer John Littlewolf, reviewed community engagement sections of the 2020 VCET RFP and also reviewed 2019 VCET quarterly reporting.

VCET Funding and Audits

DPS-OJP managed a competitive application process in 2019 that resulted in the funding of 21 multijurisdictional VCET grants in 2020 with state and federal Justice Assistance Grant funds. A VCET list is attached in Appendix B.

In 2019, DPS-OJP forwarded all of the 2018 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 2019 VCET Commanders Training, held in March at Camp Ripley, reviewed audit findings, highlighted Guidelines Manual updates, and provided task force leadership training.

The statewide coordinator conducted comprehensive site visits at all VCET locations in 2019, 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.

All current grantees were determined to be eligible for the competitive grant process.

DPS-OJP staff are planning a training workshop for all VCET commanders in the spring of 2020 to review key provisions of the Guidelines Manual and highlight areas noted in peer-review site visits. Alliant Consulting, a preferred state vendor through the Management Analysis Division, will again be contracted to conduct on-site procedural reviews of 21 VCET grants in 2020.

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. The most recent audit of the Gang Pointer File was conducted from October 2018 to September 2019, and included data from the following entities:

- The Metro Gang Strike Force (subjects transferred to BCA Investigations).
- The Minnesota Fusion Center.
- The Minnesota Department of Corrections Fugitive Unit.

At the direction of Superintendent Drew Evans, the BCA made the Minnesota Gang File available to all Minnesota law enforcement agencies to enter and maintain records for subjects meeting the Gang File requirements on Feb. 27, 2017.

- The FBI – Minneapolis Field Office and the Minnesota Department of Corrections Central Office began submitting records during the past year.

The BCA Training and Auditing Unit is responsible for conducting audits of Minnesota law enforcement agencies that have entered subjects into the Gang Pointer File.

- The Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office is the sole local law enforcement agency with records requiring a triennial audit. The next is scheduled for 2020.
- All records entered by the Metro Gang Strike Force, the Minnesota Fusion Center, the Minnesota Department of Corrections Fugitive Unit, the Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office, FBI – Minneapolis Field Office, and the Minnesota Department of Corrections Central Office have been audited for the current one-year audit period.

BCA Training and Auditing staff reviewed 198 criminal histories on the remaining subjects in the Gang Pointer File and 74 new subjects entered during the past year.

Out of the 198 records reviewed, 19 subjects did not have any additional qualifying criminal convictions and were accordingly purged from the Minnesota Gang File.

As of Sept. 1, 2019, 179 subjects are in the Gang Pointer File.

2019 VCET Program Activities and Outcomes

The 21 VCETs funded in 2019 span 70 counties across Minnesota and are staffed by more than 200 investigators from 120 agencies. Each VCET provides extensive data and narrative reports on a quarterly

basis. This information assists DPS-OJP in allocating funds and analyzing drug and violent crime trends throughout the state.

Select VCET activities and reported data for 2015 and 2019:

ACTIVITY	2015	2019
Total number of drug arrests	3,015	2,890
Total number of non-drug arrests	1,134	1,089
Percentage of violent crimes (Part 1)	18%	22%
Number of arrests involving cocaine	267	282
Number of arrests involving heroin	334	253
Number of arrests involving methamphetamine	2,028	1,818
Number of arrests involving marijuana concentrates	78	208
Number of arrests involving prescription drugs	734	247
Number of children removed during arrest	399	306
Number of guns seized	934	1,024
Amount of cocaine seized (grams)	5,849	48,156
Amount of heroin seized (grams)	8,213	25,185
Amount of meth seized (grams)	104,473	774,534
Amount of marijuana concentrates seized (grams)	12,468	117,684
Amount of prescription drugs seized (dosage units)	17,717	30,475
Number of cases coordinated with other agencies	1,546	1,633
Number of community presentations given	417	404
Number of people in attendance at community mtgs.	20,036	13,747
Number of community outreach events*		499

*added in 2016

Although there were slightly fewer VCET drug arrests in recent years, a focus on long-term investigation of mid- to upper-level dealers has resulted in cases involving significant drug seizures. In the past five years, the amount of meth seizures had increased six-fold, and marijuana concentrates seizures in 2019 were 10 times higher than 2015. Cocaine is also plentiful, with a ten-fold increase in seizure amounts in a similar amount of cases.

Amidst national and statewide efforts to limit opioid prescribing, increase Naloxone access and reduce overdose deaths, Minnesota VCETs made fewer heroin arrests in 2019 but quadrupled the amount of heroin seized. Prescription drug arrests were down by two-thirds and prescription drug seizures were up slightly.

DPS-OJP staff continue to provide support for officer safety related to synthetic opioid exposure, opioid deaths as murder investigations, and cases affecting Indian communities. An emphasis on violent crime investigations is evidenced by slight increases in the number of Part 1, non-drug arrests and gun seizures. VCETs continue to work collaboratively with law enforcement partners and regularly present drug information in their communities.

Conclusion

The VCCC will continue the bimonthly meetings, including a joint fall meeting with VCET Advisory Board Chairs. DPS-OJP will continue to manage VCET grants, provide training and technical assistance, and present multi-year data on emerging drug trends. There will be a spring VCET commanders' meeting, summer operational reviews, and fall consideration of renewal of 2020 VCET grants for 2021. The BCA will continue to manage the Gang Pointer File, and the VCCC will again review gang criteria in 2020.