



**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Inspector General
Evaluation and Inspections Division**

**Review of the Bureau of
Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and
Explosives' Violent Crime
Impact Team Initiative**

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EXECUTIVE DIGEST

In June 2004, the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) established the Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT) initiative as a pilot program designed to reduce homicides and other firearms-related violent crime in 15 cities. The goal of the VCIT initiative was to “decrease, within six months, the number of homicides, number of firearms-related homicides, number of violent crimes, and number of violent firearms crimes” in target areas in those 15 cities.¹ In December 2004, ATF extended the initiative indefinitely and, in April 2005, expanded it to include a total of 20 cities.

There were two primary purposes of the VCIT initiative, as articulated by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG) and ATF. The first was to reduce homicides and violent firearms crimes in cities where homicide and violent crime rates had not followed the national trend downward. The second was to test the effectiveness of the VCIT strategy in reducing, rather than displacing, the incidents of firearms-related violence in neighborhoods and communities by identifying, targeting, and arresting the “worst of the worst” violent offenders in specific targeted areas referred to as hot spots. The VCIT initiative was designed to build on regular law enforcement operations and the Department’s Project Safe Neighborhoods.²

To assist in implementing the VCIT program, ODAG and ATF sought the participation of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the United States Marshals Service (USMS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys (EOUSA). Each of these components agreed to support the VCIT initiative to the degree that they could, given existing resources. The VCIT pilot program initially was funded by \$499,000 in reimbursable funding from the Department’s Justice Management Division (JMD). In FY 2005, ATF operated 20 VCITs using \$6.8 million reprogrammed from other ATF activities and general operating funds.

¹ “Justice Department Announces New Violent Crime Reduction Initiative,” press release, U.S. Department of Justice, June 24, 2004.

² The Department’s Office of Justice Programs initiated Project Safe Neighborhoods in 2001 to link federal, state, and local law enforcement, prosecutors, and community leaders together in a multifaceted approach to deterring and punishing gun crime.

In fiscal year (FY) 2006, ATF received its first appropriation of \$20 million specifically to continue and expand the VCIT initiative.

Prior to launching the VCIT pilot program in June 2004, ATF completed a document describing the VCIT initiative entitled *Violent Crime Impact Teams: A Comprehensive Strategy* (VCIT Strategy) and provided it to ATF Special Agents in Charge and VCIT Coordinators as an implementation guide. The VCIT Strategy described the underlying concept of the VCIT initiative – concentrate on small high-crime areas and remove the worst violent offenders. It also described the initiative’s purpose, objectives, intended outcomes, and activities. On January 26, 2006, ATF issued a report entitled *Violent Crime Impact Teams: Best Practices*. In the report, ATF stated that the VCIT pilot initiative had been a success and that the initiative should continue because the number of homicides committed with firearms was lower in 13 of the 15 VCIT pilot cities’ target areas than during the same 6-month period of the preceding year.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted this review to assess ATF’s implementation of the VCIT initiative. We examined planning and implementation documents from ATF, USMS, the Department’s Criminal Division, and EOUSA and conducted in-person and telephone interviews with personnel from ODAG, ATF, DEA, FBI, USMS, and EOUSA. We also conducted an e-mail survey of ATF’s VCIT Coordinators nation-wide and made site visits to five of the VCIT pilot cities, where we interviewed personnel from ATF, DEA, USMS, U.S. Attorneys’ Offices (USAO), and other federal, state, and local criminal justice officials.

We focused our review on five elements described in the VCIT Strategy that ODAG and ATF Headquarters officials consistently referenced in describing the VCIT initiative. Because these officials emphasized these five elements during our interviews, in speeches, in internal documents describing the VCIT initiative, and included them in the January 2006 Best Practices report, we determined that the elements collectively differentiated VCIT from regular ATF law enforcement operations. Briefly stated, these elements were: (1) targeting specific geographic areas such as neighborhoods or communities with a high rate of firearms violence; (2) targeting the worst violent offenders in those areas; (3) building effective working relationships with community leaders; (4) using ATF firearms investigative technology resources; and (5) working in partnership with other Department law enforcement components.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

The OIG's review of the implementation of the VCIT Strategy found that while every VCIT had implemented some of the elements of the Strategy, no VCIT had implemented all of the five key elements. Further, we found that ATF did not implement an adequate evaluation plan – at either the program or the local level – to identify the activities that each VCIT undertook, assess how effectively each VCIT carried out those activities, and determine whether violent crime declined in the target areas. We concluded that ATF cannot conclusively show that the law enforcement operations it undertook during the VCIT pilot project were effective at reducing firearms crime in the target areas. While the VCIT Strategy itself may be an effective tool to reduce violent crime in target areas, ATF's incomplete implementation and evaluation of VCIT prevents it, and us, from determining the Strategy's effectiveness.

The incomplete implementation of the VCIT Strategy was due primarily to problems with the selection of the VCIT locations, inadequate direction to ensure that the key elements of the Strategy were implemented, and ineffective oversight of the VCIT operations by ATF. ATF did not ensure that each VCIT implemented the key elements of the VCIT Strategy, but instead left it to the Field Division managers to develop local strategies.

ATF developed a detailed VCIT Strategy, but local operations did not implement the Strategy's key elements.

The 32-page VCIT Strategy that ATF issued in June 2004 described six objectives ATF expected each VCIT to meet, while adapting each objective to local conditions.³ Directives to VCITs to use ATF investigative technology resources and to include personnel from other Department law enforcement components were woven throughout the Strategy. In addition to these objectives and directives, the VCIT Strategy included an extensive list of specific law enforcement practices and procedures that should be adapted to local conditions and implemented as part of the overall VCIT operations.

Through interviews with the former Deputy Attorney General and ATF officials, we identified five key elements described in the VCIT Strategy that we deemed essential to implementing the VCIT initiative.

³ These objectives are listed in the Background section beginning on page 3.

These elements also differentiated VCIT from traditional ATF enforcement operations. In interviews, ATF officials said they expected VCITs to integrate these elements into their local operation. The five key elements are described in detail below:

1. Target Small Geographic Areas. According to ATF's VCIT Strategy, VCITs were intended to target specific small geographic areas within cities, referred to as hot spots, in which violent crime regularly occurred. The VCIT Strategy recommended assigning four Special Agents and one supervisor to concentrate on a target area.
2. Target the Worst Violent Offenders. ATF's VCIT Strategy recommended that VCITs develop lists of the "worst of the worst" violent offenders to target the most serious violent offenders in a target area. Targeting the most violent offenders is a key difference between VCIT operations and traditional ATF enforcement operations, which typically target firearm crimes.
3. Build Effective Working Relationships with Community Leaders. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for VCITs to develop effective relationships with community leaders to facilitate a "free flow" of information that could help identify and apprehend violent offenders.
4. Utilize ATF's Investigative Technology Resources. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for VCITs to expand their use of three resources to analyze firearms evidence and help solve crimes: the National Tracing Center (NTC), which traces firearms recovered at crime scenes to their original points of purchase and purchasers; the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN), which collects and analyzes images of fired cartridge casings and bullets to link specific firearms to criminal activity; and the Crime Gun Analysis Branch (CGAB), which analyzes data from firearms traces and reports of handgun sales and firearm thefts to identify "crime gun" patterns.
5. Work in Partnership with Other Department Law Enforcement Components. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for representatives from other federal law enforcement agencies, including DEA and FBI Special Agents, Deputy U.S. Marshals, and Assistant United States Attorneys (AUSA), to be included on the VCITs.

This approach was intended to integrate and focus the full capabilities of the Department on the target area.

We visited five VCIT pilot cities (Tampa, Tucson, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Miami) after the pilot period had ended to assess in more detail how each of the ATF Field Divisions involved had implemented the key elements of the VCIT Strategy. The following sections describe our observations, together with the results that ATF reported for each location.

Tampa VCIT

- Target Area. The VCIT target area was two neighborhoods in two local police districts covering 7 square miles, and ATF had plans to expand it to two more districts. ATF designated an existing agent group previously assigned to another ATF operation, supplemented by additional ATF Special Agents, for a total of 11 Special Agents assigned full time to the VCIT and 10 assigned part time.
- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT pursued “impact cases” that it defined by seriousness of the crime, the suspect’s record, and the likelihood of prosecution, but it did not develop a “worst of the worst” list.
- Community Outreach. The VCIT did not engage in community outreach activities.
- ATF Technology. The VCIT reported using the NTC for all investigations and routinely using the NIBIN and CGAB.
- Partnerships. At the time of the site visit, the VCIT did not include DEA or FBI Special Agents or Deputy U.S. Marshals. Six AUSAs worked on the VCIT full time. The VCIT reported working with several Florida law enforcement agencies, including the Tampa Police Department and the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office. In comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included one Special Agent part time from both DEA and the FBI, one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and four AUSAs full time.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Tampa VCIT was successful during the pilot period because the number

of homicides committed with firearms decreased from 19 during June through November 2003 to 9 during the same period in 2004 (53 percent) in the target area.

Tucson VCIT

- Target Area. The VCIT target area was 45 square miles of a city that spans approximately 226 square miles. ATF reassigned all of the Field Division's 10 Special Agents to work full time on the VCIT.
- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT implemented a three-pronged approach, which included utilizing a "worst of the worst" list to target recently released violent offenders, initiating investigations through undercover surveillance, and targeting potential straw purchasers or traffickers.⁴
- Community Outreach. The VCIT did not engage in community outreach activities.
- ATF Technology. The VCIT used the NTC and NIBIN for some of its investigations, but often did not submit requests in a timely manner. The VCIT did not use the CGAB, but instead prepared its own crime gun reports so it could tailor them to its needs.
- Partnerships. At the time of the site visit, the VCIT did not include Special Agents from the DEA or the FBI, Deputy U.S. Marshals, or AUSAs. The VCIT reported working with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Arizona Department of Corrections, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission, the Pima County Probation Department, and the Tucson Police Department. In comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included one Special Agent part time from both the DEA and the FBI, one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and three AUSAs full time.

Philadelphia VCIT

- Target Area. During the pilot period, the VCIT target area was the Southwest Police Division, which encompasses 11 square

⁴ Straw purchasers are individuals who purchase firearms for others who wish to remain unidentified.

miles, with an initial focus on the 2-square-mile 16th police district. The ATF Field Division initially assigned 18 Special Agents to the VCIT, including the entire Firearms Trafficking Group.

- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT initially developed a “worst of the worst” list, but after the first 6 weeks of operation, shifted its focus from individuals on the list to targeting known shooters (usually identified through confidential informants). The VCIT identified and pursued individuals or groups likely to retaliate in response to a shooting (usually the target of the shooting or associates of the victim).
- Community Outreach. Initially, VCIT personnel attended several community meetings, but discontinued their outreach effort.
- ATF Technology. VCIT personnel continued to use the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB as they had prior to the creation of the VCIT. They indicated they would have liked to expand their use of the NIBIN, but local police resources were not sufficient to support expansion.
- Partnerships. The VCIT included a DEA Special Agent part time, no FBI Special Agents, and a Deputy U.S. Marshal full time. One AUSA worked on the VCIT full time. The VCIT reported working with several Pennsylvania law enforcement agencies.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Philadelphia VCIT was successful during the pilot period because homicides committed with firearms decreased from 12 during June through November 2003 to 3 during the same period in 2004 (75 percent) in the target area.

Los Angeles VCIT

- Target Area. The VCIT target area was two local police divisions, covering 20 square miles, at the time of our visit. To form the VCIT, ATF reassigned an existing task force that included 10 ATF Special Agents plus personnel from other law enforcement agencies.

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- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT identified targets through investigations, leads from ATF Special Agents, or confidential information, but did not have criteria for selecting targets or a list of “worst of the worst” offenders. The VCIT investigated firearms cases originating in the three police jurisdictions that composed the VCIT target area to determine whether the cases could be prosecuted in federal court.
 - Community Outreach. The VCIT did not participate in community outreach activities.
 - ATF Technology. The VCIT utilized the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB, and frequently incorporated firearms tracing analysis into investigations. The VCIT also used the firearms tracing analysis developed at ATF’s Southern California Regional Crime Gun Center.
 - Partnerships. At the time of the site visit, the VCIT did not include DEA or FBI Special Agents. One Deputy U.S. Marshal worked part time on the VCIT during the early stages of the initiative. One AUSA worked on the VCIT part time. The VCIT reported working with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the California Department of Corrections. In comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included one Special Agent part time from both the DEA and the FBI, one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and two AUSAs full time, as well as six LAPD officers full time and four part time.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Los Angeles VCIT had not demonstrated success during the pilot period because homicides committed with firearms increased from 72 during June through November 2003 to 77 during the same period in 2004 (7 percent) in the target area.

Miami VCIT

- Target Area. The Miami VCIT operated within the entire Miami-Dade County area (including the City of Miami), an area of approximately 2,100 square miles. While pursuing cases from the entire target area, the VCIT attempted to focus on six widely scattered portions of it. Initially, ATF assigned several agent groups to the VCIT for a total of 25 Special Agents, but the groups also retained their regular law enforcement

responsibilities. Subsequently, ATF increased the number of Special Agents on the VCIT to 34.

- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT focused on gun crimes committed rather than individuals in its targeted geographic area and did not use a “worst of the worst” list.
- Community Outreach. The VCIT did not engage in community outreach activities.
- ATF Technologies. The VCIT used the NTC to trace all guns and used the NIBIN extensively, but did not use the CGAB.
- Partnerships. The VCIT did not include Special Agents from the DEA or FBI, but did include one Deputy U.S. Marshal on a part-time basis. Three AUSAs worked on the VCIT full time. VCIT personnel told us that they also received support from the Secret Service, ICE, and the local police department. In comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included 3 DEA Special Agents part time, 1 FBI Special Agent part time, 1 Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and 2 AUSAs full time, as well as 16 members of the Miami City and Miami Dade County police departments.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Miami VCIT was successful during the pilot period because homicides committed with firearms decreased from 36 from June through November 2003 to 22 during the same period in 2004 (39 percent) in the city itself (not the target area).

Because of the inconsistency in operations that we were observing during our five field visits, we conducted a survey of 19 VCIT Coordinators⁵ and additional research to assess how the 5 key elements were implemented by the 14 VCITs we did not visit. We summarize below our findings regarding the implementation of the 5 key elements of the VCIT strategy across the 19 VCITs.

⁵ We included 19 of the 20 VCITs in operation when our review began. We excluded the New Orleans VCIT because of the effects of Hurricane Katrina on ATF’s operations there.

Target Small Geographic Areas

Eighteen of the 19 VCITs Coordinators who responded to our survey considered “identifying and working within a defined target area” a core or essential component of their VCIT initiative and stated that their VCIT targeted or operated in a specific geographic area. However, we found that the specific geographic areas varied greatly in size and population.

Overall, we found that 8 of the 19 VCITs targeted areas of 10 square miles or less, and 10 VCITs targeted areas ranging from 20 to 2,100 square miles. VCIT Coordinators reported that their VCITs targeted “specific geographic areas” that varied greatly in size and population. For example, two VCITs targeted entire cities, and one targeted an entire county. The population in the VCIT target areas ranged from 25,000 to 3 million residents.

The VCIT Strategy also indicated that, consistent with targeting a small geographic target area, VCITs should be composed of a small number of ATF Special Agents. Specifically, the Strategy recommended four Special Agents and a Supervisory Special Agent be included on the VCIT. However, we found that ATF assigned an average of 10 Special Agents to each of the 19 VCITs, with the actual number of Special Agents ranging from 3 to 34.

Target the Worst Violent Offenders

We found that 6 of the 19 VCITs (32 percent) used a “worst of the worst” list and kept it updated to reflect arrests and newly identified targets. Of the remaining 13 VCITs, 7 used a “worst of the worst” list, but did not keep it updated, while 6 did not use such a list at all.

In addition, the VCIT arrest data suggested that the VCITs might not have focused on targeted individuals. According to the arrest data, targeted individuals represented only about 20 percent of the total number of arrests made by the VCITs. Although a key element of the VCIT initiative was to target the worst offenders, from June 2004 through May 2005, the VCITs reported making 3,592 arrests, of which only 746 were targeted individuals. We could not determine whether these 746 targeted individuals were the “worst of the worst” violent offenders in the target areas because only 6 VCITs used up-to-date “worst of the worst” lists and ATF did not require VCITs to document the definition of “targeted individual” that they used to compile these data.

Build Effective Working Relationships with Community Leaders

In our survey of the 19 VCIT Coordinators, 11 reported engaging in community outreach such as attending community meetings and participating in neighborhood watch activities. Eight VCIT coordinators did not report community relations as an essential part of their VCITs' strategies.

Three of the sites we visited were among the 11 that reported they engaged in community outreach. However, during our site visits, we found that none of the five VCITs actively participated in any community outreach.

Utilize ATF's Investigative Technology Resources

We determined that VCITs did not consistently use the services of the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB to facilitate their investigations. For example, according to NTC officials, six VCITs consistently used the NTC to expedite gun tracings, seven VCITs used the NTC but not consistently, and four VCIT cities' use of the NTC actually declined after ATF implemented the VCIT program. ATF officials told us that this apparent decline in NTC use could be due to the failure of local VCITs to flag all of their submissions to the NTC.

We compared submissions to the NIBIN – the program that collects and analyzes images of fired cartridge casings and bullets to link specific firearms to criminal activity – by pilot VCIT cities for 6 months before VCIT implementation (January through June 2004) with their submissions during VCIT operations (July through December 2004). We found that six VCIT cities submitted more images after VCIT implementation, seven VCIT cities submitted fewer images, and two cities did not submit any images to the NIBIN during 2004. Although the purpose of VCITs was to intensify the focus on firearms crimes, we concluded that over half of the VCIT cities made fewer submissions to the NIBIN after ATF implemented local VCIT operations than prior to initiation of the VCIT program.

In response to our survey, 17 of the 19 VCIT Coordinators (89 percent) stated that they used the CGAB – which analyzes firearm trace, handgun sale, and firearm theft information to identify “crime gun” patterns – on an ongoing basis as part of their VCIT strategies. However, during our site visits to five VCIT cities, local VCIT personnel stated they did not routinely use the CGAB. In fact, in three cities we visited, ATF personnel and contract staff explained that they were

assigned to produce reports similar to those the CGAB provided. We believe this to be an indication that the type of information the CGAB produced was useful to VCITs, but that ATF had not tailored CGAB reports to support VCIT operations.

Work in Partnership with Other Department Law Enforcement Components

Of the 19 VCIT sites, only 1 included representatives from the DEA, FBI, and USMS; another 14 VCITs included a representative from one or two of these agencies; and 4 VCITs had no representative from any other Department law enforcement component. The VCIT Coordinators reported that the DEA provided Special Agents to 7 VCITs, the FBI provided Special Agents to 3 VCITs, and the USMS provided U.S. Deputy Marshals to 14 VCITs. VCIT coordinators reported that the USAOs provided AUSAs to 17 of the VCITs. See Table 1 on the next page. We also found that when the DEA and USMS assigned personnel to VCITs, the assigned personnel were often unaware of their expected roles and did not always receive clear direction from either ATF or their own agency regarding their expected duties. At only one of the five sites we visited did personnel from either the DEA or USMS tell us that they had a clear understanding of their role on the local VCIT.

Table 1: Department of Justice Component Participation

VCIT City	DEA		FBI		USMS		USAO	
	Full Time	Part Time						
Hartford	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Tampa	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0
Baltimore	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Tucson	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0
Fresno	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Camden	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Philadelphia	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tulsa	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
Columbus	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Washington, DC/No. Va.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Richmond	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Greensboro	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Los Angeles	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Houston	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Las Vegas	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0
Albuquerque	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2
Miami	0	5	0	1	0	1	4	16
Chattanooga	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Pittsburgh	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Total	1	10	2	1	4	14	20	35

Note: Survey data are not always consistent with the data we report from our site visit interviews.

Source: OIG VCIT Coordinator Survey

ATF did not address local conditions in the site selection process and, contrary to the VCIT Strategy, placed VCITs in areas with decreasing violent crime and areas without sufficient cooperation with local law enforcement.

We found that ATF and ODAG officials selected cities to participate in the VCIT initiative without seeking input from ATF Field Division personnel who were most familiar with local crime conditions. Without the advice of ATF field personnel, ODAG and ATF officials often selected locations for the VCIT pilot test that did not reflect ATF’s emphasis on targeting violent crime “hot spots.” We found that in some of the selected target areas violent crime was decreasing or already at a low level. We

also found that ATF did not ensure that the pilot sites would receive cooperation from local law enforcement. For example, in some areas, local authorities were not willing to give ATF the local crime data it needed to monitor progress and evaluate the impact of the VCIT initiative on violent crime.

ATF did not provide sufficient direction and oversight to its Field Divisions to ensure that local VCITs implemented the key elements of the initiative.

We found that ATF officials did not develop policies and procedures for incorporating the five key elements that differentiated VCIT from routine ATF enforcement operations either before or during the pilot period. ATF also did not provide resource materials or training on implementing the VCIT key elements to ATF Field Division staff or personnel from federal or local partner agencies prior to initiating VCIT Operations. The ATF Field Operations staff who have the authority and responsibility to oversee the Field Divisions' operations did not provide written operational guidance regarding how the VCIT Strategy should be implemented. All of the VCIT Coordinators we interviewed told us that ATF Headquarters officials left it to Field Division managers to develop their local VCIT strategies. After the pilot period, in August 2005, ATF Headquarters personnel met with VCIT Coordinators to discuss local operations, and in January 2006, ATF published the Best Practices report, which stated that "this analysis will be used to strengthen future VCIT deployments." However, ATF did not provide specific policies or guidance for implementing the identified practices.

Because of the lack of operational guidance from ATF Headquarters, local VCIT activities were often a continuation of ATF enforcement activities that had been under way prior to VCIT implementation. ATF Field Division managers and Special Agents in two of the cities told us that, except for working in target areas, their VCITs' activities were indistinguishable from their Field Divisions' previous routine operations.

ATF did not develop an adequate evaluation plan, leaving it unable to demonstrate the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative.

We found that ATF has not developed an adequate evaluation plan to determine the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative. Although ATF's VCIT Strategy clearly stated the importance of determining the effectiveness of the initiative and its impact on homicides and all violent crimes committed with firearms, ATF Headquarters officials did not implement a

program-wide evaluation plan that could accomplish this objective. ATF collected standard measures of law enforcement activity – such as arrests – that, alone, were not adequate to evaluate the implementation or effectiveness of a specific strategy such as VCIT. ATF did not collect and analyze the data necessary to identify and correct problems in implementing VCIT’s key elements or in evaluating their effectiveness. For example, ATF did not collect data on the criminal histories of the offenders arrested; prosecution and sentencing of VCIT arrestees; VCITs’ use of firearm technologies; or data on personnel and other resources provided to VCITs by other Department components.

ATF Headquarters officials also recognized the importance of conducting local evaluations of VCIT operations in each city, but they did not provide the Field Divisions with guidance on how to do so. When we examined the local evaluations that the VCIT Coordinators submitted to ATF Headquarters, we found that they described in narrative fashion local lessons learned. Few reports provided quantitative or qualitative data documenting the effectiveness of the activities they described. For example, reports did not provide data on the characteristics (e.g., criminal histories) of the individuals VCITs arrested or the investigative technologies VCITs used in investigations. None of the reports had documentation on the number of VCIT arrestees prosecuted or the length of the sentences handed down for those who were convicted. If the Field Divisions had reported these types of data, ATF could have identified and corrected gaps in implementing VCIT’s key elements and in evaluating their effectiveness.

ATF’s Claim of VCIT Success Is Based on Insufficient Data.

In its January 2006 Best Practices report, ATF compared the number of homicides committed with firearms before and after VCIT implementation in the 15 pilot cities. ATF reported that the pilot initiative was a success because the number of homicides committed with firearms in the VCIT target areas decreased compared with the number of homicides in the same 6-month period of the preceding year in 13 of the 15 pilot cities.

However, our analysis of the data in the ATF report does not support this conclusion. We found that ATF based its analysis on insufficient data and faulty comparisons. ATF inappropriately used city-wide data rather than target area data for 8 of the 15 VCITs and, therefore, could not demonstrate the impact of the VCIT on homicides committed with firearms for half of the VCITs. Moreover, the number of homicides committed with firearms in

some of the target areas where ATF implemented VCITs was relatively small, generally ranging from 2 to 32, with the majority under 20 during a 6-month period. Therefore, percentage decreases reported by ATF appear dramatic but actually reflect small changes in the number of homicides committed with firearms, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative.

For example, ATF reported that in Albuquerque, homicides committed with firearms in the target area decreased by 50 percent – from 4 between June and November 2003 to 2 during the same period in 2004. In addition, the comparison of data from only two points in time, 2003 and 2004, was not consistent with accepted standards for trend analysis.⁶

We believe that a better measure of the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative would have been to compare the number of violent firearms crimes (instead of only homicides committed with firearms) in the VCIT target areas for the same periods before and after the initiative was implemented. First, the change in the number of violent firearms crimes is a standard, agency-wide ATF performance measure. Second, the number of violent firearms crimes in a VCIT target area is a large number, ranging from 107 to 4,056, making analyses of the data more reliable. Furthermore, according to the VCIT Strategy, ATF intended to measure the effectiveness of VCITs not only by the number of homicides committed with firearms, but also by the total number of homicides, the number of violent crimes, and the number of violent firearms crimes.

Although a primary goal of the VCIT initiative was to reduce violent firearms crime, our analysis of data that ATF provided for target areas in six pilot cities did not show that the VCITs had done so. Tampa had experienced a decrease in violent firearms crimes before VCIT was implemented there – from 278 in 2002 to 257 in 2003 – followed by a sharper decrease to 107 in 2004 after VCIT implementation. Greensboro experienced an increase in violent crimes committed with firearms before VCIT implementation, followed by a slight decrease during VCIT implementation. Los Angeles showed a decrease that began before VCIT was implemented and continued after VCIT implementation, as did Chattanooga. See Table 2. In two VCIT cities, Albuquerque and

⁶ The Baldrige National Quality Improvement Program of the National Institute of Standards and Technology establishes three points in time as the minimum for a trend analysis.

Philadelphia, violent firearms crime increased after VCIT was implemented. A comparison of high-crime areas with VCITs to similar high-crime areas without VCITs would constitute a stronger evaluation methodology.

Table 2: Violent Crimes Committed with Firearms in Target Areas

City	2002 June-Nov.	2003 June-Nov.	2004 June-Nov.
Albuquerque	256	188	191
Chattanooga	1,149	346	N/A
Greensboro	334	353	351
Los Angeles	2,338	1,863	1,731
Philadelphia	3,581	3,886	4,056
Tampa	278	257	107
Total	7,936	6,893	6,436

Note: These data were provided to ATF by the local police departments.

Source: ATF data

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although we believe ATF developed sound objectives for the VCIT Strategy to combat violent firearms crime, ATF did not implement that Strategy. This was primarily due to ATF's inconsistent direction to and oversight of its Field Divisions on adapting the VCIT Strategy to local operations. Most VCITs inconsistently incorporated the key elements that were to differentiate the initiative from ATF's day-to-day enforcement operations. Further, ATF did not develop an adequate evaluation strategy to measure the performance or impact of the VCIT initiative, and ATF's analysis of the data it collected does not support its claims of success. As a result, although the Strategy on paper appears to be a reasonable and effective approach, after 24 months of operations and the allocation of more than \$35 million in reprogrammed funds, general operating funds, and funds appropriated for VCIT, ATF cannot definitively show whether the initiative successfully reduced firearms crime in areas with high levels of violent crime.

For FY 2006, ATF received \$20 million to continue and expand the VCIT initiative. To maximize the use of these funds and to inform future funding decisions, we believe that ATF should implement the initiative

consistent with its VCIT Strategy and in a manner that will allow ATF to determine whether the Strategy is effective in reducing violent firearm crime in specific areas. To accomplish this, we recommend that ATF:

1. Establish specific operational guidelines for VCIT implementation, and provide training based on these guidelines for ATF Special Agents in Charge and VCIT Coordinators on tailoring the VCIT initiative to local crime problems.
2. Develop and implement a pre-deployment assessment for prospective VCIT locations to determine the potential applicability of VCIT to local violent crime problems.
3. Develop and implement an adequate evaluation strategy to assess VCIT performance and impact on violent firearms crime.
4. For existing VCITs, where possible, and for future VCITs, establish interagency agreements with federal and local partner agencies that define resource commitments and operational responsibilities.
5. Establish management authority and responsibility for overseeing the implementation and evaluation of local VCIT operations in accordance with the VCIT Strategy and the guidelines developed in response to Recommendation 1.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
AUSA	Assistant United States Attorney
CGAB	Crime Gun Analysis Branch
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
EOUSA	Executive Office for United States Attorneys
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FY	fiscal year
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
JMD	Justice Management Division
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPD	Miami Police Department
NTC	National Tracing Center
NIBIN	National Integrated Ballistics Information Network
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
ODAG	Office of the Deputy Attorney General
PPD	Philadelphia Police Department
PSN	Project Safe Neighborhoods
SAC	Special Agent in Charge
TPD	Tampa Police Department
UCR	Uniform Crime Reports
USAO	United States Attorney's Office
USMS	United States Marshals Service
VCIT	Violent Crime Impact Team

BACKGROUND

In June 2004, the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) established the Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT) initiative as a 6-month pilot program designed to reduce violent crime in 15 cities. The goal of the VCIT initiative was to “decrease within six months, the number of homicides, number of firearms-related homicides, number of violent crimes and number of violent firearms crimes” in target areas in those 15 cities.⁷ In December 2004, ATF extended the program indefinitely and, in April 2005, expanded it to include a total of 20 cities.

There were two primary purposes of the VCIT initiative, as articulated by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG) and ATF. The first was to reduce homicides and violent firearms crimes in cities where homicide and violent crime rates had not followed the national trend downward. The second was to test the effectiveness of the VCIT strategy in reducing, rather than displacing, the incidents of firearms-related violence in neighborhoods and communities by identifying, targeting, and arresting the “worst of the worst” violent offenders in specific targeted areas referred to as hot spots. The VCIT initiative was designed to build on regular law enforcement operations and the Department’s Project Safe Neighborhoods.⁸

To assist in implementing the VCIT program, ODAG and ATF sought the participation of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the United States Marshals Service (USMS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys (EOUSA). The VCIT pilot program initially was funded by \$499,000 in reimbursable funding from the Department’s Justice Management Division (JMD). In FY 2005, ATF operated 20 VCITs using \$6.8 million reprogrammed from other ATF activities and general operating funds. In fiscal year (FY) 2006, ATF received its first appropriation of \$20 million specifically to continue and expand the VCIT initiative.

⁷ “Justice Department Announces New Violent Crime Reduction Initiative,” press release, U.S. Department of Justice, June 24, 2004.

⁸ The Department’s Office of Justice Programs initiated Project Safe Neighborhoods in 2001 to link federal, state, and local law enforcement, prosecutors, and community leaders together in a multifaceted approach to deterring and punishing gun crime.

The VCIT Strategy

In response to ODAG's direction, ATF developed a 32-page document entitled *Violent Crime Impact Teams: A Comprehensive Strategy* (VCIT Strategy) in which it described the mission, expectations, organization, and implementation of the initiative. According to the VCIT Strategy, the initiative's mission is to "reduce armed violence in the locations that are not following the national trend, through the use of geographic targeting, aggressive investigation, and prosecution of those responsible." According to the VCIT Strategy's mission statement, "The ultimate goal of this strategy is to ensure that the incidents of firearms-related violence is [sic] thoroughly reduced, not displaced to adjacent neighborhoods."

The VCIT Strategy incorporated strategies the National Institute of Justice reported to be effective or promising in the 1998 publication, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*. These strategies included incarcerating the "worst of the worst" offenders and identifying and targeting neighborhoods with high levels of violent crime referred to as hot spots. The VCIT Strategy also incorporated elements of other Department violent crime control initiatives such as Project Safe Neighborhoods and Operation Weed and Seed, as well as local programs such as Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles and the Directed Patrol Project in Indianapolis.⁹ The concept underlying the VCIT program was to concentrate law enforcement in geographic target areas, arrest and prosecute the worst violent offenders in the target area, involve the community in the strategy, and coordinate law enforcement efforts across agencies. Consistent with these concepts, ATF's VCIT Strategy included specific objectives that VCITs were expected to accomplish to reduce violent crime:

- Target Specific Geographic Areas. According to ATF's VCIT Strategy, VCITs were to target specific hot spots in which violent crime was regularly occurring. Examples of target areas were neighborhoods and police precincts that had high rates of violent crime. The VCIT Strategy stated that VCITs should identify these

⁹ The Department initiated Operation Weed and Seed in 1992 to help prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity in designated high-crime neighborhoods across the country. Operation Ceasefire was developed in response to gang-related gun violence in the Hollenback area of Los Angeles. Multiple law enforcement agencies used a coordinated strategy to increase police patrols and surveillance of gang members. The Indianapolis Police Department implemented the Directed Patrol Project in 1997 to reduce violent crime by proactively patrolling target areas with a special emphasis on locating and seizing illegally possessed firearms.

target areas using technology and human intelligence. The strategy also indicated that ATF intended to assign a small number of Special Agents – four Special Agents and a Supervisory Special Agent were recommended – to target the small geographic areas.

- Target the Worst Violent Offenders. ATF's VCIT Strategy recommended that VCITs develop lists of the "worst of the worst" violent offenders to target the most serious violent offenders in the target area. Targeting the most violent offenders is a key difference between VCIT operations and traditional ATF enforcement operations, which typically target firearm crimes. This objective was based on the theory that most violent crime in a small geographic area is committed by a small group of violent offenders.
- Utilize ATF's Investigative Practices. The VCIT Strategy stated that VCITs were to disrupt and dismantle criminal activities through the use of certain ATF investigative practices. To accomplish this objective, VCITs were to assist local officers by responding rapidly to firearms-related violent crime and utilizing ATF Industry Operations Investigators (Inspectors) as a resource. Inspectors verify that licensed firearms dealers comply with federal regulations and provide accurate information to ATF regarding firearms sales. This objective also included the use of undercover operations and confidential informants.
- Prosecute Violent Offenders Aggressively. The VCIT Strategy stated that VCITs should arrest and ensure the prosecution of "a wide range of firearms offenders," such as armed career criminals, armed violent offenders, narcotics traffickers, and individuals illegally possessing firearms. To accomplish this objective, VCITs were to work with federal and state prosecutors to determine the jurisdiction that offered the maximum possible penalty for these firearm offenders.
- Work with Community Leaders. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for VCITs to develop effective relationships with community leaders to facilitate a "free flow" of information that could help them identify and apprehend violent offenders. In a May 2005 request to Congress to reprogram funds, ATF stated that VCITs "will foster relationships with the affected communities through neighborhood watch programs and attendance at community meetings and social events."

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- Evaluate the VCITs' Impact. According to the VCIT Strategy, the following measures would be used to assess the impact of the VCITs: reductions in the number of homicides, firearms-related homicides, violent crimes, and violent firearms crimes. Comparisons would be made between crime rates during the pilot period and crime rates for the same period during the previous year. ATF expected the VCITs to monitor their results and submit data to ATF Headquarters on a monthly basis using data submission forms ATF Headquarters provided. ATF initially required weekly data submissions. (See Appendix I for a copy of the current data submission form.) ATF also expected its Field Divisions to conduct local evaluations of VCIT operations.

At the conclusion of the pilot period, and concurrent with the OIG review, ATF initiated its own review of best practices across the 15 pilot cities. ATF identified the following VCIT best practices: (1) set clear goals and measure performance; (2) develop collaborative partnerships with local police; (3) target the “worst of the worst” criminals; (4) use the full array of intelligence assets; (5) maintain a fluid and dynamic approach when targeting offenders and hot spots; (6) conduct proactive street enforcement with local police in targeted hot spots; (7) deploy resources during peak hours of criminal activity; (8) investigate the sources of firearms linked to violent crime; (9) prioritize prosecution of defendants linked to targeted hot spots; and (10) publicize success stories.

VCIT Technology Resources

The VCIT Strategy called for VCITs to expand the use of the National Tracing Center (NTC), the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN), and the Crime Gun Analysis Branch (CGAB) to analyze firearms evidence and help solve crimes. ATF, in its nomination of the VCIT development team for the Attorney General’s 2005 Award for Outstanding Contributions to Community Partnerships for Public Safety, described VCIT as a “technology-based firearms initiative.” In a briefing for the Office of Management and Budget in October 2004, ATF stated, “The utilization of these new technologies, in concert with local technology, is essential in order to suppress violent criminals in the community. These tools must be in place to accomplish the goals of this initiative.” The technological tools included the following resources.

National Tracing Center

The NTC traces serial numbers of firearms used in crimes and recovered at crime scenes to determine the original point of sale of a

firearm and its original purchaser. In addition, the NTC frequently traces a firearm to the most recent purchaser. ATF encourages law enforcement agencies to submit all recovered firearms for tracing so that ATF can effectively identify potential sources of illegal firearms trafficking. To support the VCIT initiative, the NTC implemented a policy that classifies all firearms trace submissions from VCITs as “urgent” and gives these requests the center’s highest priority.

National Integrated Ballistics Information Network

The NIBIN is a networked database of fired cartridge casing and bullet images developed to assist firearms examiners with linking criminal activity to specific firearms. ATF encouraged VCITs to utilize the NIBIN to aid in the investigations of firearms-related violent crimes.

Crime Gun Analysis Branch

The CGAB analyzes data from successful firearms traces, reports of multiple handgun sales, and reports of firearms thefts to identify patterns that may not be apparent from information in a single trace. For example, the CGAB identifies “crime gun” patterns, crimes associated with firearms, source location, possessor information, and “time to crime” information.¹⁰ To support the VCIT initiative, the CGAB developed “crime gun” reports for the 15 original VCIT cities and provided these reports, many of which focus on VCIT target areas, to VCIT cities twice a year.

VCIT Personnel Resources

According to the VCIT Strategy, each VCIT “will be comprised of Federal special agents and support personnel working with State and local law enforcement . . . and will consist of the following” ATF personnel:

- 1 ATF Resident Agent in Charge,
- 4 ATF Special Agents,
- 1 ATF Investigative Analyst, and
- 1 ATF Intelligence Research Specialist.

¹⁰ “Time to crime” means the elapsed time between the purchase of a firearm and its use in the commission of a crime. A short “time to crime” is an indicator that the gun was purchased with the intent of using it in some form of illegal activity because most firearms purchased legally for legitimate purposes – such as hunting, sport shooting, or self or home defense – remain with the original purchaser for a long period of time. Firearms obtained through straw purchases or from licensed firearms dealers who sell firearms illegally are more likely to be used in criminal activity.

The VCIT Strategy made the Resident Agent in Charge the supervisory Special Agent in Charge of each VCIT. ATF Special Agents were charged with “targeting the most egregious criminals and bringing them to justice.” The Investigative Analyst and Intelligence Research Specialist was to provide investigative and intelligence support to the VCIT. According to the VCIT Strategy, ATF intelligence units and Inspectors were also to provide support to the initiative.

The VCIT Strategy stated that VCITs would also consist of personnel from partner agencies, including:

- State and local police officers,
- FBI Special Agents,
- DEA Special Agents,
- USMS Deputy U.S. Marshals,
- State and federal probation and parole officers,
- An Assistant United States Attorney (AUSA), and
- State prosecutors.

The VCIT Strategy described the roles and responsibilities for each of these partners and suggested additional resources that the components listed above could contribute to a VCIT as needed. In addition, the VCIT Strategy recommended the VCITs include personnel from the Internal Revenue Service, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Border Patrol, Federal Bureau of Prisons, and state and county jails.

ODAG officials stated that interagency partnerships were envisioned as a key component of the VCIT initiative and that the VCITs were to serve as an intelligence and information-sharing bridge for the participating Department agencies, as well as a mechanism to integrate agency-specific expertise. Prior to announcing the VCIT initiative, ODAG and ATF Headquarters officials met with officials at the DEA, USMS, and FBI to solicit these agencies’ participation. High-level officials at each of these agencies agreed to provide assistance as resources allowed. The Deputy Attorney General spoke with the United States Attorneys for the VCIT cities before the initiative began, and they also agreed to work on the initiative. In addition, ATF Headquarters officials urged Field Division managers in VCIT cities to solicit the participation of other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

VCIT Funding Resources

The VCIT pilot program initially was funded by reprogrammed and general operating funds from ATF. ATF secured \$499,000 from JMD for

reimbursable FY 2004 expenses related to the implementation and pilot period of the VCIT initiative. In June 2004, after the VCIT initiative was announced, ATF asked to reprogram funds from a gang resistance program to the VCIT initiative. JMD approved the reprogramming of \$3.7 million. ATF then obtained approval for the \$3.7 million reprogramming from the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees. The Senate subsequently approved the reprogramming of the “full, un-obligated” balance of ATF’s gang resistance program (\$6.8 million) to the VCIT initiative.¹¹ On June 30, 2005, the House of Representatives approved the total reprogramming of \$6.8 million to fund the VCIT initiative.

In addition to the reprogrammed funds, during the initial year of VCIT operations ATF directed general funds toward expenditures such as Special Agent salaries, office space, equipment, and miscellaneous resources. ATF also received \$20 million in 2006 specifically for VCIT. ATF reported that, as of March 30, 2006, it had spent a total of \$35.8 million on VCIT activities.

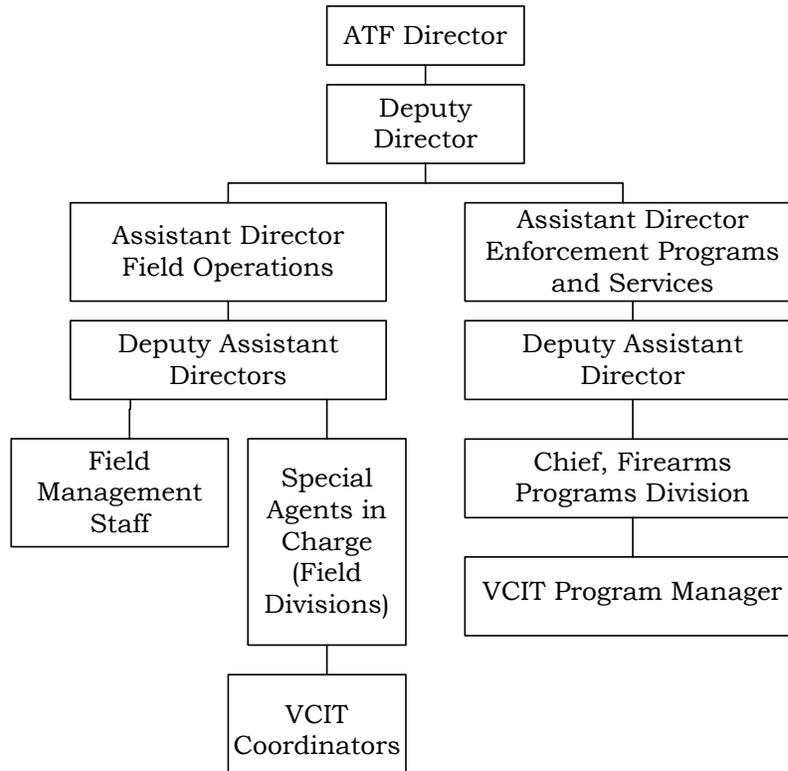
For the FY 2006 budget cycle, ATF requested and the Office of Management and Budget approved \$30 million for the VCIT initiative. The funding request included an additional 75 Special Agent positions, 25 Industry Operations Investigators, and 50 technical support positions. Congress ultimately provided \$20 million for the VCIT program in the FY 2006 appropriation. In the FY 2007 budget request to Congress, the President recommended that ATF receive \$16 million for the year and deploy VCITs to 15 additional cities.

VCIT Management

At ATF Headquarters, the responsibility for directing VCIT operations is assigned to the Assistant Director for Field Operations, while program development and evaluation activities are the responsibility of the VCIT Program Manager. Among the Program Manager’s responsibilities are the collection of performance data from the VCITs and compilation of the data into reports for ATF Headquarters officials. Figure 1 depicts ATF’s management structure for the VCIT initiative.

¹¹ Funds were reallocated from the Gang Resistance and Education Training program, which had been administratively transferred from ATF to the Office of Justice Programs earlier in 2004.

Figure 1: ATF VCIT Management Structure



Under ATF’s current organizational structure, the VCIT Program Manager reports to the Chief of the Firearms Programs Division, who reports to the Deputy Assistant Director and Assistant Director for Enforcement Programs and Services. That Assistant Director, supported by three Deputy Assistant Directors, oversees the Field Management Staff, which is responsible for ensuring that programs developed by the Enforcement Programs and Services staff, such as VCIT, are implemented. The Field Management Staff directs VCIT operations through the relevant Special Agents in Charge of the Field Divisions in the selected cities. The Special Agent in Charge, in turn, directs VCIT Coordinators (who typically are Supervisory Special Agents) through the Field Division’s management structure.

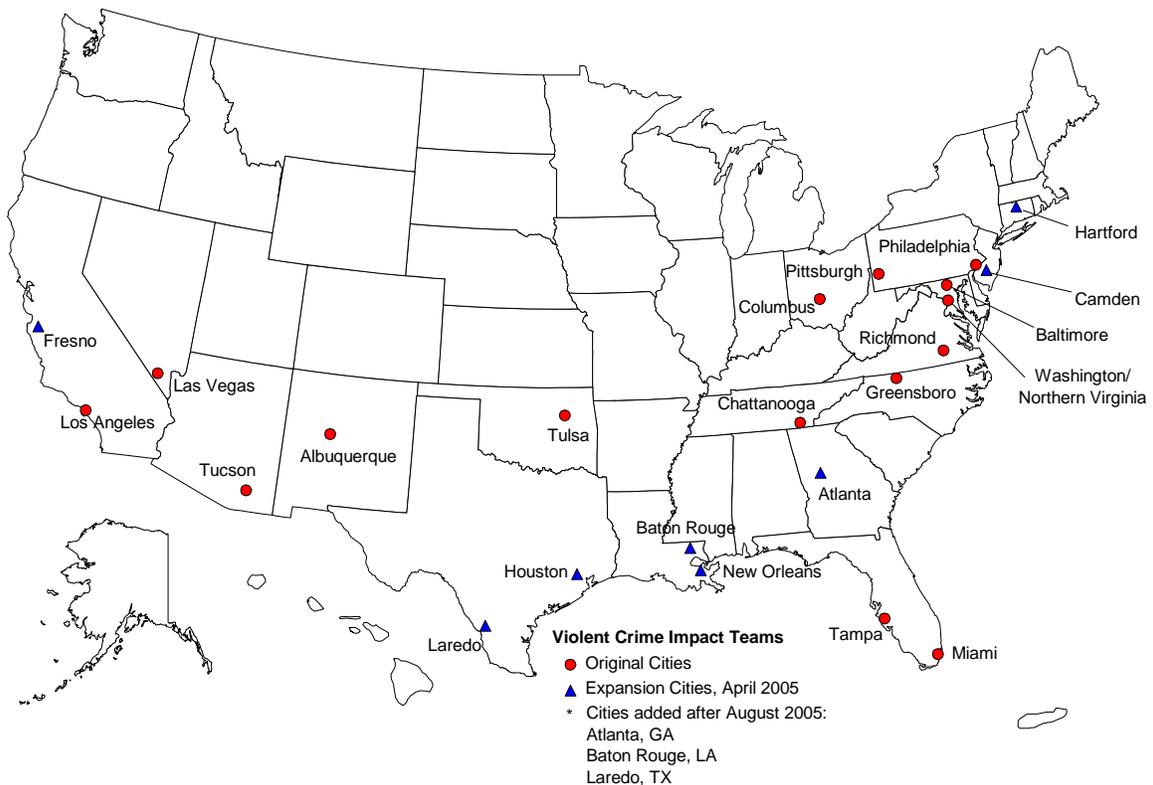
Participating Cities

ATF and ODAG officials told us that they selected cities to participate in the VCIT initiative based on an examination of crime statistics, including recent homicide and violent crime numbers. The 15 cities selected to participate in the initial phase of the VCIT initiative were

Albuquerque, New Mexico; Baltimore, Maryland; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; Greensboro, North Carolina; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; Tampa, Florida; Tucson, Arizona; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Washington, D.C./Northern Virginia. (See Figure 2.)

In April 2005, ATF expanded the VCIT initiative to include Camden, New Jersey; Fresno, California; Hartford, Connecticut; Houston, Texas; and New Orleans, Louisiana. In September 2005, as part of the Department’s response to Hurricane Katrina, the Attorney General directed ATF to establish a VCIT in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In October 2005, the Attorney General announced the initiation of a VCIT in Laredo, Texas, as part of the Department’s response to violence along the United States–Mexico border. In March 2006, the Attorney General announced a new VCIT in Atlanta, Georgia.

Figure 2: Cities with VCITs as of March 2006



PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted this review to assess ATF's implementation of the VCIT initiative.

Scope

To review the VCIT initiative, we focused on planning and implementation documents from ATF, the USMS, the Department's Criminal Division, and EOUSA, including draft proposals, e-mails, and reports. The scope of our review encompassed 19 of the first 20 VCITs.¹²

Methodology

Interviews. We conducted in-person and telephone interviews with personnel from ATF Headquarters and ATF Field Divisions. Specifically, we interviewed individuals from the Office of Field Operations, the Office of Enforcement Programs and Services, and the Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information, including staff at the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB. In addition, we spoke with two Special Agents assigned to ATF Headquarters who worked on the development and initial implementation of the VCIT initiative.

We conducted in-person and telephone interviews with personnel from the DEA, FBI, and USMS with knowledge of VCIT operations in their jurisdiction. We interviewed the former Deputy Attorney General and ODAG personnel. We also conducted interviews with personnel from EOUSA who assisted in recruiting AUSAs for the VCITs.

Field Site Visits. We conducted our fieldwork from June 2005 through September 2005. As part of our fieldwork, we conducted in-person interviews with personnel from ATF, DEA, USMS, and local USAOs, and other federal, state, and local criminal justice partners in five VCIT cities: Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Tampa, Florida; and Tucson, Arizona.

¹² Due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina on ATF operations in New Orleans after August 29, 2005, we decided not to consider New Orleans VCIT operations as part of our review.

Survey. We conducted an e-mail survey of ATF's VCIT Coordinators to determine VCIT staffing, law enforcement strategies, their views on the VCIT initiative, and other relevant information. (See Appendix II for the survey questionnaire.) All 19 VCIT Coordinators responded to the survey.

Data. ATF provided us with historical violent crime data for the VCIT cities; firearms tracing and ballistic imaging information for the VCIT cities; and data related to VCIT performance, including arrests and seizures of drugs and weapons. ODAG provided us with data compiled by the Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics used to determine VCIT site selection. The DEA, USMS, and EOUSA provided us with data related to staffing levels at VCIT locations. The FBI provided us with data related to Safe Streets Task Forces operating in VCIT cities. The DEA provided us with Mobile Enforcement Teams documents and reports.

Background Research. Our background research on the VCIT initiative included reviews of reports, congressional testimony and appropriations, press releases, speech transcripts, and newspaper articles.

RESULTS OF THE REVIEW

The VCITs did not implement the key elements of ATF's VCIT Strategy. While every VCIT in the 19 locations that we reviewed implemented some of the key elements of the strategy, no VCIT implemented all of the 5 key elements. Specifically, not all VCITs targeted small geographic areas and the worst violent offenders in those areas. Some VCITs did not work with community leaders. In addition, VCITs often did not make full use of ATF's investigative technology resources or work as partners with other Department law enforcement components. As a result, ATF did not implement the VCIT initiative as envisioned by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General and ATF Headquarters, and as described in ATF's VCIT Strategy. Also, the activities of the VCITs in most cities were indistinguishable from routine ATF law enforcement operations.

ATF's VCIT Strategy

Although ATF developed a detailed VCIT Strategy, we found that local operations did not implement the Strategy's five key elements as defined by the OIG review team. Through our review of the VCIT Strategy, as well as our interviews with the former Deputy Attorney General and ATF officials, we identified five key elements that were essential to implementing the VCIT Strategy. In interviews with the OIG, ATF officials said they expected that these elements would be integrated into each local VCIT operation. The five key elements and their implementation by local VCIT operations were:

1. Target Small Geographic Areas. According to ATF's VCIT Strategy, VCITs were intended to target specific small geographic areas within cities, referred to as hot spots, in which violent crime regularly occurred. The VCIT Strategy recommended assigning four Special Agents and one supervisor to concentrate on a target area.
2. Target the Worst Violent Offenders. ATF's VCIT Strategy recommended that VCITs develop lists of the "worst of the worst" violent offenders to target the most serious violent offenders in the target area. Targeting the most violent offenders is a key difference

between VCIT operations and traditional ATF enforcement operations, which typically target federal firearm crimes.

3. Build Effective Working Relationships with Community Leaders. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for VCITs to develop effective relationships with community leaders to facilitate a "free flow" of information that could help them identify and apprehend violent offenders.
4. Utilize ATF's Investigative Technology Resources. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for VCITs to expand their use of the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB to analyze firearms evidence and help solve crimes.
5. Work in Partnership with Other Department Law Enforcement Components. ATF's VCIT Strategy called for representatives from other federal law enforcement agencies, including DEA and FBI Special Agents, Deputy U.S. Marshals, and AUSAs, to be included on the VCITs. This approach was intended to integrate and focus the full capabilities of the Department on the target area.

VCIT Operations in Five Cities

We visited five VCIT pilot cities (Tampa, Tucson, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Miami) to assess in more detail how each ATF Field Division had implemented the key elements of the VCIT Strategy. The following sections describe our observations, together with the results that ATF reported for each location.

Tampa VCIT

- Target Area. The Tampa VCIT focused on two neighborhoods in the Tampa Police Department's (TPD) Districts Two and Three, which covered 7 square miles and had approximately 50,000 residents. ATF designated an existing Special Agent group previously assigned to another ATF operation, supplemented by additional ATF Special Agents, for a total of 11 Special Agents assigned full time to the VCIT and 10 assigned part time. The Tampa VCIT designated two neighborhoods as hot spots, but the VCIT planned to expand to cover an increasingly large area. At the time of our visit, we were told that the VCIT planned to expand to Districts One and Four and parts of neighboring Hillsborough County.

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- Targeted Offenders. There was no list of “targets” developed because of TPD’s dissatisfaction with previous attempts to use such a list. According to the VCIT Coordinator, the Tampa VCIT pursued “impact cases,” which were defined by the seriousness of the crime, the suspect’s record, and the likelihood that the U.S. Attorney’s Office (USAO) in the district would accept the case. The VCIT Coordinator stated that the VCIT was very selective in the cases it pursued and that the VCIT relied heavily on a cadre of reliable confidential informants to identify individuals as suspects in shooting incidents.
 - Community Outreach. According to the VCIT Coordinator, the VCIT was not involved in any community outreach activities.
 - ATF Technology. The VCIT reported using the NTC for all firearms investigations and routinely using the NIBIN and CGAB as part of its operations. While the VCIT Coordinator told us that ATF and TPD submitted all firearms evidence for tracing, the NTC reported that 358 fewer trace submissions were requested in Tampa during the VCIT pilot period than during the same period in the previous year.
 - Partnerships. At the time of the site visit, the VCIT did not include DEA or FBI Special Agents or Deputy U.S. Marshals. Six AUSAs worked on the VCIT full time. The VCIT reported working with several Florida law enforcement agencies, including the Tampa Police Department and the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office. By comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included one Special Agent part time from both DEA and the FBI, one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and four AUSAs full time.

The DEA Special Agent in Charge told us that the DEA had minimal involvement because he saw ATF as going after low-level drug violators who were accused of illegally possessing less than 5 kilograms of illegal drugs. However, when DEA Special Agents encountered firearms, he said that they would call ATF. The FBI did not assign personnel to the VCIT. The USMS had originally assigned a Deputy U.S. Marshal full time to the VCIT. However, the Deputy U.S. Marshal stated that he was never called upon to participate. The USMS later designated another Deputy U.S. Marshal as a point of contact to handle VCIT requests for assistance. At the time of our site visit, the VCIT had not yet asked the USMS to participate in a law enforcement operation.

VCIT personnel reported that they worked occasionally with a Department of Homeland Security U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) task force and with several state and local agencies.

The VCIT worked with ICE Special Agents whenever it identified illegal aliens associated with violent crime. In addition, the VCIT worked with the state department of law enforcement in sharing and analyzing intelligence. Also, the state department of corrections occasionally provided information on old cases and parolees who served time for violent crime. In the past, ATF had worked closely with TPD's Quick Uniformed Attack on Drugs street-level police officers. However, a TPD District Captain told us that the new Chief of Police was not task force oriented. Most TPD officers serving on task forces had been pulled back to patrol duties and made available to the VCIT on an as needed basis, she said.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Tampa VCIT was successful during the pilot period because the number of homicides committed with firearms decreased from 19 during June through November 2003 to 9 during the same period in 2004 (53 percent) in the target area.

Tucson VCIT

- Target Area. The Tucson VCIT's target area was the Tucson Police Department's South and West Divisions, covering 45 square miles (of a city that spans approximately 226 square miles) and approximately 120,000 residents. The ATF Field Division assigned the Area Office's 10 Special Agents to work full time on the VCIT.
- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT utilized a "worst of the worst" list of 52 individuals identified by a Special Agent as having violent criminal histories. To develop the list, the Special Agent narrowed a list of almost 1,000 possible targets provided by the local police department to a list of 300 using violent felony convictions as his criterion. He further refined his list to 52 individuals.

The VCIT used a three-pronged approach: (1) targeting recently released violent offenders through the use of the "worst of the worst" list; (2) initiating proactive investigations, such as undercover surveillance; and (3) identifying and targeting potential

straw purchasers or traffickers through the use of ATF's investigative technology resources.¹³ The Assistant Special Agent in Charge stated that the approach was very similar to the Violence Impact Program he used in Phoenix. The Tucson Police Department and Pima County Attorney's Office officials said they viewed VCIT operations as an extension of ATF's Project Safe Neighborhoods activities already going on in the city.

- Community Outreach. The VCIT did not participate in community outreach activities. Tucson Police Department officials, however, stated that they had mentioned the existence of the VCIT group at community meetings.
- ATF Technology. The VCIT did not frequently utilize ATF firearms technologies as part of its strategy. Trace requests for all firearms recovered in VCIT target area crimes were not submitted to the NTC in a timely manner, and evidence submissions to the NIBIN for firearms crimes in the target areas were infrequent. According to VCIT members, the Tucson Police Department was unable to submit timely information on all of its recovered firearms to ATF or submit ballistics evidence for imaging because of staffing shortages. The Tucson Police Department used its own analyst to create crime gun reports similar to those created for the VCIT by the CGAB.
- Partnerships. At the time of the site visit, the VCIT did not include Special Agents from the DEA or FBI, Deputy U.S. Marshals, or AUSAs. The VCIT reported working ICE, the Arizona Department of Corrections, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission, the Pima County Probation Department, and the Tucson Police Department. By comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included one Special Agent part time from both the DEA and FBI, one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and three AUSAs full time.

At the outset of the VCIT initiative, a Special Agent from the DEA had been assigned to the VCIT. The agent spent about 2 weeks working full time with the VCIT, but because most VCIT cases had no drug nexus, he eventually returned to his own office on a full-time basis. The FBI did not assign personnel to the VCIT. Managers at the local USMS office stated that, although they were

¹³ Straw purchasers are individuals who purchase firearms for others who wish to remain unidentified.

aware of the VCIT initiative, they did not have the resources to assign personnel to the VCIT.

The VCIT did have a partnership with ICE, the state department of corrections, and the Tucson Police Department. A Special Agent from ICE was on call to assist VCIT members who encountered illegal immigrants with firearms or those VCIT members who were unsure of the authenticity of immigration-related documents. On the state level, parole officers at the state department of corrections stated that they submitted referrals to the VCIT, but did not actively participate in investigations.

In May 2005, ATF Special Agents assigned to the VCIT began patrolling the streets in the two target areas 4 nights per week with members of the Tucson Police Department's specialized Bravo Units. Each Division had its own team of Special Agents and Police Officers. According to the VCIT Coordinator, this strategy was implemented after he learned about the success that another VCIT was having with it. In addition to patrols, the unit also responded to firearms crime scenes, worked follow-up on cases, and sometimes conducted undercover work.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Tucson VCIT was successful during the pilot period because the number of homicides committed with firearms decreased from 24 during June through November 2003 to 18 during the same period in 2004 (25 percent) in the city itself (not in the target area).

Philadelphia VCIT

- Target Area. During the pilot period, the VCIT target area was the Southwest Police Division, which encompasses 11 square miles, with an initial focus on the 2-square-mile 16th police district. The ATF Field Division initially assigned 18 Special Agents to the VCIT, including its entire Firearms Trafficking Group. By August 2005, ATF had reduced the number to nine. At the time the 16th district was selected, it had the second highest violent crime rate in the city (based on homicides and aggravated assaults with firearms) and was in the Police Division with the highest crime rate. At the time of our site visit in June 2005, the VCIT had shifted its focus to a different police district, based on a reported 75-percent reduction in homicides during the pilot period in the first district targeted. The second district targeted had the highest crime rate in the Southwest Division and was larger and more populous.

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- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT initially developed a “worst of the worst” list, but after the first 6 weeks of operation, shifted its focus from individuals on the list to targeting known shooters (usually identified through confidential informants). The VCIT identified and pursued individuals or groups likely to retaliate in response to a shooting (usually the target of the shooting or associates of the victim). According to ATF personnel, the “worst of the worst” list did not work because many of the individuals who were identified as having lengthy criminal histories were not the individuals responsible for violent shootings. Using ATF’s investigative technology resources, the VCIT would identify the most recent owner or possessor of recovered firearms, but found they were not necessarily “shooters.” The VCIT altered its approach to focus on following up on all shootings in the district to identify the victim, or the person targeted in those cases where there was no injury, and found that this approach was more effective than identifying the gun’s original owner. According to the VCIT Coordinator, about half of the people arrested by the VCIT had no previous convictions. He also stated that VCIT prioritized cases based on the victims or targets “we’ve got the information on” to identify potential retaliatory shooters.
 - Community Outreach. Early in the pilot phase, VCIT personnel attended several community meetings, according to the VCIT Coordinator. VCIT personnel said that they discontinued this effort because they had not obtained information at these meetings on the people they wanted to arrest.
 - ATF Technology. According to VCIT personnel, the use of the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB by the Firearms Trafficking Group did not increase when the VCIT was formed. The VCIT personnel also characterized their use of the Firearms Technology Branch services as “nothing special.” They said that these technologies were used “a lot,” although the VCIT Coordinator noted that these technologies were not used by the VCIT to track crime trends. The VCIT Coordinator said that the VCIT would have liked to use the NIBIN for all shell casings. However, the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) had been losing examiners. The remaining examiners were extremely busy with PPD work and were unable to submit shell casings to the NIBIN for all VCIT investigations. For example, shell casings from incidents in which the intended victim did not sustain injury were very low on PPD’s priority list, he said,

even though the information would be useful to VCIT. These casings could lead to shooters who missed their intended victim and soon could become victims themselves.

- Partnerships. The Philadelphia VCIT included a DEA Special Agent assigned part time, but no FBI Special Agents. The VCIT also included a Deputy U.S. Marshal assigned full time and one AUSA. The Deputy U.S. Marshal supported fugitive apprehension efforts and led “sweeps” of individuals wanted by the federal government, as well as the state government. The USMS also provided the VCIT with intelligence and surveillance equipment.

In addition to federal law enforcement personnel and PPD officers, the VCIT included two investigators from the state narcotics bureau and two members of the circuit court bench warrant unit. According to VCIT members, the narcotics bureau agents provided the same support to the VCIT that the DEA would have brought, including surveillance equipment, legal staff, chemists, evidence handlers, and money to acquire evidence and information. ATF personnel stated that the most valuable resources were the officers from the judicial circuit bench warrant unit because these officers could easily detain or arrest VCIT targets with active bench warrants.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Philadelphia VCIT was successful during the pilot period because homicides committed with firearms decreased from 12 during June through November 2003 to 3 during the same period in 2004 (75 percent) in the target area.

Los Angeles VCIT

- Target Area. The Los Angeles VCIT operated in two of the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) most violent divisions, covering a 20-square-mile area with more than 3 million residents. ATF and LAPD reassigned members of an existing task force, which included 10 ATF Special Agents plus LAPD personnel, to form the VCIT. After initially operating in three LAPD divisions and one Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department substation, the VCIT eventually reduced its target area to the two LAPD divisions. According to VCIT personnel, this was due, in part, to the transfer of an ATF Special Agent back to his ATF home office and the concerns of Field Division management about the VCIT having taken on too large of a target area.

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- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT had no formal list of targeted offenders. According to the VCIT Coordinator, he did not want to restrict the team's activities. Instead, the VCIT identified "targets" through investigations, Special Agents, or confidential informants, but did not identify criteria for selecting the targets. The VCIT's focus was to adopt federal firearms cases originating in LAPD's divisions that could be prosecuted in federal court.
 - Community Outreach. The VCIT did not participate in community outreach activities. However, LAPD officers assigned to the VCIT stated that, as part of their usual duties, they interacted with LAPD community officers, who shared intelligence about gang activities.
 - ATF Technology. The VCIT utilized ATF investigative technologies and frequently incorporated firearms tracing analysis into investigations. The VCIT also used firearms tracing analysis developed at ATF's Southern California Regional Crime Gun Center.
 - Partnerships. At the time of the site visit, the VCIT did not include DEA or FBI Special Agents. One Deputy U.S. Marshal worked part time on the VCIT during the early stages of the initiative. One AUSA worked on the VCIT part time. The VCIT reported working with LAPD and the California Department of Corrections. By comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included one Special Agent part time from both the DEA and FBI, one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and two AUSAs full time, as well as six LAPD officers full time and four part time. Early in the implementation of VCIT, the Deputy U.S. Marshal had organized "fugitive sweeps" and participated more often in VCIT fugitive apprehension activities.

Between one and four LAPD officers worked in each segment of the target area. The VCIT developed a partnership with LAPD's Gun Unit, which works firearms cases originating anywhere in the city. The VCIT also worked with the state department of corrections.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Los Angeles VCIT had not demonstrated success during the pilot period because homicides committed with firearms increased from 72 during June through November 2003 to 77 during the same period in 2004 (7 percent) in the target area.

Miami VCIT

- Target Area. The VCIT operated within the entire Miami-Dade County area (including the City of Miami), an area of approximately 2,100 square miles with a total population of approximately 2.38 million. While pursuing cases from the entire city-county, the VCIT attempted to focus on six scattered areas of it. ATF assigned 25 Special Agents to VCIT during the pilot period and had increased the number to 34 by August 2005. The VCIT duties were assigned to several ATF Special Agent groups, all of which were already working on violent crime and all of which kept their pre-VCIT responsibilities. We were told by ATF Field Division management that the Miami Field Division added “VCIT” to the names of these groups.
- Targeted Offenders. The VCIT did not use a “worst of the worst” list. According to VCIT personnel, it was the consensus of all parties involved in the planning process that, given the demographics of the city-county area, such a list would be interpreted as racial profiling and would have a negative impact on community relations. ATF Special Agent in Charge said that they decided to go with a long-term, multifaceted approach that focused on firearms crimes, rather than on individuals, in geographic areas.
- Community Outreach. The VCIT did not conduct community outreach. The only community outreach mentioned by VCIT personnel during our site visit was attributed to other ATF programs, such as the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program.
- ATF Technologies. Miami VCIT personnel stated that they used ATF’s investigative technologies extensively. The VCIT traced all guns entered into the police evidence tracking system as property and attempted to enter all related bullets and casings into the NIBIN. However, there were 358 fewer trace requests by ATF’s Miami office during the VCIT pilot period than during the same period in the previous year. The VCIT did not use the CGAB.
- Partnerships. The VCIT did not include Special Agents from the DEA or FBI, but did include DEA support on an ad hoc basis. It included one Deputy U.S. Marshal part time and three AUSAs full time. The DEA Special Agent in Charge told us that he did not see

a need to provide a Special Agent full time to VCIT, in part, because the DEA already participated on numerous task forces. We were told by both USMS and ATF Field Division personnel that there really was no difference in the way the USMS worked with ATF since VCIT had been implemented, but both groups stated that working relationships had improved since VCIT was initiated. No other federal law enforcement agencies were included on the VCIT, although the Secret Service provided support for an international arms smuggling case, and ICE Special Agents provided support on several gang cases. By comparison, during the pilot period the VCIT included 3 DEA Special Agents part time, 1 FBI Special Agent part time, 1 Deputy U.S. Marshal part time, and 2 AUSAs full time, as well as 16 members of the Miami City and Miami Dade County police departments.

In addition to the federal personnel, the VCIT worked closely with approximately 15 officers from the Miami-Dade County Police Department. The police department also provided technical support, canines, and helicopter cover when necessary. The VCIT also worked with the Miami Police Department (MPD), but the working relationship had diminished to an “as needed” basis after many of the MPD officers were reassigned to other duties. We were told that ATF VCIT members responded to the scene of all firearms-related violent crimes and every police interaction with targeted individuals and associates of those individuals if they were in possession of firearms or ammunition and were stopped in the target area.

ATF indicated in its January 2006 Best Practices report that the Miami VCIT was successful during the pilot period because homicides committed with firearms decreased from 36 from June through November 2003 to 22 during the same period in 2004 (39 percent) in the city itself (not the target area).

In addition to our five field visits, we conducted a survey and additional research to assess how the VCITs implemented the five key elements identified by the review team. We summarize below our findings regarding the implementation of the 5 key elements of the VCIT strategy across the 19 VCITs that we surveyed, including the 5 that we visited.

Target Small Geographic Areas

Eighteen of the 19 VCIT Coordinators who responded to our survey considered “identifying and working within a defined target area” a core or

essential component of their VCIT initiative and stated that their VCIT targets or operates in a specific geographic area. However, we found that the specific geographic areas varied greatly in size and population. Overall, we found that 8 VCITs targeted areas of 10 square miles or less, and 10 VCITs targeted areas ranging from 20 to 2,100 square miles. Two VCITs targeted entire cities, and one targeted an entire county. The population in the VCIT target areas ranged from 25,000 to 3 million residents. Eight of the VCIT target areas had a population of 50,000 or more.¹⁴

The VCIT Strategy also indicated that, consistent with targeting a small geographic target area, VCITs should be composed of a small number of ATF Special Agents. Specifically, the VCIT Strategy recommended that four Special Agents and a Supervisory Special Agent be assigned to a VCIT. However, we found that ATF assigned an average of 10 Special Agents to each of the 19 VCITs, with a range of 3 to 34 Special Agents. Table 3 details the sizes of the areas targeted by 19 VCITs and the population within each of the target areas.

¹⁴ We derived this data from VCIT Coordinators' survey responses. We also obtained data from state and local government agencies' official web sites and the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 3: VCIT Target Areas

VCIT City	Target Area	Square Miles	Population
Hartford	Three neighborhoods	5	48,000
Tampa	Two neighborhoods	7	50,000
Baltimore	One police district	4	52,500
Tucson	One police command area	45	120,000
Fresno	Three police precincts	51	275,000
Camden	One police district	2 to 3	25,000
Philadelphia	One police district	11	75,000
Tulsa	One police division	8	75,000
Columbus	Three police precincts	33	75,000
Washington, DC/No. Va.	Three police precincts and a 4-mile traffic corridor	36	295,000
Richmond	Three police sectors	7	40,000
Greensboro	Entire city	120	250,000
Los Angeles	Two police divisions	20	3,000,000
Houston	One police precinct	21	80,000
Las Vegas	One police precinct	3	100,000
Albuquerque	One police command area	20	85,000
Miami	Entire county	2,100	2,380,000
Chattanooga	Entire city	135	150,000
Pittsburgh	One police zone	10	48,000

Note: Survey data are not always consistent with the data we report based on our site visit interviews.

Source: Survey responses and independent inquiries

A Senior Counsel to the Deputy Attorney General told us that some VCITs “took on too much – too much geographic area and too many people.” ATF Headquarters officials also acknowledged that some of the target areas were too large. However, these officials said they notified only one VCIT of this concern. The Assistant Director for Field Operations stated that the Los Angeles VCIT, which operated in an area of 3 million people, “has been notified that it is biting off more than it can chew.” The Los Angeles VCIT Coordinator confirmed this assessment in his response to our survey, reporting that his VCIT’s target area “is too large to be effective.” At the time of our site visit, the target area had been reduced from three local police districts and a sheriff’s substation to two police districts. The VCIT

Coordinator later reported that he planned to reduce the size of the target area yet again.

Target the Worst Violent Offenders

We found that 6 of the 19 VCITs (32 percent) used a “worst of the worst” list and kept it updated to reflect arrests and newly identified targets. Of the remaining 13 VCITs, 7 used a “worst of the worst” list, but did not keep it up to date, and 6 did not use a “worst of the worst” list.

According to ATF officials, when an individual on such a list was stopped or arrested by any VCIT partner agency, ATF could then alert the investigating officers about the individual’s criminal history, associations, and ATF’s potential interest in federal prosecution. The officials anticipated that any arrest of someone on a “worst of the worst” list would result in ATF involvement in the case and, potentially, federal firearms charges.¹⁵

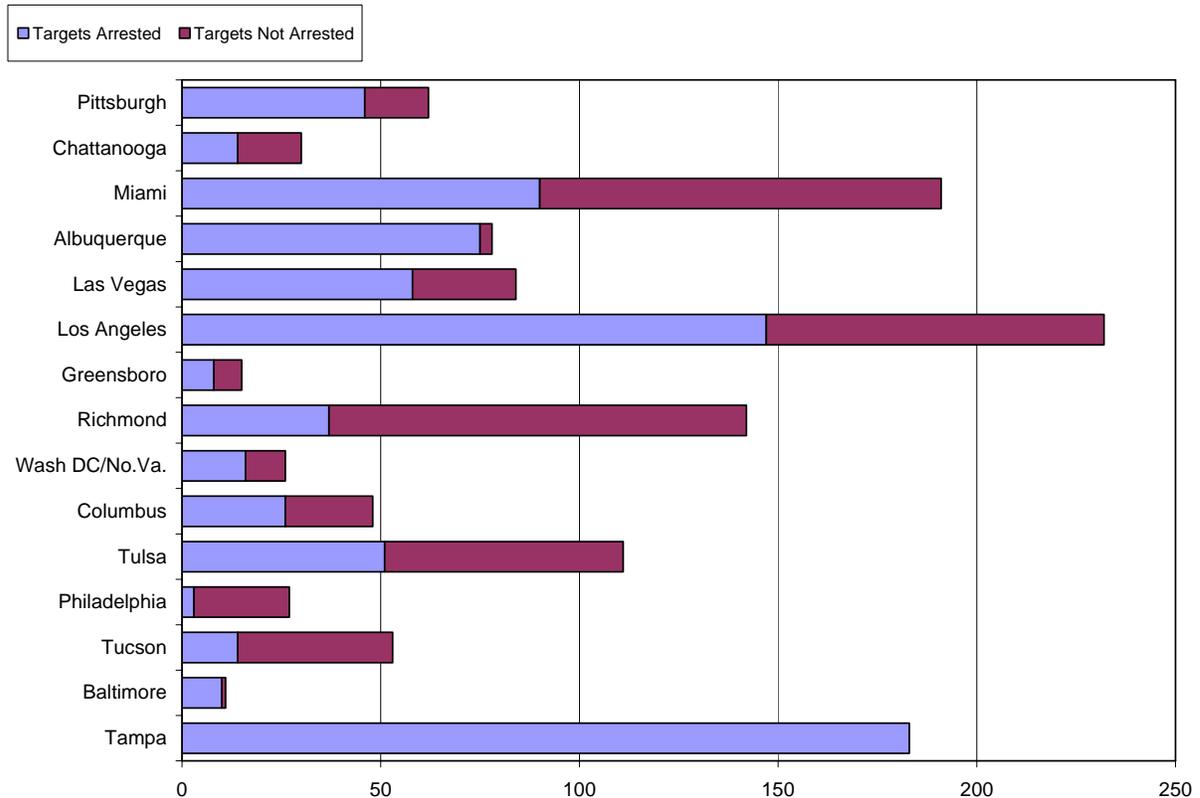
ATF Field Division managers in VCIT cities gave varying reasons for not using lists of targeted offenders. One VCIT Coordinator stated that he attempted to develop such a list, but that he later decided that his VCIT would have more impact on violent crime by investigating recent firearms violence rather than waiting for targeted individuals to commit crimes. The Special Agent in Charge in another Field Division stated that a “worst of the worst” list would be interpreted by community leaders as a form of racial profiling and, as a result, that VCIT did not use such a list. In a third city we visited, ATF developed a “worst of the worst” list, but it was not useful because ATF VCIT members did not share the list with non-ATF VCIT members.

In addition, arrest data suggested that the VCITs did not focus sufficiently on targeted individuals. According to VCIT arrest data, targeted individuals represented only about 20 percent of the total number of arrests by the VCITs. Although a key element of the VCIT initiative was to target the worst offenders, from June 2004 through May 2005, the VCITs reported making 3,592 federal and state arrests, of which 746 were targeted individuals. Further, since only 6 VCITs used up-to-date “worst of the worst” lists, and ATF did not require that VCITs document the definition of “targeted individual” that they used to compile these data, it could not be

¹⁵ Federal firearms charges generally carry more severe penalties than state firearms charges for individuals with lengthy criminal records. Nearly every law enforcement official we interviewed referred to this as “the federal hammer.” Moreover, federal inmates serve their sentences without possibility of parole.

determined whether these 746 targeted individuals were the worst violent offenders in the target areas. Figure 3 depicts the number of individuals targeted and how many of those individuals were arrested.

Figure 3: Individuals Targeted and Arrested by VCITs



Notes: Totals are for May 2004 through June 2005; therefore, data are provided only for the original 15 VCIT cities.

The Tampa VCIT reported arresting a greater number of targeted individuals than appeared on its list. ATF's revised form precludes this reporting anomaly from recurring.

Source: OIG VCIT Coordinator Survey

While some variation in the number and type of individuals targeted would be expected, ATF has not established clear criteria for developing and using “worst of the worst” lists (or some other method) to identify targeted individuals in each community. Further, because arrests of targeted individuals – however they were defined by a VCIT – constituted only a small portion of some VCITs’ arrests, ATF is unable to assess the effect of targeting and arresting the worst violent offenders in the target areas on reducing violent crimes committed with firearms, a major goal of the VCIT initiative.

Build Effective Working Relationships with Community Leaders

The VCITs were expected to develop relationships with community leaders to facilitate a “free flow” of information that could help them identify and apprehend violent offenders. In our survey of VCIT Coordinators, 11 reported engaging in community outreach, such as attending community meetings and participating in neighborhood watch activities. Eight VCIT coordinators did not report that community relations were an essential part of their strategy. Three of the 5 sites we visited were among the 11 that reported they engaged in community outreach. However, during our site visits we found that none of the five VCITs actively participated in any community outreach. In fact, in one of the five cities, the VCIT Coordinator told us that the VCIT had initiated community outreach activities, but discontinued them when nothing from the community outreach gave the VCIT information on the people they wanted to arrest.

We found that local community groups in that city were unaware of the VCIT and its operations. We interviewed several community group leaders working in the target area, including the Advisory Board President of the recreation center where ATF and local police department officials had held a press conference to announce the expansion of the local VCIT. The President stated that although he knew about the press conference, he did not know anything about ATF’s VCIT initiative before the event and had not heard anything since the press conference. Another prominent community leader associated with a neighborhood drug prevention program said that, until the OIG informed him of the VCIT’s expansion into his program’s service area, he did not know about the VCIT or ATF’s presence in the community.

We concluded that the majority of the 19 VCITs did not undertake activities to develop relationships in the community that could produce leads and other information useful for criminal investigations.

Utilize ATF’s Investigative Technology Resources

We determined that VCITs did not consistently use the services of the NTC, the NIBIN, and the CGAB to facilitate their investigations. ATF encouraged VCITs to make expanded and consistent use of these technological resources, stating that they were essential to suppressing violent criminals in the target areas.

National Tracing Center. According to NTC officials, six VCITs consistently used the NTC to expedite gun tracings, seven VCITs used the NTC but not consistently, and four VCIT cities’ use of the NTC declined after

ATF implemented the VCITs. Although all VCIT Coordinators reported it was part of their local VCIT strategies to use the NTC to trace serial numbers of firearms used in crimes and recovered at crime scenes, we found VCITs did not routinely flag requests for NTC traces and, therefore, did not receive the high priority that ATF intended. According to NTC data, during the VCITs' first year in operation, 6 VCITs flagged their requests from 21 to 291 times, and 7 VCITs used the flag fewer than 12 times.¹⁶ In two of the five VCIT cities we visited, personnel responsible for submitting trace requests stated that they were unaware that they were supposed to flag VCIT requests. A clerk in one of the cities said that the electronic trace submission program used there did not have a VCIT project code, so VCIT submissions to the NTC could not be flagged. An ATF contractor responsible for submitting trace requests in the other city said that clerks at the VCIT's local police partner agency only marked trace requests as "urgent" for high profile or newsworthy incidents.¹⁷ Any VCIT case that did not meet those criteria, she said, was not labeled "urgent." She also stated that she tried to keep the number of "urgent" trace requests to a minimum.

Overall, during the 1-year period following the implementation of the initial 15 VCITs, NTC data showed a 15-percent increase in the number of trace requests it received from those cities. However, because the city-wide NTC data are not specific to the VCIT target areas, the changes may not be attributable to VCIT operations. We also noted that while 11 of the cities increased their NTC usage, 4 submitted fewer trace requests.¹⁸ One of the cities submitted 524 fewer trace requests during the first year of VCIT operations (2,694) than it did during the same period prior to implementing a VCIT (3,218).

National Integrated Ballistics Information Network. The NIBIN program collects and analyzes images of fired cartridge casings and bullets to link specific firearms to criminal activity. We compared NIBIN submissions by pilot VCIT cities for the 6 months before VCIT implementation (January through June 2004) with pilot cities' submissions during VCIT operations (July through December 2004). We found that six

¹⁶ We were unable to determine the number of trace requests not flagged as VCIT because those requests were grouped with all of the non-VCIT trace submissions from the respective cities.

¹⁷ As described in the Background section, the NTC gives the same priority to trace requests with the VCIT flag as it does those marked "urgent." Urgent requests are given the NTC's highest priority.

¹⁸ Annual firearms tracing data was unavailable for the VCITs added in 2005.

VCIT cities submitted more images after VCIT implementation, seven submitted fewer images, and two did not submit any images to the NIBIN during 2004. Together, the initial 15 VCIT cities submitted 4,350 more images to the database during the first 6 months of 2005 than they did during the same period in 2004.¹⁹ However, one VCIT city accounted for 1,305 (30 percent) of these additional images.²⁰ We concluded that although VCITs increased the emphasis on violent firearm crime, over half of the VCIT cities made fewer submissions to the NIBIN after ATF implemented local VCIT operations than prior to implementation of the VCIT initiative.

The VCIT Coordinators in all five cities we visited stated that they would like to submit images of all ballistics evidence found in VCIT target areas to the NIBIN, and NIBIN Branch staff told us that all VCIT cities have access to the NIBIN. However, we found that not all the VCITs used the NIBIN. One VCIT city did not submit images because ATF had not placed ballistics imaging equipment in that location.²¹ Further, in two of the cities we visited, VCIT Coordinators stated that personnel shortages at their local law enforcement partner agencies often resulted in processing backlogs and limited the number of ballistics images that could be processed. In one of those cities, the local law enforcement partner submitted ballistics evidence images only for violent firearms-related crimes that occurred in the city, according to the VCIT Coordinator. Because of personnel shortages, the agency did not submit images for firearms and shell casings recovered in the VCIT target areas if they were not related to violent crimes. The VCIT Coordinator said that it should be a priority to have images of all VCIT-related ballistics evidence submitted to the NIBIN; however, he stated that he had no authority over how the local police department handled its ballistics evidence.

Crime Gun Analysis Branch. In response to our survey, 17 VCIT Coordinators (89 percent) stated that they used the CGAB on an ongoing basis as part of their VCIT strategy. However, during our site visits to five of

¹⁹ Because ATF collects NIBIN data on a city-wide basis, results specific to individual VCITs could not be determined.

²⁰ We were unable to determine the cause of the one VCIT city's large increase in NIBIN usage.

²¹ According to the Chief of the NIBIN Branch, although the city did not have NIBIN equipment on site, it had access to the NIBIN through ATF's national crime laboratory services. Yet, the city did not submit any fired cartridge casing or bullet images to the database.

the VCIT cities, local VCIT personnel stated that they did not routinely use the CGAB. In fact, in three cities we visited, ATF personnel and contract staff explained that they were assigned to produce reports similar to those provided by the CGAB – an indication that the type of information produced by the CGAB was useful to VCITs but that ATF did not tailor CGAB reports to support VCIT operations.

An ATF contractor in one of the cities said that his “crime gun” reports better reflected the jurisdictional boundaries and areas with high levels of violent gang activity in the VCIT target area than the CGAB’s reports. He stated that a CGAB report on his city was not of high quality and inaccurately depicted jurisdictional boundaries. He surmised that this was due to the CGAB’s lack of familiarity with the unique aspects of the city.²² In another city we visited, an analyst for the VCIT’s local law enforcement partner stated that, at the direction of her agency’s own crime analysis unit, she continued to produce quarterly “crime gun” maps similar to those included in the CGAB’s quarterly report. She stated that she used the same computer software to produce her maps, but included more comprehensive data than the CGAB. Her reports (not the CGAB’s) were later cited by local ATF personnel when they explained the area’s crime trends to the OIG review team.

According to the Chief of the CGAB, between June 2004 and August 2005 the CGAB produced 92 VCIT-related “crime gun” reports, which represented about 15 to 20 percent of the CGAB’s annual workload.

We determined that despite the CGAB’s distribution of “crime gun” reports, ATF has not ensured that VCITs use these reports or work with the CGAB to determine the appropriate VCIT boundaries. As a result, VCITs are not fully utilizing the CGAB to identify current “hot spots of criminal activity and the sources of ‘crime guns’ from those problem areas,” as described in the VCIT Strategy.

Work in Partnership with Other Department Law Enforcement Components

Of the 19 VCITs, most did not have assigned representatives from the DEA, FBI, and USMS. One did include representatives from the DEA, FBI, and USMS; another 14 VCITs included a representative from one or two of those agencies; and 4 VCITs had no representative from any other Department law enforcement component. The VCIT Coordinators reported

²² The contractor stated that he was more familiar with how police districts in his city were drawn than CGAB employees who worked in West Virginia.

that the DEA provided Special Agents to 7 VCITs, the FBI provided Special Agents to 3 VCITs, and the USMS provided U.S. Deputy Marshals to 14 VCITs. In comparison, VCIT coordinators reported that the USAOs provided AUSAs to 17 of the VCITs. See Table 4.

Table 4: Department of Justice Component Participation

VCIT City	DEA		FBI		USMS		USAO	
	Full Time	Part Time						
Hartford	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Tampa	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0
Baltimore	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Tucson	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0
Fresno	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Camden	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Philadelphia	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tulsa	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
Columbus	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Washington, DC/No. Va.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Richmond	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Greensboro	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Los Angeles	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Houston	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Las Vegas	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0
Albuquerque	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2
Miami	0	5	0	1	0	1	4	16
Chattanooga	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Pittsburgh	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Total	1	10	2	1	4	14	20	35

Note: Survey data are not always consistent with the data we report from our site visit interviews.

Source: OIG VCIT Coordinator Survey

We also found that when the DEA and USMS assigned personnel to VCITs, the personnel were often unaware of their expected roles and did not always receive clear direction from either ATF or their own agency regarding their expected duties. At only one of the five sites we visited did personnel from either the DEA or USMS tell us that they had a clear understanding of their role on the local VCIT.

Efforts to Encourage Participation. The DEA and USMS issued memorandums to their managers in the VCIT cities introducing the initiative and encouraging support for it. In addition, the Deputy Attorney General, in a conference call, informed the U.S. Marshals for the 15 pilot VCIT cities about the VCIT initiative. FBI Headquarters officials considered participating in the VCIT initiative, according to an FBI Unit Chief, and left the decision to participate with the Special Agents in Charge in the VCIT cities.

Unclear Roles for DEA and USMS Participation. DEA and USMS personnel assigned to VCITs stated that they had not received clear direction from either ATF or their own agencies regarding their expected duties. In only one of the five VCIT cities we visited did personnel from either of the components have a clear understanding of their role in the local VCIT. In the other four, DEA and USMS personnel assigned to VCIT said they did not understand the VCIT initiative or their role as a VCIT participant.

DEA managers could clearly articulate the mission and objectives of the VCIT initiative in only one of the five cities we visited. In two of those cities, DEA managers and Special Agents were completely unfamiliar with VCIT. We also found that the few DEA personnel who participated in the VCIT initiative did not receive clear direction from ATF regarding their roles.

Although USMS Headquarters officials told us that the USMS was willing to participate in the VCIT initiative, we found a conflict in expectations between USMS personnel and VCIT Coordinators that was similar to that of the DEA. For example, in one city we visited, a Supervisory Deputy U.S. Marshal, acting on USMS Headquarters direction, stated that the USMS had assigned a Deputy U.S. Marshal full time to the local VCIT, but ATF personnel told the Deputy to continue his regular duties with USMS and that VCIT would contact him if necessary. In another city we visited, the Deputy U.S. Marshal assigned to the local VCIT told us that he took it upon himself to initiate warrant “sweeps” in the VCIT area because he had been given no guidance regarding his role as a part-time VCIT partner.

The incomplete implementation of the VCIT Strategy was due primarily to problems with the selection of the VCIT locations, inadequate direction by ATF Headquarters on implementing the VCIT strategy, and ineffective oversight of VCIT operations by ATF Headquarters. ATF did not address local conditions in the site selection process and, contrary to the VCIT Strategy, placed VCITs in areas with decreasing violent crime and areas without sufficient cooperation with local law enforcement. In addition, ATF did not provide sufficient direction and oversight to its Field Divisions to ensure that local VCITs implemented the key elements of the initiative. Further, ATF did not develop an adequate evaluation plan, leaving it unable to demonstrate the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative. Consequently, ATF missed the opportunity to determine the impact of the VCIT strategy on combating violent crime.

Selection of VCIT Locations

ATF did not address local conditions when selecting locations and established some VCITs where violent crime was already decreasing or where other violent crime initiatives were under way. ATF also placed some VCITs in areas where it did not have agreements with local officials to provide the local crime data it needed to monitor progress and evaluate the impact of the pilot VCITs on violent crime.

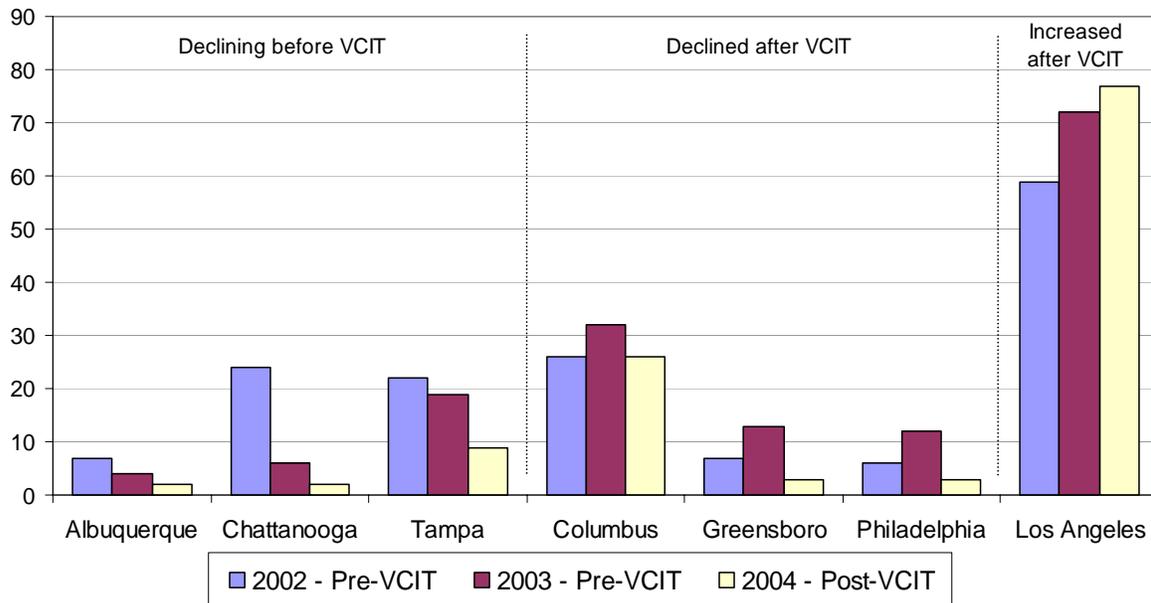
When selecting the initial VCIT cities, ATF and ODAG officials chose locations without seeking input from the ATF Field Division personnel who were most familiar with local conditions. ODAG officials described site selection as a collaborative process with ATF that was based on a number of different statistics from an analysis prepared by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. According to a former ATF Headquarters official, ATF Headquarters officials informed Special Agents in Charge that ODAG had selected their cities for VCITs based on city-wide homicide rates. He also said that after learning their locations had been selected, many of the Special Agents in Charge expressed concerns.

One of the VCIT Coordinators we interviewed during our site visits told us that the crime rate in that target area was not significant enough to warrant a VCIT. Our analysis of ATF's data confirmed that violent crime had been decreasing at some of the locations ATF chose for VCIT pilot sites. At three of the seven VCIT pilot sites for which ATF was able to provide target area data, homicides committed with firearms were decreasing before

VCITs were established. Similarly, two of the six target areas for which ATF was able to provide data on violent firearms crime had experienced a decrease prior to local VCIT operations. See Figure 4. The data ATF provided and our analysis of it will be discussed more fully later in this report.

Figure 4: Homicides Committed with Firearms in Target Areas

**June–November of 3 Years,
Before and After VCITs Were Implemented in 2004**



Note: See Table 6 for the data underlying this chart.

Source: OIG analysis

ATF also selected target areas for VCITs where local law enforcement agencies were already targeting violent firearm crime. In interviews and responses to our survey, we found that a local law enforcement agency already had a program similar to the VCIT initiative in place in three VCIT cities.

Moreover, although local crime data were essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the VCIT pilot, ATF did not establish agreements to secure these data from local police for each of the pilot sites. As a result, ATF did not have such data for the VCIT target areas in 8 of the 15 pilot cities. Consequently, ATF was unable to determine the impact of local operations on violent firearms crime overall or on homicides committed with firearms for half of the pilot VCITs. VCITs in those eight cities also lacked data to monitor changes in the amount and type of target area crime. The ATF

Assistant Director for Field Operations acknowledged the importance of local support and stated that ATF would not establish a new VCIT where there is no commitment from the local police department to share data and other types of law enforcement support.

ATF Direction and Oversight

We found that ATF did not provide sufficient direction and oversight to its Field Divisions to ensure that local VCITs implemented the key elements of the initiative. ATF officials did not develop policies and procedures for incorporating the five key elements that differentiated VCIT from routine ATF law enforcement operations. ATF also did not provide resource materials or training on implementing the VCIT Strategy for ATF Field Division staff or personnel from federal or local partner agencies. In addition, ATF did not establish procedures for periodically reviewing local VCIT operations. However, in August 2005 after the pilot period, ATF Headquarters personnel met with VCIT Coordinators to discuss local operations, and in January 2006 ATF published a Best Practices report, which stated that “this analysis will be used to strengthen future VCIT deployments.” However, ATF did not provide specific policies or guidance for implementing the identified practices.

ATF Headquarters officials told us that the staff in the Firearms Programs Division who developed the VCIT initiative did not have the authority to oversee the Field Divisions’ operations, which include local VCIT operations. In response to our survey, 17 of 19 VCIT Coordinators (89 percent) stated that the VCIT Program Manager in the Firearms Programs Division was their primary point of contact for VCIT. However, current and former ATF Headquarters officials told us that the VCIT Program Manager had no direct control over how Field Divisions implemented the VCITs.²³ The Chief of the Firearms Programs Division confirmed that his division cannot direct how VCITs operate. The VCIT Program Manager also stated that he did not have the authority to direct changes in local VCIT operations. Rather, he stated that his role was to report VCIT performance figures, such as arrests and homicide statistics, and present program recommendations to other ATF Headquarters officials.

²³ One of the two VCIT Coordinators who did not report the VCIT Program Manager as his point of contact reported his contact as a Program Analyst at ATF Headquarters. The other reported his point of contact as the Special Agent assigned to the Firearms Enforcement Branch who assisted in preparing for VCIT Coordinator meetings at ATF Headquarters.

Further, the ATF Field Operations management staff who have the authority and responsibility to oversee the Field Divisions' operations did not provide operational guidance regarding how the VCIT Strategy should be implemented. A Field Management Staff official told us that he receives inquiries from VCIT Coordinators regarding VCIT operations, but can only refer them to other ATF personnel, such as VCIT Coordinators who have had similar concerns. Furthermore, an Assistant Special Agent in Charge of a Field Division stated he had been told by the Assistant Director of the Field Operations Division that with respect to VCIT implementation, he could reduce violent crime anyway he saw fit. In effect, the ATF Field Division staff who participated in the pilot VCIT initiative understood that they could develop their own strategies to combat violent crime.

All VCIT Coordinators we interviewed told us that ATF Headquarters officials left it to ATF Field Division managers to develop their local VCIT strategies. ATF Field Division managers stated that they received no direction regarding specific elements of the VCIT Strategy that were to be incorporated into the local VCIT strategies. Consequently, we found that local VCIT activities were often a continuation of law enforcement activities that were under way before VCIT was implemented and that the roles of many Special Agents essentially did not change when they were assigned to VCITs. In two of the cities we visited, ATF Field Division managers and Special Agents told us that their VCITs' activities were indistinguishable from their Field Divisions' previous routine operations. One Special Agent stated, "As far as I know, they just gave [Project Safe Neighborhoods] a new name." Another Special Agent stated, "Really the only change is geography, but essentially I'm doing the same thing." One Assistant Special Agent in Charge told us, "This is what we were doing before VCIT."²⁴

In two of the five cities we visited, we spoke with ATF Special Agents assigned to VCITs who could not distinguish between their current role on a VCIT and their responsibilities before the implementation of VCITs in their cities. In fact, one ATF Special Agent did not know what the acronym "VCIT" stood for. Another ATF Special Agent we interviewed did not know that he had been assigned to the initiative. He asked the OIG review team

²⁴ One Assistant Special Agent in Charge stated that although his office had not previously been performing VCIT-like activities, he did not view VCIT as a new initiative. He stated that this type of effort has had many names, but that it is still about applying federal firearms laws to felons.

what the initiative was and whether participation in the program would benefit his operations.²⁵

The inability of numerous Special Agents to differentiate routine activities from VCIT activities was due, in part, to the reassignment to VCITs of entire existing Special Agent groups.²⁶ We found that some ATF field offices simply renamed existing agent groups “VCIT,” which made it difficult for personnel to differentiate VCIT operations from other ATF law enforcement activities. In one city we visited, Special Agents and local law enforcement officers assigned to a VCIT explained that they had been part of an earlier “ATF task force” that was given the VCIT moniker, but there was no change in their roles or duties. In a second city, the Assistant Special Agent in Charge told us that two pre-existing enforcement initiatives, one of which had started 3 years prior to our site visit, now were considered part of VCIT. The Special Agent in Charge’s description of VCIT as it operated in that city was identical to the description of the pre-existing enforcement initiatives rather than to the VCIT strategy.

Evaluation Plan

ATF has not developed an adequate evaluation plan to determine the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative. Although ATF’s VCIT Strategy stated the importance of determining the effectiveness of the initiative and its impact on homicides and all violent crimes committed with firearms, ATF Headquarters officials did not implement a program-wide evaluation plan for the VCIT initiative that would accomplish this objective. We found that ATF collected standard measures of law enforcement activity – such as arrests – that, alone, were not adequate to evaluate the implementation or effectiveness of a specific strategy such as VCIT. ATF did not collect and analyze data program-wide to identify and correct problems in implementing VCIT’s key elements and evaluating their effectiveness:

- Target Small Geographic Areas. ATF’s evaluation strategy was not adequate for this element because ATF did not collect and analyze data comparing the amount of resources it had committed for its basic operations in the target area to the amount of additional resources committed to a target area once VCIT was established.

²⁵ We later reconfirmed with the Assistant Special Agent in Charge that this Special Agent was a member of the local VCIT.

²⁶ Special Agent groups are generally assigned to a specific law enforcement activity such as the investigation of gun trafficking. An ATF Field Division may have as many as six Special Agent groups, while Area Offices may have only one.

Therefore, it could not determine if, by establishing a VCIT, it had in fact increased law enforcement resources in a target area. It also could not effectively evaluate either the impact of targeting a small area with a limited amount of additional personnel resources or the impact of assigning entire agent groups to larger areas.

- Target the Worst Violent Offenders. ATF's evaluation strategy was not adequate for this element because it did not address the collection and analysis of data on the criminal histories of offenders arrested by a VCIT in a target area compared with the criminal histories of offenders arrested in the target area before the VCIT was implemented. Furthermore, because ATF did not collect and analyze data on the prosecution, conviction, or sentencing of VCIT arrestees, ATF could not determine if these actions contributed to a reduction in crime rates.
- Build Effective Working Relationships with Community Leaders. ATF evaluation was not adequate for this element because ATF did not collect and analyze appropriate data on how VCITs worked with community leaders to increase the flow of information between the community and the VCITs. To evaluate this key element, ATF could have collected and analyzed data on the VCITs' use of information from the community in their investigations. Instead, ATF collected data on the "Number of Outreach Activities Participated In (Meetings, Strategy Sessions, Presentations, Speeches)" and the "Number of Persons Exposed to Outreach Activities." Using these data, ATF could report, for example, that one VCIT made 250 community contacts by attending a meeting of 250 community residents and that another VCIT made 2 million contacts through multiple press conferences. But data on numbers of meeting attendees and people exposed to press conferences does not measure whether VCITs obtained cooperation and information from the community and used it in investigating violent crimes.
- Utilize ATF's Investigative Technology Resources. ATF's evaluation strategy was not adequate for this element because ATF did not analyze the data it collected on the number of submissions VCITs sent to the NTC, NIBIN, and CGAB. If ATF had analyzed that data, it could have examined the decreases in the use of these technologies in VCIT cities that we discussed previously in this report. ATF also did not collect or analyze data on the use of information from these technologies in its investigations.

-
- Work in Partnership with Other Department Law Enforcement Components. ATF evaluation strategy was inadequate for this element because ATF did not collect data on the level of personnel and other resources that other Department law enforcement components provided to VCITs. Further, ATF did not collect and analyze data on joint investigations. As a result, ATF did not have information on resource commitments that it could have used to identify those VCITs that lacked adequate assistance from Department components. ATF also could not determine which of the resources provided by those components were most beneficial for VCITs. Rather, ATF collected and reported anecdotal information in its “lessons learned” documents and press releases on instances in which another Department component was involved with a VCIT on a particular case or law enforcement operation. Therefore, ATF did not have the information necessary to evaluate the quality and quantity of resources other Department components provided.

ATF Headquarters officials recognized the importance of conducting local evaluations of VCIT operations in each city, but they did not provide Field Divisions with guidance on how to conduct such evaluations. When we examined the local evaluations that the VCIT Coordinators submitted to ATF Headquarters, we found that they described in narrative fashion local lessons learned. Few reports provided quantitative or qualitative data documenting the effectiveness of VCIT activities.

For example, reports did not provide data on the characteristics (e.g., criminal histories) of those arrested by VCITs or the investigative technologies used in each VCIT investigation. None of the reports documented the number of VCIT arrestees who were prosecuted, the court system in which they were prosecuted, or the length of the sentences handed down for those who were convicted. Moreover, the reports did not contain quantitative or qualitative assessments of the implementation of the VCIT initiative’s other key elements, such as the use of community information in investigations or other federal and local resources committed to the initiative. If the local VCITs had collected that data, they could have determined whether they were using resources effectively and arresting the worst violent offenders in their target areas. Then it would be possible to conduct impact studies to determine if performance of the key elements was having the desired effect on reducing homicide and other firearm crimes.

ATF's Claim of VCIT Success Is Based on Insufficient Data

Our analysis of ATF's data on homicides committed with firearms did not support ATF's claim that the VCIT initiative was successful. (See Appendix III for the form ATF uses to compile and analyze VCIT data.) The *Violent Crime Impact Teams: Best Practices* report ATF issued in January 2006 compared the number of homicides committed with firearms before and after the VCIT implementation in the 15 pilot cities. ATF reported that the pilot program was a success because the number of homicides committed with firearms decreased in 13 of the 15 pilot cities compared with the number of homicides in the same 6-month period of the preceding year. The following table, Table 5, appears on page 6 of ATF's January 2006 report.

Table 5: Homicides Committed with Firearms

City	2003 June-Nov.	2004 June-Nov.	Percentage Change
Albuquerque*	4	2	-50%
Baltimore	91	128	41%
Chattanooga	6	2	-67%
Columbus*	32	26	-19%
Greensboro	13	3	-77%
Las Vegas	62	51	-18%
Los Angeles*	72	77	7%
Miami	36	22	-39%
Pittsburgh	33	13	-61%
Philadelphia*	12	3	-75%
Richmond	51	38	-25%
Tampa*	19	9	-53%
Tucson	24	18	-25%
Tulsa	29	12	-59%
Washington, DC/No. Va.	92	76	-17%
Total	576	480	-17%

* The statistics in this table for Albuquerque, Columbus, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Tampa include homicides or violent crimes that occurred only within the VCIT target area, not within the entire city.

Source: ATF, *Violent Crime Impact Teams: Best Practices*, January 26, 2006

Our analysis of the data in the ATF report does not support this conclusion. We found ATF based its analysis and conclusions on

insufficient data and faulty comparisons. ATF inappropriately used city-wide data, rather than target area data, for 8 of the 15 VCITs and therefore could not demonstrate the impact of the VCIT on homicides committed with firearms for half of the target areas. The VCIT Program Manager said that ATF used city-wide data because it did not have access to target area crime data for those eight cities. However, city-wide data are not a valid measure for VCITs that did not have entire cities as their target areas. Moreover, the number of homicides committed with firearms in some of the target areas where ATF implemented VCITs was relatively small during both 6-month periods. Therefore, percentage decreases reported by ATF appear dramatic but actually reflect small changes in the number of homicides committed with firearms, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative. For example, ATF reported that in Albuquerque, homicides committed with firearms in the target area decreased by 50 percent – from 4 between June and November 2003 to 2 during the same period in 2004. In addition, ATF’s use of data from only two points in time, 2003 and 2004, was not consistent with accepted standards for trend analysis.²⁷

Table 6 presents the results of our analysis of ATF data on target area homicides committed with firearms in the seven VCIT cities for which ATF provided target area data. To analyze trends for these seven cities, we added data on total homicides committed with firearms for the same 6-month period from 2002, 2003, and 2004. One of the seven cities, Columbus, showed no change; another, Los Angeles, showed an increase. Three other cities – Albuquerque, Chattanooga, and Tampa – showed a downward trend beginning in 2002 before the VCITs were implemented, a trend that continued during the pilot period. Only two cities, Greensboro and Philadelphia, showed an increase from 2002 to 2003 that was followed by a decrease during the pilot VCIT period.²⁸

²⁷ The Baldrige National Quality Improvement Program of the National Institute of Standards and Technology establishes three points in time as the minimum for a trend analysis.

²⁸ We attempted to establish a fourth point for the analysis and asked ATF for 2005 data. ATF staff told us that they did not have 2005 data for all VCITs and that some of the data that the ATF Field Divisions submitted to Headquarters had not been verified.

Table 6: Homicides Committed with Firearms in Target Areas

City	2002 June-Nov.	2003 June-Nov.	2004 June-Nov.
Albuquerque	7	4	2
Chattanooga	24	6	2
Columbus	26	32	26
Greensboro	7	13	3
Los Angeles	59	72	77
Philadelphia	6	12	3
Tampa	22	19	9
Total	151	158	122

Source: OIG analysis of ATF-provided data

We believe that a better measure of the effectiveness of the VCIT initiative would have been to compare the number of violent firearms crimes (not homicides only) in the VCIT target areas for the same time periods before and after the initiative was implemented. First, the change in the number of violent firearms crimes is a standard ATF agency-wide performance measure. Second, the number of violent firearms crimes in the VCIT target areas is a larger number, ranging from 107 to 4,056, making analyses of these data more reliable. Furthermore, according to its VCIT Strategy, ATF intended to measure the effectiveness of VCITs not only by the number of homicides committed with firearms, but also by the total number of homicides, the number of violent crimes, and the number of violent firearms crimes.²⁹

Our analysis of the number of violent crimes involving firearms in VCIT target areas does not show that the VCITs were successful in reducing violent firearms crime, a primary goal of the VCIT initiative. Table 7 depicts our analysis of VCIT's performance based on data ATF provided on violent crimes committed with firearms in six VCIT cities. Only two of the six, Tampa and Greensboro, experienced a positive impact on violent firearms crimes in their target areas. Before VCIT implementation, Tampa

²⁹ According to ATF's Strategic Plan for 2004–2009, the performance measures for ATF's firearms enforcement activities are "percent change in violent firearms crime in metropolitan areas with a substantial ATF presence (as compared with similar areas)" and "percentage of high-crime cities with an ATF presence demonstrating a reduction in violent firearms crime when compared to the national average (2004–2009)."

experienced a decrease in violent firearms crimes from 278 in 2002 to 257 in 2003, followed by a sharper decrease to 107 in 2004 after VCIT implementation. Greensboro experienced an increase in violent crimes committed with firearms before VCIT implementation, followed by a slight decrease after implementation. Los Angeles showed a decrease that began before VCIT was implemented and continued after implementation, and Chattanooga showed a decrease prior to VCIT implementation. In two cities, Albuquerque and Philadelphia, violent firearms crime increased after VCIT was implemented. A comparison of high-crime areas with VCITs and similar high-crime areas without VCITs would constitute a stronger evaluation methodology.³⁰

Table 7: Violent Crimes Committed with Firearms in Target Areas

City	2002 June-Nov.	2003 June-Nov.	2004 June-Nov.
Albuquerque	256	188	191
Chattanooga	1,149	346	N/A
Greensboro	334	353	351
Los Angeles	2,338	1,863	1,731
Philadelphia	3,581	3,886	4,056
Tampa	278	257	107
Total	7,936	6,893	6,436

Note: The data included in the table were provided to ATF by the local police departments.

Source: OIG analysis of ATF-provided data

In addition, during our fieldwork, several ATF officials told us that they were not prepared to say that the decreases in homicides in VCIT cities were directly attributable to VCIT operations. In sum, while ATF officials recognized the importance of evaluating the VCIT initiative in the VCIT Strategy, they did not develop an adequate evaluation plan to support claims of success.

³⁰ We also note that this methodology is advocated by the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although we believe ATF developed sound objectives for the VCIT Strategy to combat violent firearms crime, ATF did not implement that Strategy. This was primarily due to ATF's inconsistent direction to and oversight of its Field Divisions on adapting the VCIT Strategy to local operations. Most VCITs inconsistently incorporated the key elements that were to differentiate the VCIT initiative from ATF's day-to-day enforcement operations. Further, ATF did not develop an adequate evaluation strategy to measure the performance or impact of the VCIT initiative, and ATF's analysis of the data it collected does not support its claims of success. As a result, although the Strategy on paper appears to be a reasonable and effective approach, after 24 months of operations and the allocation of more than \$35 million in reprogrammed funds, general operating funds, and funds appropriated for VCIT, ATF cannot definitively show whether the VCIT initiative successfully reduced firearms crime in areas with high levels of violent crime.

For FY 2006, ATF received \$20 million to continue and expand the VCIT initiative. To maximize the use of these funds and to inform future funding decisions, we believe that ATF should implement the VCIT initiative consistent with its VCIT Strategy and in a manner that will allow ATF to determine whether the Strategy is effective in reducing violent firearm crime in specific areas. To accomplish this, we recommend that ATF:

1. Establish specific operational guidelines for VCIT implementation, and provide training based on these guidelines for ATF Special Agents in Charge and VCIT Coordinators on tailoring the VCIT initiative to local crime problems.
2. Develop and implement a pre-deployment assessment for prospective VCIT locations to determine the potential applicability of VCIT to local violent crime problems.
3. Develop and implement an adequate evaluation strategy to assess VCIT performance and impact on violent firearms crime.
4. For existing VCITs, where possible, and for future VCITs, establish interagency agreements with federal and local partner agencies that define resource commitments and operational responsibilities.
5. Establish management authority and responsibility for overseeing the implementation and evaluation of local VCIT operations in

accordance with the VCIT Strategy and the guidelines developed in response to Recommendation 1.

APPENDIX I: VCIT DATA COLLECTION FORM

FORM 3
Revised: 01 Oct 2005

WEEKLY VIOLENT CRIME IMPACT TEAM REPORT

CITY: _____ For the week of: _____

WORKLOAD REPORT								
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	WEEKLY TOTAL
Worst of the Worst Identified								0
Worst of the Worst Identified (Gang Members)								0
Worst of the Worst Arrested								0
Total Arrests								0
Gang Members Arrested								0
Fugitives Arrested								0
Firearms Recovered								0

Submitted By: _____
Date: _____

DEFINITIONS:

The following guidelines and definitions are to assist you in statistical reporting, and cover the areas where there have been questions or inaccuracies. Department names chosen as examples do not reflect any actual incidents or problems. To preserve the integrity of the VCIT program, we want to be very careful about what sorts of credit we claim, so as to withstand scrutiny by outsiders. Improperly claiming credit for work performed by others would seriously undermine the validity of your hard work, but be sure to take credit where credit is due. If you or any VCIT participant s can articulate meaningful linkage to an enforcement activity, even if the VCIT presence was not substantial, you may do so. Please recognize that many of the enforcement activities of the VCIT members, (USMS, DEA, State law enforcement), will not be captured in NFORCE and thus should be reported using VCIT Form 3 on a weekly basis. Capturing the actual output of the team members and other law enforcement, when related to enforcement activities against our (VCIT) targets and their associates, will assist in accurately measuring ATF's contribution to reducing violent crime.

Worst of the Worst Identified VCITs were to indicate specific numbers of criminals identified as worst of the worst for VCIT enforcement. As priorities change, and new suspects are identified, these new people should be counted here. On a weekly basis this figure should represent any additional violent offenders identified as worst of the worst operating within targeted area or who are responsible for committing the crime in the area.

Worst of the Worst Identified (Gang Members) This category is a subset of "Worst of the Worst Identified." Of the identified targeted worst of the worst, indicate the number whom are believed to be affiliated with a gang. *The totals here should never be greater than the total for "Worst of the Worst Identified."* A gang for purposes of this reporting is defined as a group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. Criminal activity includes juvenile acts that if committed by an adult would be a crime. Example: If you have identified 30 worst of the worst individuals, of which 20 have a suspected gang affiliation, 30 would be identified under "Worst of the Worst Identified", and 20 would be identified in "Worst of the Worst Identified (Gang Members)."

Worst of the Worst Arrested Of the previously identified targeted individuals for VCIT enforcement (see above), indicate the number arrested due to VCIT activity. This measure is to include the arrest of any of the targeted individuals, as the VCIT is a collective, combined targeting effort of law enforcement. As priorities change, and new suspects are identified, these new people may also be counted as targeted individuals. Example: If you arrested three people in one week, but only one was targeted, indicate the total number of arrests in the "Total Arrests" section, and the one Worst of the Worst individual in this section. Doing so will allow us to avoid duplicate counting of arrests. *The totals here should never be greater than the total for "Worst of the Worst Identified."*

Total Arrests This refers to Federal or State arrests made by, or as a direct result of, VCIT activity. To qualify, a VCIT member should be the arresting agent/officer/detective or a meaningful participant. Arrests made by other LE agencies, e.g., a roundup by the Dallas Police Department independent of the VCIT, even if in a high crime area, should not be counted without a clear VCIT nexus. However, it is important to capture all VCIT team members' activity, including the activities of each of the participating agents/detectives/officers other than ATF.

Gang Members Arrested This category is a subset of "Total Arrests." Of the total arrests, indicate the number whom are believed to be affiliated with a gang. A gang for purposes of this reporting is defined as a group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. Criminal activity includes juvenile acts that if committed by an adult would be a crime. *The weekly number here should have a corresponding number for "Total Arrests."* *Total Arrests should always be equal or greater than this number.*

Fugitives Arrested This category is a subset of "Total Arrests." Of the total arrests, indicate the number whom are fugitives. *The weekly number here should have a corresponding number for "Total Arrests."* *Total Arrests should always be equal or greater than this number.*

Firearms Recovered Indicate the number firearms recovered, to include all firearms taken into custody.

APPENDIX II: VCIT COORDINATOR SURVEY



Department of Justice
Office of the Inspector General
Evaluation & Inspections Division

ATF Violent Crime Impact Team Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General is conducting a review of the Violent Crime Impact Teams (VCIT) led by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). As part of the review, we are conducting this survey of VCIT sites to obtain information regarding VCIT operations in your area, as well as any opportunities you see for improvement.

Your input is very important to us, and we are counting on you to respond openly to the questions provided. We also value your narrative comments, and we encourage you to include them.

DIRECTIONS: This survey should be completed by the Special Agent in Charge, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Resident Agent in Charge, Group Supervisor, or other ATF official directly responsible for coordinating and supervising your VCIT's activities. Unless otherwise noted, please answer the survey questions as they relate to operations **in your location**. For questions regarding specific numbers, please answer to the best of your ability. If you are unable to provide specific numbers in certain sections, please indicate why.

To answer this questionnaire electronically, please click your cursor in the appropriate shaded area and type your response. After you have completed the questionnaire, please save the document and e-mail it as an attachment to the following address: [REDACTED]. If you prefer, you may print out the questionnaire, fill it out manually, and fax it to [REDACTED]; ATTN: [REDACTED].

We estimate that it will take you less than one hour to complete this questionnaire. **Please return the completed questionnaire by September 9, 2005. If you have any questions, please call [REDACTED].**

Thank you for your assistance.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING PERSONAL INFORMATION:	
Name:	Field Division:
Title:	Field Office or Group:
Phone:	Months Served on this VCIT:

1 of 10

DOJ Office of the Inspector General
ATF Violent Crime Impact Team Questionnaire

II. PERSONNEL

2. Please complete the following table by filling in the number of full-time and part-time ATF personnel assigned to your VCIT during its initial 6-month pilot period and currently assigned. If a series listed is not part of your VCIT staff, please enter “0” in the corresponding cells.

	Pilot Period		Currently	
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time
a. Series 1801				
b. Series 1802				
c. Series 1811				
d. Series 1854				
e. Other (Please Specify)				

3. Please complete the following table by filling in the number of full-time and part-time personnel that were assigned to your VCIT during the initial 6-month pilot period and currently assigned, from each of the agencies below. Please use the rows reserved for “Other” agencies to add any and all agencies participating in your VCIT that are not listed in the table. If an agency listed does not contribute any personnel to your VCIT, please enter “0” in the corresponding cells.

	Pilot Period		Currently	
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time
a. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)				
b. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)				
c. Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)				
d. United States Marshals Service (USMS)				
e. U.S. Attorney’s Office (USAO)				
f. City Police Department				
g. Other (Please Specify)				
h. Other (Please Specify)				
i. Other (Please Specify)				
j. Other (Please Specify)				

4. How were these agencies recruited to participate on your VCIT?

5. Please use the checkboxes in the following table to indicate your level of satisfaction with the following agencies' level of participation with your VCIT. Please use the rows reserved for "Other" agencies to add any and all agencies participating in your VCIT that are not currently listed in the table. For any agency that is not participating, please check "Not Applicable." Select only one answer for each row.

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
a. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. United States Marshals Service (USMS)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. City Police Department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. Other (Please Specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. Other (Please Specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. Other (Please Specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
j. Other (Please Specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

6. What other federal, state, or local entities would be useful partners for your VCIT?

III. PLANNING

7. Briefly describe your VCIT planning process and list the agencies that participated.

8. Did ATF Headquarters provide you with any of the following guidance regarding the planning and establishment of your VCIT? Check yes or no in each row.

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>a. Planning Documents or Templates</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>b. Policies and Procedures</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>c. VCIT Supervisor Training</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>d. Training Guidelines</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>e. Other (Please specify):</i> | | |

9. How useful was the guidance received from Headquarters in planning your VCIT? Select one.

- a. Very Useful
- b. Useful
- c. Somewhat Useful
- d. Not Useful
- e. Did Not Receive Any Guidance

10. Do you consider the following to be the core or essential components (or key elements) of your VCIT initiative? Select yes or no in each row.

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>a. Identifying and working within a defined target area.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>b. Developing and pursuing a target list of the most violent offenders.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>c. Disrupting and dismantling targeted criminal organizations.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>d. Developing working relationships with community leaders.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>e. Maximizing the length of sentence through appropriate prosecution.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>f. Evaluating operational results with specific measures.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

11. Has your VCIT altered its “key elements” or operational strategy since it began operations? Select one.

Yes No (If no, skip to question 14)

12. If you answered “yes” to question 11, please briefly explain when and how you changed your strategy.

13. If you answered “yes” to question 11, did you discuss this change with ATF Headquarters before altering the strategy? Select one.

Yes No

14. Do you use the following resources on an on-going basis as part of your VCIT strategy? Select yes or no for each row.

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>a. Crime Gun Analysis Branch</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>b. National Integrated Ballistics Information Network</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>c. National Tracing Center</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>d. COMPSTAT</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

IV. OPERATIONS

DEFINITIONS:

- **“WORST OF THE WORST” LIST:** A list of individuals whose arrest and prosecution are a priority for your VCIT.
- **SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHIC AREA:** A police district, neighborhood, group of neighborhoods, or other clearly defined location in or around a city that is smaller than your Field Office’s jurisdiction.

15. Does your VCIT use a “Worst of the Worst” list to target individuals for investigation? Select one.

Yes No (If no, skip to question 19)

16. If you answered “yes” to question 15, please explain how this list was developed.

17. If you answered “yes” to question 15, please explain how this list is used.

18. If you answered “yes” to question 15, please explain how this list is updated.

19. If you answered “no” to question 15, please explain why your VCIT does not use a “Worst of the Worst” list to target individuals for investigation.

20. Does your VCIT target or operate in a specific geographic area(s)? Select one.

Yes No

21. Please describe the geographic area(s) in which your VCIT operates (including approximate size and population) and explain how the area(s) were selected.

22. Does your VCIT plan to target another specific geographic area in the future? Select one.

Yes No (If no, skip to question 24)

23. If you answered “yes” to question 22, list the criteria your VCIT used to determine it was appropriate to target another geographic area.

24. Are the following practices routinely used by your VCIT? Select yes or no for each row.

- a. Assist local officers in firearms-related homicides by working all leads and ensuring evidence is processed using all available ATF resources.* **Yes** **No**
- b. Assist local officers in firearms-related violent crime (other than homicides) by working all leads and ensuring evidence is processed using all available ATF resources.* **Yes** **No**
- c. Respond to firearms-related homicides at the scene within the first hour of local police notification.* **Yes** **No**
- d. Respond to firearms-related violent crimes (other than homicides) at the scene within the first hour of local police notification.* **Yes** **No**
- e. Assist in preliminary interviews at firearms-related homicides, as necessary, and as requested by local investigators.* **Yes** **No**
- f. Assist in preliminary interviews at firearms-related violent crimes (other than homicides), as necessary, and as requested by local investigators.* **Yes** **No**
- g. Use undercover techniques and informants.* **Yes** **No**
- h. Use ATF inspectors to identify potentially corrupt FFLs.* **Yes** **No**
- i. Work with state and/or federal prosecutors throughout the arrest and prosecution process.* **Yes** **No**

V. EVALUATION

25. In addition to participating in ATF Headquarters' monthly performance evaluations, do you conduct any local VCIT evaluations? Select one.

Yes **No**

26. Do you believe the monthly statistics (such as homicide and violent crime rates) requested by ATF Headquarters reflect the impact your VCIT is having on the targeted area(s)?

Yes No

27. Please explain.

28. What other performance measures or monthly statistics can you recommend that would accurately reflect the impact your VCIT is having on the targeted area(s) or the city as a whole?

29. Do you track all VCIT cases (including non-ATF initiated cases) through the criminal justice system (including arrest, prosecution, disposition, etc.)?

Yes No

V. MISCELLANEOUS & CONCLUSIONS

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please answer each of the following questions.

30. Are the VCIT partners co-located? Select one.

Yes No (If no, skip to question 32)

31. If you answered "yes" to question 30, are they located in ATF-provided offices? Select one.

Yes No

32. Do you conduct joint training with your VCIT partners? Select one.

Yes No

33. Do you believe your city has a gang problem (i.e., the presence of a large, criminal gang or gangs)? Select one.

Yes No (If no, skip to question 35)

34. If you answered “yes” to question 34, please describe.

35. How satisfied are you with the following, as they relate to VCIT (check one in each row):

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
a. Communication from ATF Headquarters, Field Operations?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Communication from ATF Headquarters, Enforcement Programs and Services?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Cooperation of other DOJ agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Cooperation of state and local law enforcement agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Cooperation of state and local prosecutor?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. Information sharing between participating VCIT agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

36. Please list your primary point of contact for VCIT at ATF Headquarters.

a. Name:

b. Office:

37. Please list below any improvements or changes that you would like to see in your VCIT.

38. Please list below those aspects of VCIT you believe work best in your location.

39. If you have any other comments regarding your VCIT, please include them below:

Thank you again for your time and assistance with this questionnaire.

Please return the completed questionnaire by *September 9, 2005*. If you have any questions, please call [REDACTED].

APPENDIX III: VCIT PERFORMANCE REPORT

FORM 4

CITY: _____

PERFORMANCE REPORT												
Number of Homicides												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2001												
2002												
2003												
2004												
2005												
2006												
Number of Homicides by Firearm												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2001												
2002												
2003												
2004												
2005												
2006												
Violent Crimes (Defined as reported in UCR: Murder and Nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault)												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2001												
2002												
2003												
2004												
2005												
2006												
Violent Crimes which involved the use of a firearm												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2001												
2002												
2003												
2004												
2005												
2006												

Submitted By (i.e. S/A Eric Harden): _____

Date: _____

List Contact Person and Police Department (i.e. Sgt. Joe Smith, LAPD): _____

APPENDIX IV: ATF'S RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT



U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms and Explosives

Office of the Director

Washington, DC 20226

903000:HCH
8310

MAY - 1 2006

MEMORANDUM TO: Assistant Inspector General for Evaluation and Inspection

FROM: Director

SUBJECT: Review of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Violent Crime Impact Team Initiative

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on areas of concern involving the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) draft report, detailing a review of the Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT) initiative. We agree with all of the recommendations in the OIG report. In fact, ATF is currently implementing several of the suggested improvements similarly discovered as a result of our independent evaluation of the VCIT pilot program conducted prior to, and concurrent with, the OIG's review. These findings were first published in December 2005, in *Violent Crime Impact Teams, Best Practices* (ATF Publication 3501.1) and are an attachment to this response. This memorandum addresses each OIG recommendation and details the actions ATF has taken to mitigate issues identified in the report.

Although ATF stands in agreement with the OIG recommendations that chart the future for the VCIT program's expansion, ATF disagrees with the findings used to support these conclusions. ATF's primary disagreement is founded on the fact that the VCIT program was a 6-month pilot program actively under review by ATF at the time of the OIG audit and that criticisms regarding implementation of a program under design are premature. For the purposes of responding to these findings, ATF addresses the two areas of greatest concern to the OIG as defined by ATF: performance measurement and program implementation.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

ATF knows that the public expects law enforcement institutions to prevent crime. ATF therefore creates enforcement programs intended to prevent crimes committed with firearms, explosives, and fire. Success of ATF programs is measured not solely by outputs, such as the number of convictions achieved or arrests made, but by reductions in the number of crimes ATF special agents and their enforcement partners work jointly to prevent. We agree with the OIG's position that the measurement of these outcomes is problematic at best. It may also be true that a direct causal relationship between ATF programs and reductions in crime can never be established.

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However, an abundance of evidence already exists that ATF is an integral player in a Department of Justice (DOJ)-wide strategy that is contributing to historic reductions in violent crime through support of the President's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative and, more recently, through VCIT, a companion initiative to PSN that has contributed to a significant decline in homicides. In 2000, the year prior to implementation of PSN, 533,470 persons were victims of gun crime. In every year thereafter, fewer victims of firearms violence have been reported, reaching a low of 280,890 in 2004, representing a nearly 50 percent decline. Although the track record for VCIT is not nearly as lengthy, the results attributed to the program are impressive. Following only several months of operations, homicides in VCIT cities declined by more than 8 percent, a rate of decline five times the average of other American cities. Although it is uncertain to what degree ATF is specifically responsible for the decline in homicides and overall violent crime, it is clear that ATF has played its part and has contributed to a safer America. ATF programs have saved lives. The difficulty of measuring law enforcement success through crime prevention should not prevent ATF from building programs that support the goals shared by our State and local partners, as well as the members of the public we are collectively sworn to protect. ATF's unique approach should encourage necessary debate by decision makers who must judge which Federal programs provide the most value in increasing public safety and the quality of life in our communities.

As a law enforcement organization, ATF is not alone in its belief that Government programs and strategies can prevent crime. The Uniform Crime Report (UCR) produced by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) cites many known factors that affect the volume and type of crime occurring from place to place. These factors include the "effective strength of law enforcement agencies"; "administrative and investigative emphases of law enforcement"; as well as the "policies of other components of the criminal justice system (i.e., prosecutorial, judicial, correctional, and probational)" (FBI, UCR, 2004, p. vi.)

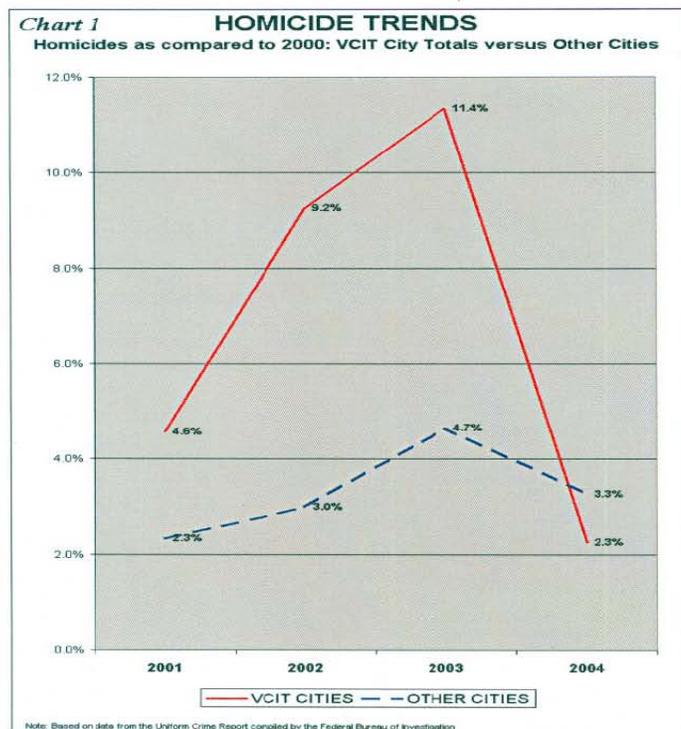
The FBI's position that the law enforcement community can impact crime through additional resources and purposeful interventions is supported by Larry T. Hoover, Director of the Police Research Center at Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, who has stated that "one of the most common misconceptions pervading modern criminology is that police make no difference...however, there is consistently accumulating evidence that focused police efforts to reduce particular crimes committed by particular offenders at particular times and places are effective." Hoover advises that virtually every controlled experiment entailing *crime-specific interventions* has yielded positive results (i.e., crime went down). In other words, "when the police concentrate resources on a particular crime, the incidence of that crime drops" (Police Executive Research Forum *Police Program Evaluation*, 1998, p.1.)

With this knowledge, ATF initiated the VCIT program at the direction of the Deputy Attorney General to mitigate the homicide problem in 15 cities selected by officials from the Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG) and ATF. Members of the ODAG's staff voiced concern that the success of PSN and its impact on overall violent crime was being undermined by the stubborn fact that homicides, including those committed with firearms, continued to rise. ATF

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agreed to establish a 6-month VCIT pilot using \$499,000 and additional personnel in 15 cities in a proactive attempt to prevent homicides.

Following ATF's intervention, the 15 VCIT cities witnessed a remarkable decline in homicides compared to cities without VCITs in other parts of the Nation. It is also true that these 15 cities, as a group, represented some of this Nation's most violent areas. Based on UCR data for the 3 calendar years preceding the 6-month pilot project, the 15 cities selected by ODAG experienced an **11.4 percent increase** in homicides, as compared to all other cities measured by the UCR, which saw a **4.7 percent increase** during the same period (*Chart 1*).

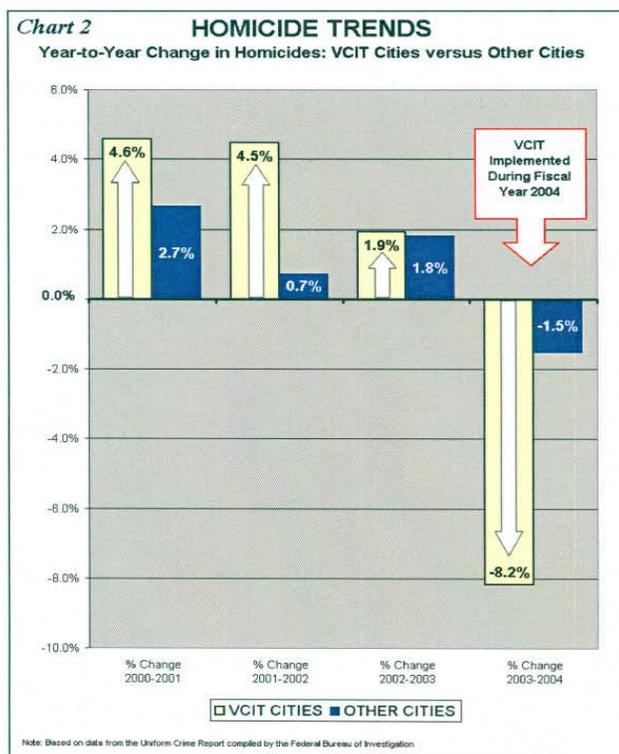


The VCIT program attempted, through a **crime-specific intervention**, to prevent homicides, particularly those committed with firearms. **Specific offenders were targeted**; those most likely to use a firearm to kill someone and not necessarily those with the longest rap sheet. **Specific areas were targeted**; those that seemed to be the hot spots where murders were committed, and

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in particular, those committed with guns. **Additional resources were provided**; in particular, special agents were detailed to VCIT cities, new partnerships were established, and teams adjusted work schedules to work on days of the week and during periods of the evening when homicides were most likely to occur.

By the conclusion of 2004, the number of homicides in the 15 cities declined dramatically when compared as a group to the remaining cities in the United States that had not received VCIT intervention. Based on UCR data for 2004, homicides in VCIT cities **declined 8.2 percent**, while cities without VCIT **declined 1.5 percent**. The only commonality known to evaluators among these 15 cities, which collectively saw a homicide reduction five times that of other cities in America, was VCIT intervention, which was implemented with the sole purpose of producing this effect (*Chart 2*).



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PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The OIG recognizes that the VCIT strategy may be an effective tool to reduce violent crime in target areas and criticizes ATF on its implementation of the strategy. We agree that VCIT does prevent crime but believe our implementation strategy was under design when reviewed and this criticism, therefore, is premature.

ATF concurs that a detailed strategy is important in the implementation of the VCIT initiative but reiterates that the goal of the **pilot** program was to determine which elements of the program were effective and should be included in future implementation. Therefore, field offices were given the flexibility to determine which elements were key and were not required to continue to implement elements that were determined to be unnecessary.

In June 2004, ATF designed VCIT to give ATF field offices guidance on implementing a new strategy to lower the number of homicides. The program was designed to run for a 6-month pilot period until December 2004, when it would be reviewed to determine if ATF resources should continue to be allocated to the VCIT program. ATF's objective during this pilot period was to determine if ATF could affect the number of homicides in specific high-crime areas.

The report does not address these facts. The VCIT strategy was designed to give a framework to local field offices so that they could model their implementation around the aspects of the program that actually worked in their area. This was a significant lesson learned from PSN that saw benefits to avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to program implementation. ATF recognized that certain aspects of the VCIT strategy would be more effective in different areas of the country and that it was essential to give special agents in the field the ability to tailor the VCIT strategy locally and specifically to the communities they serve. ATF believed that allowing field offices this flexibility would enable ATF to determine which aspects of the strategy were effective and which were not. ATF developed a VCIT strategy prior to the implementation of the pilot program that suggested **six elements** ATF initially believed to be important parts of the VCIT strategy. VCIT cities were tasked with implementing all of these elements and determining which ones were effective in their area. Subsequent to the VCIT pilot period, ATF conducted an extensive review of each VCIT city's performance to determine, simply, "what is working and what is not." The review consisted of after-action reports, as well as extensive interviews with VCIT supervisors and representatives from participating law enforcement agencies.

In December 2005, ATF published *Violent Crime Impact Teams, Best Practices*, which outlined the **ten best practices** used in VCIT cities that ATF believed were effectively impacting violent crime and contributing to reductions in homicides. The OIG review, dated April 2006, lists **five key elements** believed to be the most important to the implementation of the VCIT strategy.

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TABLE A

Elements for Implementation Identified in VCIT Pilot Strategy June 2004	VCIT Best Practices Identified in Review by ATF Published December 2005	Key Elements Identified by OIG Review Drafted April 2006
1. Identify areas	1. Set clear goals and measure performance	1. Target small geographic areas
2. Target the "worst of the worst"	2. Develop collaborative partnerships with local police	2. Target the worst violent offenders
3. Disrupt and dismantle	3. Target the "worst of the worst" criminals	3. Build effective working relationships with community leaders
4. Arrest and prosecute	4. Use the full array of intelligence assets	4. Utilize ATF's investigative technology resources
5. Community outreach	5. Maintain a fluid and dynamic approach when targeting offenders and hot spots	5. Work in partnership with other Departmental law enforcement
6. Evaluate results	6. Conduct proactive street enforcement with local police in targeted hot spots 7. Deploy resources during peak hours of criminal activity 8. Investigate the sources of firearms linked to violent crime 9. Prioritize prosecution of defendants linked to targeted hot spots 10. Publicize success stories	

Table A illustrates the chronology of the *elements of implementing the pilot*, as well as the concurrent review and documentation of the *key elements identified by the OIG* and the *best practices documented by ATF*. The table is illustrative of the fact that ATF had implemented an effective review of the pilot program to determine the elements of the VCIT program that are effective and should be implemented in all VCIT cities in the future.

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ATF is cognizant that practitioners responsible for programmatic evaluation recognize four types of reviews: Front end Evaluations, Formative Evaluations, Monitoring Evaluations, and Summative Evaluation. Different approaches will produce different results. It is also fair to state that different approaches are more suitable for different stages in the life cycle of a program. The OIG conducted a *Formative Evaluation* during which the traditional goals of *process assessment* (where determinations regarding implementation and operations are investigated) and *evaluability assessment* (where determinations regarding the feasibility of various evaluation methods are detailed) were employed, and findings based on this approach were logically presented. The OIG acknowledged that it rarely, if ever, has reviewed a program during its pilot phase of operations. VCIT was reviewed in the same fashion as other Government programs that have operated for many years. In contrast, ATF conducted a *Front-end Evaluation* (where a needs assessment would have been the traditional approach for an inquiry of its kind) prior to the formal implementation of the program. Formal implementation of the program first began in earnest during fiscal year (FY) 2006, in response to findings first published within an extensive *Best Practices* review released in late 2005, as well as the dedication of significant financial resources as a result of late FY-05 reprogramming and FY-06 funding. When the reviews are compared (**Table A, columns 1 and 2**), it is clear that the OIG evaluated ATF based on the implementation of its initial pilot framework, an exploratory approach to determine if teams dedicated to reducing homicides could succeed. In contrast, ATF approached the initial pilot as an exercise to determine best practices; hence, far different and more comprehensive conclusions were reached. ATF purposely chose to conduct a *Front-end Evaluation* to encourage field divisions to try different methods within the VCIT Strategy so that evaluators could determine what worked and what did not prior to formal implementation of the program. In Baltimore and Los Angeles, where ATF's published findings suggested VCIT had failed to adequately contribute to a reduction in homicides, ATF leaders directed significant changes in strategy, resulting in improved short-term results. In Chattanooga, the program was viewed as an inappropriate means to combat local crime problems; and with the agreement of local ATF and police officials, the program was terminated. In the remaining 16 cities, operations have been refined to replicate past successes.

There is no disagreement over recommendations that guide the future expansion of the program and serve as the basis of the *Monitoring* and *Summative Evaluations* of tomorrow.

Once again, as **Table A** clearly illustrates, ATF recognizes the importance of programmatic evaluation and appreciates the constructive criticism of the VCIT program by the OIG both where it mirrors ATF's findings and where it differs from our experiences in the field. When the complementary reviews are juxtaposed, we believe that the table collectively serves as a constructive outline for future VCIT efforts.

In its field site visits, the OIG conducted numerous in-person interviews with personnel from ATF, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the United States Marshals Service (USMS), and other Federal, State, and local law enforcement partners, but did not incorporate into the document the positive feedback from these partners. OIG audit team members specifically stated

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(on numerous occasions to a number of interviewees) that their interviews with “all levels” of personnel revealed a consistent theme — that this program was an effective program.

TARGET SMALL GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

With regard to targeting *specific* (not small) geographic areas, the Executive Digest misrepresents many of the site-specific details. The Executive Digest (Page ix) suggests that the target areas varied in size but fails to concede that 18 of the 19 cities (95 percent) considered identifying and working within a defined target area as a core component (key element) of their VCIT initiative. Similarly, 18 of 19 (95 percent) cities surveyed responded that their VCIT targets or operates in a specific geographic area(s) (i.e., “hot spots”). This is consistent with the original VCIT strategy.

While ATF agrees that some cities may have initially selected a larger area than might be ideal and concurs that a small area may be a reasonable recommendation, to represent this as a “key element” in the implementation of the pilot misrepresents the strategy. To further illustrate the OIG’s contention that VCITs targeted areas that varied greatly in size, information is presented regarding the areas of operation as opposed to the targeted areas. The report does not identify that cities whose operations encompassed the entire city did target identified geographic hotspots (with one exception). Specifically, Chattanooga and Miami are represented in the OIG supporting documentation as having “target areas” of the entire city and county (respectively) when both of these VCITs articulated in the OIG surveys that they did target specific hot spots.

TARGET THE WORST VIOLENT OFFENDERS

The OIG survey questioned whether VCITs used a “worst of the worst” list and allowed for those who responded negatively to explain their reasons. The OIG survey results suggest that 13 out of 19 VCITs used a “worst of the worst” list but also uncovered the reason why these lists were not used (when they were not). It warrants recognition that the predominant reason for not using the lists was to ensure participation by partners who were key to the success of VCIT.

The OIG makes two assertions regarding the targeting of the worst violent offenders that conflict with the strategy:

- 1) The OIG suggests that because only 746 of the 3,592 individuals arrested were targeted, VCITs might not have focused on targeted individuals. While the strategy prioritizes targeting those predominantly responsible for fueling homicides and firearms violence, it certainly does not discourage the VCIT from arresting untargeted individuals for violation of law.
- 2) Because ATF did not document the definition of a “targeted individual,” the OIG asserts that it could not determine whether or not the targeted individuals were the “worst of the worst” violent offenders in the target areas. This would suggest a lack of understanding as to what constitutes the “worst of the worst” criminals in a community — those persons

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most likely to murder someone based on street-level intelligence. Documentation of the targeted individuals would not have provided insight to allow the OIG to determine the “worst of the worst,” as this is subjective. An example of how this varies is the adoption of a strategy that not only targets identified shooters in a crime but also identifies and pursues retaliatory shooters.

BUILD EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

ATF concurs that community outreach is an important component toward affecting lasting success of violence-reducing initiatives including VCIT. ATF does not concur, however, that the VCITs did not incorporate community outreach into their strategies. VCIT has always been a component of the PSN strategy. When considering the operations in their totality, including the complementary efforts of PSN, almost every VCIT had elements of outreach. For example, the review suggests that during the site visits, the OIG found that only one of the five VCITs actively continued to participate in any community outreach. Each of the four cities that are identified as not participating in community outreach either have direct community outreach or have a complementary outreach mechanism in place through which community outreach is a contributing element to the strategy.

For example, the OIG review states that the Tampa “...VCIT did not engage in community outreach activities.” (page v) Further review of the ATF activities in Tampa would reveal participation in community outreach programs, including “Drug-Free Kids” and the “Great American Teach In.” The OIG review states that the Tucson VCIT did not engage in community outreach activities. Further review of activities in Tucson reveals that ATF did participate in community outreach activities, such as joining the Tucson Police Department during their “Community Night Out.” This was in addition to numerous meetings, strategy sessions, presentations and speeches between May 2004 and September 2005.

UTILIZE ATF’S INVESTIGATIVE TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES

The OIG review states “...we determined that VCITs did not consistently use the services of the National Tracing Center (NTC), the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN), and the Crime Gun Analysis Branch (CGAB) to facilitate their investigations.” ATF does not agree with the OIG’s characterization of the VCITs’ use of ATF’s technology resources. The Executive Digest does not fully present much of the site-specific details and does not incorporate the full results of the review. Although the OIG survey did not pose the question whether VCITs felt utilization of technology was a key element of their VCIT initiative, the OIG survey did reveal extensive use of the technologies by ATF.

Specifically, the OIG survey revealed the following:

- All of the VCITs (19 out of 19 – 100 percent) used NTC
- Seventeen out of 19 VCITs (89 percent) used NIBIN
- Seventeen of the 19 VCITs (89 percent) used CGAB

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ATF will continue to direct the VCITs to utilize technology in support of their mission but believes the use of technology within VCIT cities is mischaracterized in the report. ATF is specifically concerned that some of the characterizations may have arisen from misunderstandings about ATF protocols for firearms tracing and NIBIN utilization. For example, the contention that VCITs underutilized NTC services is largely premised on the fact that they did not utilize the “urgent” identification for all of their traces. ATF policy outlines that traces should be classified as urgent for time-sensitive requests, such as homicide of a police officer, assassination attempts of public officials, and violent incidents of national significance (e.g., Columbine). NTC officials did provide instruction to those processing trace requests that VCIT firearms traces could be expedited without meeting the identified criteria for “urgent” requests. While the VCITs were not specifically instructed to mark trace requests as “urgent” for all recovered firearms, there was inconsistency in the use of this NTC service.

Further, ATF does not necessarily interpret a decline in trace requests to mean that there was an inconsistent or declining use of NTC services. Trace requests are incident driven and will fluctuate with firearms recoveries over time. Simply put, if fewer firearms are recovered, fewer traces will be submitted.

ATF has similar concerns with the assessment of VCIT use of NIBIN. Like tracing, NIBIN is incident driven. NIBIN usage is limited to the volume of ballistic evidence recovered in a given period of time. In addition, the OIG evaluation of NIBIN use does not address seasonal variations in evidence retrieval (comparing July-December 2004 to January-June 2004). ATF also took note of the fact that the time period the OIG assessed is different from the pilot period (June-November 2004), which we fear could potentially mislead the report audience. Should this data reveal anything, ATF would suggest that this could be evidence of a decline in the instances of shootings, a goal of the program.

When considering the operations in their totality, including the complementary efforts of local crime analysts and local Regional Crime Gun Centers, every VCIT utilized crime gun analysis. The entire picture should be considered when reviewing the use of CGAB. In response to the OIG survey, seventeen of the nineteen VCIT coordinators (89 percent) stated that they used CGAB (one of those who responded negatively was Los Angeles, which has similar services provided by a Regional Crime Gun Center).

WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER DEPARTMENT LAW ENFORCEMENT COMPONENTS

The Executive Digest provides the key element as “coordinate law enforcement efforts across agencies” (Page ii), followed in the review as “work in Partnership with Other *Departmental* Law Enforcement Components.” ATF views these as two different things by which to judge the implementation of the program. ATF certainly agrees that full participation by our partner law enforcement agencies is important to the VCIT strategy, but to base judgment of ATF’s implementation of the VCIT pilot on this fact does not reflect that the VCIT strategy and the

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OIG interviews with ATF officials identified local law enforcement as the most critical law enforcement partnership in support of the success of VCIT.

Additionally, ATF is concerned with the representation made as to the level of participation across the cities. The OIG survey posed this question for two separate time periods, including during the pilot period and at the time of the survey in September 2005. The OIG used information based on the site visits that spanned yet another time period. Data is used from each of these different points in time to support the assertions of lack of participation by Departmental law enforcement. Of greatest concern is the representation of participation in site visits that is not consistent with what ATF officials in the field report as participation levels. For example, the OIG suggests that the Tucson "...VCIT did not include special agents from the DEA or the FBI, Deputy U.S. Marshals, or AUSAs." ATF officials overseeing Tucson provided information contrary to this, that currently there is one DEA special agent assigned fulltime who is available anytime he is needed, and a U.S. Marshal assigned and working every day on the task force. The OIG survey also identified the following participants during the pilot period: three full-time AUSAs, one DEA special agent, one U.S. marshal, four city police department officers, one Pima County attorney, one Pima County adult probation officer, one U.S. probation and parole officer, and one Arizona Criminal Justice Commission representative. Additionally, the VCIT has worked with the Arizona Board of Parole and Probation.

RELEASE OF UNVALIDATED NUMBERS

Lastly, ATF feels it critically important to reiterate that the OIG should not base any tables or analysis on *unvalidated* figures (see Table 2 in Executive Digest of the OIG review, Figure 4, Table 7, and Table 8 in the OIG review). These figures are presented as "ATF data" and in tables identified as "the OIG analysis" throughout the report. ***All data released by ATF underwent a thorough validation with the local police departments, and NONE of this data has been verified or validated (with the exception of the homicide by firearms over the 6-month pilot period and the compared 6-month period in 2003).*** ATF made a commitment to its local partners that only verified information would be released for public consumption and has made this clear to the OIG. If these numbers are to be used, we ask that the OIG validate these numbers with the local police departments.

We thank you for your consideration of our concerns as articulated above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned previously, we agree with the OIG's recommendations and have already implemented many of the findings below:

- 1. Establish specific operational guidelines for VCIT implementation and provide training based on these guidelines for ATF special agents in charge (SACs) and VCIT coordinators on tailoring the VCIT initiative to local crime problems.**

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ATF concurs.

VCIT was a pilot program and following the initial 6-month implementation of VCIT, ATF engaged in an in-depth assessment. As previously noted, ATF has published and distributed *Violent Crime Impact Teams, Best Practices* for the very purpose of establishing specific operational guidelines for VCIT implementation. ATF convened two VCIT meetings, August 16 and 23, 2005. During the meetings, each VCIT supervisor presented and fully articulated his/her team's strategy, and preliminary copies of the VCIT best practices document were provided to each supervisor. Presentations on the VCIT strategy, reporting requirements, NIBIN, and operational guidelines for VCIT implementation were made by representatives of ATF's Office of Field Operations and Office of Enforcement Programs and Services.

Current operational guidelines for VCIT, as outlined in VCIT Best Practices Numbers 1 through 10, have been established as the basic tenets for all VCIT cities. Prior to the implementation of each VCIT, ATF executive leadership and ODAG senior staff met with senior representatives from all partner agencies. ATF will continue this practice to ensure that VCIT initiatives are tailored to local crime problems and address the concerns of local communities. Each Division's implementation of this initiative may vary, dependant on particular jurisdictional needs, but will adhere to the Best Practices framework.

2. Develop and implement a predeployment assessment for prospective VCIT locations to determine the potential applicability of VCIT to local violent crime problems.

ATF concurs.

ATF has canvassed each of the ATF SACs requesting a preliminary analysis to form a pool of potential future VCIT cities. These site surveys address crime rates; exact nature of the crime problems in each city; the specific size and location of the proposed VCIT area; and the level of support anticipated from other law enforcement agencies. In addition, ATF, in concert with the Attorney General's Anti-Gang Coordination Committee, participated in the development of the Anti-Gang Coordinating Committee Gang Threat Assessment and Law Enforcement Activity Recommendation. This Recommendation would be used as a template for the submission of all future VCIT sites before an Anti-Gang Task Force Subcommittee for consideration of expanding the program to a new city. The Recommendation is a thorough assessment, an analysis of ongoing law enforcement and task force operations, and a specific plan of operations, including the proposed area of operations and specific goals of the proposed task force. The Recommendation also requires the concurrence of the local U.S. attorney, DEA SAC, FBI SAC, U.S. Marshal, and police chief. The Anti-Gang Task Force Subcommittee will consist of one representative each from ATF, FBI, USMS, Executive Office of United States Attorneys, and DOJ's Criminal Division, and will review and approve all future VCIT sites.

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3. Develop and implement an adequate evaluation strategy to assess VCIT performance and impact on violent firearms crime.

ATF concurs.

ATF realizes that the overall program evaluation will hinge on official, validated crime data as reported through the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The VCIT was a pilot program developed in response to a request from DOJ to address unacceptable levels of homicides. The goal of the VCIT pilot program was to determine if the VCIT strategy could be effective at reducing homicides by focusing efforts and resources on hot spots where homicides most frequently occur. ATF considered the following four sets of data:

1. Number of homicides
2. Number of homicides committed with a firearm
3. Number of violent criminal acts
4. Number of violent criminal acts with a firearm

Each one of these is a valuable indicator of whether or not the VCIT program is having an effect but, considering ATF's firearms jurisdiction, ATF determined that any evaluation should be measured by its impact on firearms-related crimes. ATF concurs with the OIG report and agrees that the best overall evaluation of the VCIT program's success would be the number of violent criminal acts with a firearm. However, it was determined that these numbers could not be satisfactorily validated until the underlying data that make up the UCR issued by the FBI was released to law enforcement for analysis. The VCIT pilot program took place from June – December 2004. As of the date of this report, the UCR data for this time period is still not available for dissection; therefore, ATF clearly could not evaluate the 6-month VCIT pilot program on this measurement, nor could strategic adjustments be made to the program based upon this data. As soon as the data becomes available, ATF will evaluate these numbers and discern if any correlation can be made between the implementation of the VCIT program and the resulting firearms-related violent crime data.

Because of the data's unavailability, the only option remaining was to look at the data set of homicides committed with a firearm. This data set is easily validated by local law enforcement and can therefore be used in a timely manner to obtain a snapshot of crime trends in a specific area. Academics have also found that homicide data is the most accurate crime data available, as it can be more easily validated with coroner and hospital data and less likely to be miscoded by law enforcement personnel. While we acknowledge that the number of homicides committed with a firearm can be a small number in some locations, when the data is analyzed over the 15 VCIT cities and compared to the rest of the cities in the United States, ATF feels that any large difference in a trend is statistically significant. Additionally, this measure goes directly to the stated mission of VCIT to reduce homicides.

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Although firearms-specific data for 2004 is not yet available, official UCR data for total homicides is available. Chart 1 shows the number of homicides committed in the 15 VCIT cities from 2001–2004 as compared to the number of homicides committed in every other city in the United States over the same period. The data was obtained from the correlating UCR for each year. As previously noted, UCR data for the 3 calendar years preceding the 6-month pilot project reflect the 15 VCIT cities' **11.4 percent increase** in homicides as compared to all other cities measured by the UCR, which saw a **4.7 percent increase** during the same period. The homicide rate for these cities during the time the VCIT pilot program was operating fell **8.2 percent** as compared to a decrease of **1.5 percent** in all other U.S. cities. These numbers are dramatic. The incontestable fact that the number of homicides decreased 5.5 times faster in these 15 cities than in the rest of the United States, accounting for 41 percent of the total national decline in homicides, seems beyond mere coincidence or happenstance.

ATF does not claim that the VCIT pilot program alone was responsible for these results but recognizes these results constitute a unique and positive occurrence, particularly for the residents of these communities. ATF looks forward to the opportunity to explore more fully the factors that influenced these historic reductions in crime as firearms-specific UCR data and more data points become available. ATF believes that these measurements were the only way to evaluate the VCIT program in its infancy until validated UCR data becomes available from the FBI. Given the limits of “real-time” crime data, these measures seem appropriate given the VCIT mission to reduce the incidents of homicide.

4. For existing VCITs, where possible, and for future VCITs, establish interagency agreements with Federal and local partner agencies that define resource commitments and operational responsibilities.

ATF concurs.

ATF has developed uniform memorandums of understanding (MOUs) for all future VCIT operations. Drafts of these MOUs are currently being reviewed by ATF counsel. These MOUs, combined with the use of the aforementioned Anti-Gang Coordinating Committee Gang Threat Assessment and Law Enforcement Activity Recommendation, which requires the concurrence of all local law enforcement agency heads — Federal, State, and local — with the establishment of future VCIT operations and their scheme of operations, will accomplish this goal.

ATF is also pleased that both the DEA and USMS have advised that they each intend to request two full-time special agent positions to serve on each of 40 VCITs as a part of the fiscal year 2008 budget process. Discussions continue with the FBI concerning joint efforts between VCIT and Safe Streets Task Forces.

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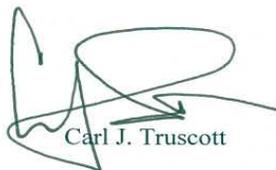
5. Establish management authority and responsibility for overseeing the implementation and evaluation of local VCIT operations in accordance with ATF's VCIT Strategy and the guidelines developed in response to Recommendation 1.

ATF concurs.

VCIT was a pilot program that deliberately provided broad guidance regarding operations. This was intended to both gauge what practices would prove most successful and to allow each community to address specific issues and unique problems that were the root causes of its violent crime problems. For example, it is not important that a VCIT group maintain a list formally known as the "Worst of the Worst Offenders List," as long as that group establishes a method with its law enforcement partners to identify, investigate, and arrest the most violent and egregious offenders — those persons most likely to commit a homicide.

The publication and adoption of the VCIT best practices document has been and will continue to be utilized to establish clear operational guidelines for the implementation of VCIT operations. In addition, all ATF field divisions are required to submit biannual strategic plans that address or reevaluate their current crime problems, target areas, and concepts of operation. ATF field divisions must also submit written justification to substantially vary from the approved VCIT strategic plan. For example, written justification would be needed to change the targeted area. All VCITs are required to submit weekly workload statistics on arrests, traces, and seizures, as well as monthly performance reports on outcome-based measures such as homicides and, where available, violent crime. Narratives on successful and significant cases are also required. Feedback on the timeliness of reporting is provided by monthly online scorecards that address current strategic plans, weekly output reporting, narrative reporting, and monthly performance reporting.

We thank you again for allowing us the opportunity to provide initial comments on the draft report. As outlined above, we concur with all of the recommendations in the OIG report and have already taken action to implement them. ATF is dedicated to reducing violent crime and making our neighborhoods safer and believe that the VCIT initiative has contributed significantly to this mission. We embrace any opportunity or recommendation that will enable us to improve these efforts and meet the challenges of the future. Please contact us if we can provide further clarification.



Carl J. Truscott

APPENDIX V: OIG'S ANALYSIS OF ATF'S RESPONSE

On April 10, 2006, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) provided a draft of this report to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) with a request for written comments. We asked that ATF indicate its concurrence or non-concurrence with each of the five recommendations, describe the actions taken or planned in response to the recommendations, and provide the completion dates of those actions. On April 18, 2006, the Assistant Inspector General for Evaluation and Inspections and the review team met with senior ATF officials to discuss the report's findings.

ATF responded to the OIG in a memorandum dated May 1, 2006. ATF concurred with all five of our recommendations and provided a description of the actions it plans to take in implementing the recommendations. The actions that ATF has taken and plans to take are partially responsive to our recommendations.

Although ATF concurred with each of the report's five recommendations, it disagreed with some of the findings. ATF stated that its "primary disagreement was founded on the fact that the [Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT)] program was a 6-month pilot program actively under review by ATF at the time of the OIG review." ATF contended that the OIG's criticisms regarding the implementation of a pilot program were premature. ATF also expressed concerns related to how the OIG assessed two primary issues: performance measurement and program implementation.

OIG'S ANALYSIS OF ATF'S RESPONSE TO REVIEW'S FINDINGS

The OIG disagrees with ATF's foundational argument that it was premature for the OIG to review the VCIT program. First, on multiple occasions in early 2005, ATF and senior Department officials publicly stated that the VCIT initiative had been a success. For example, on March 17, 2005, 11 months after the program began, the ATF Director announced that the "indications are that VCIT is working. . . . We are acting on these indications of [VCIT] success: we're expanding the VCIT program to five cities immediately and to an additional five later this year." Second, contrary to ATF's contention that the program was "under design" when the OIG conducted its review, the VCIT Strategy that ATF issued in June 2004 has remained essentially the same, as documented in ATF's January 2006 *Violent Crime Impact Teams: Best Practices* report. Given that ATF and Department officials believed that the program was sufficiently mature to

report results and request funding for expansion, and that the program design has not changed significantly since its inception, ATF's contention that it was premature for the OIG to examine the program is not persuasive.

We discuss below other concerns raised by ATF regarding our assessment of the VCIT initiative.

Performance Measurement Findings

ATF contended that the OIG did not recognize that the VCIT initiative had contributed significantly to the decline in homicides and overall violent crime in VCIT cities. ATF discussed its contributions to reducing violent crime through its participation in Project Safe Neighborhoods and VCIT. ATF also provided data that it had not provided during our review to support its claim of success. ATF noted that it is difficult to measure law enforcement success in preventing crime, but attempted to support its assertions of VCIT's success by comparing the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) homicide data from 2001 through 2004 for the 15 pilot VCIT cities versus all other U.S. cities. According to the data that ATF provided, homicides declined 8.2 percent in VCIT cities from 2003 to 2004, but declined only 1.5 percent in U.S. cities without VCITs during that period. ATF concluded that the greater reduction in homicides in VCIT cities was evidence of the VCIT initiative's effectiveness.

The OIG disagrees that ATF's comparison of FBI UCR data on total homicides in the 15 VCIT pilot cities with total homicides in all other U.S. cities that participate in the UCR demonstrates VCIT's success. First, the 15 VCIT pilot cities were selected because they were experiencing high rates of homicide. In contrast, the comparison group of non-VCIT cities included cities where homicide rates were variously increasing, decreasing, and static. Statistically, the trend in the homicide rate for this broad and diverse group of cities will necessarily fluctuate less than that for the smaller group of high-crime VCIT cities, regardless of any new law enforcement operation. Therefore, we would expect to see more change in homicide rates in VCIT cities, regardless of whether the VCIT program had an impact.

Second, in comparing changes in the number of homicides in VCIT pilot cities and in non-VCIT cities, ATF assumed that the VCITs were the only significant difference in anti-violent crime activities between the two groups of cities. In fact, U.S. cities have implemented a broad variety of strategies to reduce homicides and other violent crime. Because cities also differ in other characteristics related to crime, the FBI offers the following

cautionary note with regard to using its UCR data for cross-city comparisons:

Because many of the variables that influence crime in a particular town, city, county, state or region, the UCR Program does not encourage the comparison. Some of those variables include, but are not limited to population density and the degree of urbanization, modes of transportation and highway systems, economic conditions and citizens' attitudes toward crime.

Third, only a small portion of the reduction in homicides in the VCIT pilot cities from 2003 to 2004 could be attributable to local VCIT operations because VCITs: (1) operated in target areas within cities rather than city-wide, (2) did not focus on homicides resulting from domestic violence, and (3) did not begin operating until June 2004, almost half way through the year. Specifically:

- ATF could not determine if reductions in city-wide homicides may have been due, in part, to a reduction in homicides in the VCIT target areas because ATF did not have target area data for more than half (8 of 15) of the pilot cities. For the 7 cities where ATF had target area data on homicides committed with firearms, it did not determine if the target area accounted for a significant portion of the total number of homicides in the city. That analysis is essential for ATF to show that a reduction in homicides committed in the target area could have had a significant impact on the city-wide homicide rate.
- Using the total number of a city's homicides as a measure of VCIT effectiveness is inappropriate because a significant portion of homicides result from domestic violence and VCITs were not designed to focus on domestic violence.
- Because local VCIT operations were not initiated until June 2004, it is highly improbable that the effect of those operations would be reflected in 2004 UCR data. The VCITs required, at a minimum, several months to identify and arrest targeted individuals in the target area and remove them from the target area pending prosecution. As a result, VCITs could not have begun to affect crime rates until the last few months of 2004.

We therefore concluded that the reductions indicated by the UCR data of total city-wide homicides from 2003 to 2004 among the 15 pilot cities

cannot be attributed to the local VCIT operations. Rather than using city-wide UCR data, local police data on homicides for the VCIT target area for several years before and after a VCIT was implemented are required to determine if a relationship exists between a local VCIT operation and a change in that area's homicide rate. The particular type of homicide data to be used for this analysis (e.g., homicides, homicides committed with firearms, or non-domestic homicides) would depend on the specific focus of the VCIT operation.

In sum, the available data were not sufficient to support ATF's conclusions regarding the success of the initiative. While the OIG recognizes that it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of crime prevention efforts, the collection and analysis of appropriate data are essential to provide accurate information to decision-makers who allocate federal funds.

Finally, in its response to the report's performance measurement findings, ATF stated that "the OIG should not base any tables or analysis on *unvalidated* figures (see Table 2 in Executive Digest of the OIG review, Figure 4, Table 7 and Table 8 in the OIG review)."³¹ ATF said that its data on homicides with firearms undergoes a thorough validation with the local police departments and that none of the violent firearms crime data the OIG had referenced had been verified or validated. ATF requested that the OIG validate these numbers it had provided with the local police departments.

The OIG included an analysis of these data to illustrate how the use of more appropriate data could be used for determining the effectiveness of VCITs. However, we have included a footnote for Table 2 in the Executive Digest and Table 7 in the body of the report indicating that the original source of the data was local police departments.

Program Implementation Findings

In its response, ATF stated that the goal of the VCIT pilot was to determine if ATF could affect the number of homicides in specific high-crime areas and identify which elements of the Strategy were effective and should be included in future implementation plans. ATF argued that the OIG prematurely reviewed the VCIT initiative in a way it would have reviewed a government program that had been in operation for many years. ATF further stated that the VCIT Strategy was designed to give local ATF offices a framework so that they could model their implementation of VCIT around

³¹ In the final version of the report, Table 7 was renumbered as Table 6 and Table 8 was renumbered as Table 7.

the aspects of the program that actually worked in their areas. ATF also took issue with the OIG's selection of five key elements that the OIG "believed to be the most important to the implementation of the VCIT strategy" and instead said the OIG should have conducted its evaluation based on six objectives in ATF's Strategy.

The OIG disagrees with ATF on most of those points. First, in referring to our report, ATF states, "We agree that VCIT does prevent crime. . . ." The OIG actually concluded that while the VCIT Strategy itself may be an effective tool to reduce violent crime in target areas, and the OIG also concluded that ATF could not yet determine the effectiveness of the Strategy.

Second, as discussed previously, we initiated this review after ATF officials announced that the VCIT pilot was successful and that they were planning to expand the initiative based on the pilot's success. The pilot took place from June through November 2004. At the time our review began, ATF had almost a full year of VCIT operations for us to review. By the time the OIG's fieldwork was completed, VCIT had been operating in the pilot cities for approximately 18 months.

Third, in our report, we stated that the five key elements we selected were essential to implementing the VCIT initiative and that, collectively, the key elements differentiated VCIT from traditional ATF law enforcement operations. We further explained that we selected these five key elements because the Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG) and ATF officials consistently highlighted them as essential to implementing the VCIT strategy.

Regardless of whether the VCIT Strategy is considered to have five key elements or six objectives, the OIG agrees with ATF's statement that the goal of the pilot was to determine which elements of the strategy were successful and should be included in future implementation. The OIG also recognizes that flexibility is essential to allow the program to be tailored to local conditions. However, the OIG found that, rather than flexibly implementing the VCIT Strategy, some local VCIT operations did not implement the Strategy's essential elements. As a result, ATF did not effectively test the Strategy and cannot support its claim that the VCIT initiative was effective. For example, we found that seven VCITs using a "worst of the worst" list of targeted individuals did not keep it updated, while six did not use such a list at all. We also found that only one VCIT included representatives from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), FBI, and U.S. Marshals Service (USMS), while four VCITs had no representatives from the DEA, FBI, or USMS. Further, during our site

visits, we found that none of those five VCITs actively participated in community outreach.

Specific Findings

1. Target Small Geographic Areas

ATF stated that the use of the term “small” to characterize the intended size of target areas for the VCIT initiative was inappropriate and that the OIG inaccurately described site-specific details in describing VCIT operations in several cities. ATF also stated:

While ATF agrees that some cities may have initially selected a larger area than might be ideal, and concurs that a small area may be a reasonable recommendation, to represent this as a ‘key element’ in the implementation of the pilot misrepresents the strategy.

Specifically, ATF contended that the OIG inaccurately described the VCIT target areas as city-wide for Chattanooga and Miami.

Although ATF did not use the adjective “small” in reference to target areas in the VCIT Strategy, references in the Strategy and interviews with ODAG and ATF officials led us to conclude that a target area was clearly intended to be a small geographical area within a city. In the VCIT Strategy, ATF used the following terms to describe the target areas: “community,” “neighborhood,” “geographic areas within cities,” and “police districts.” The VCIT Strategy also recommended assigning four Special Agents and one supervisory agent to a VCIT target area, which clearly indicated that the target area was to be of limited geographic size. Further, in announcing the VCIT initiative pilot in 15 cities, ATF officials frequently said that the VCITs’ efforts would focus on “hot spots” of violent crime. For example, one ATF official stated, “VCIT is a laser-like approach focusing on hot spots of violence.”

ATF’s contention that the OIG incorrectly described the size of the target areas for the Chattanooga and Miami VCITs is incorrect. In describing the areas within which the VCIT operated, the Chattanooga VCIT Coordinator stated in responding to our survey that during the VCIT’s first 12 months it operated throughout the city-county area and subsequently

reduced the target area to the city.³² Similarly, in response to our survey, the Miami VCIT Coordinator reported that the Miami VCIT operated within the whole of Miami-Dade County and that the VCIT operated in five principal areas within the county that warranted specific attention.

2. Target the Worst Violent Offenders

ATF's response faults the OIG for not including the reasons why six of the VCITs did not use a "worst of the worst" list.

Our analysis of the VCITs' targeting the worst offenders was designed to evaluate whether ATF implemented and measured the impact of this element. The fact that six VCITs did not implement this key element of the VCIT initiative prevented ATF from measuring its effectiveness at those sites, regardless of the reasons for not implementing it. Furthermore, we also found that seven other VCITs did not keep their lists of targeted offenders current, which diminished the usefulness of any attempt to measure the impact of this element in those cities. Overall, 13 of 19 VCIT cities did not implement fully this key element of the VCIT strategy.

The OIG found that VCITs might not have focused on targeted offenders because these offenders represent only about 20 percent of VCIT arrests. The VCIT initiative was designed to focus on the "worst of the worst" in areas with a high volume of violent crime. The fact that only one in five arrestees was classified as a "targeted individual" appeared to be a low ratio. Moreover, over a third of the VCITs arrested less than half of the individuals they targeted while arresting many non-targeted individuals, which indicates that these VCITs did not sufficiently focus on targeted individuals. We agree that arresting additional alleged offenders is positive, but ATF designed the VCITs to focus primarily on the worst of the worst.

The OIG also disagrees with ATF's statement that the OIG does not understand the term "worst of the worst" criminals in a community. We recognized that the definition of the worst of the worst to be targeted across VCITs would likely differ, as each VCIT should have tailored the definition to fit local conditions.³³ Yet, we concluded that to effectively implement and

³² Our report refers to "VCIT Coordinators" because we found that was how ATF personnel commonly referred to people in that particular position. In its response to the report, however, ATF used the term "supervisors."

³³ We agree with ATF that the Philadelphia VCIT's definition constituted an example of an acceptable definition. However, we note that the Philadelphia VCIT did not develop a list of suspects who met this definition.

evaluate the results of this element of the VCIT Strategy, it is necessary to define which offenders will be targeted, develop a list of targeted individuals for each VCIT, and track VCIT arrest data for targeted and non-targeted individuals. Without such information, ATF cannot determine whether a VCIT tailored this element to its local conditions, effectively implemented the element, or obtained the desired results.

3. Build Effective Working Relationships with Community Leaders

ATF disagreed with our finding that VCITs did not incorporate community outreach into their strategies and asserted that each of the five cities that the OIG identified as not participating in community outreach either had a direct community outreach or a complementary outreach mechanism in place.

The information the OIG developed during our site visits does not support ATF's contention that community outreach was incorporated into these cities' VCIT strategies. During our site visit in Tampa, for example, several local ATF officials told us that the VCIT was not involved in any community outreach activities. Only one local official indicated that there had been some community involvement when the VCIT was initiated. The officials indicated that ATF participated in other programs in Tampa, including Drug-Free Kids and the Great American Teach-In, but these were independent of the VCIT initiative. Similarly, during our visit to Tucson, local ATF officials reported that the VCIT did not participate in community activities. However, we noted in our report that the Tucson Police Department told us that it had mentioned the VCIT at community meetings.

Further, none of the three examples of ATF community outreach in Tampa and Tucson address the VCIT Strategy objective to "work with community leaders to cultivate solid and sustained commitment between the residents of the community and law enforcement authorities to ensure positive results." In their responses to our survey, none of the 19 VCIT Coordinators reported community activities that addressed the objective of working with community leaders. Finally, during our site visits, we found no instance, and ATF's response offered no examples, of a VCIT reaching out "to social service agencies, nonprofit community assistance agencies, faith-based groups, schools, and private businesses to promote a comprehensive and coordinated community action plan to deal with gang suppression, intervention, and prevention." Consequently, we concluded that our description of the VCIT outreach activity was full and accurate.

4. Utilized ATF's Investigative Technology Resources

ATF stated that the OIG mischaracterized the VCITs' use of technology resources by stating that they did not consistently use the National Tracing Center (NTC), National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN), and Crime Gun Analysis Branch (CGAB) services. ATF stated that the OIG's survey results revealed extensive use of the technologies. In its response, ATF also faults the Executive Digest of our report for not fully presenting much of the site-specific detail and not incorporating the full results of the review contained in the body of the report.

Although the OIG acknowledges that, in response to our survey, most of the VCITs reported that they use these technologies, we do not agree with ATF's contention that the data rebut our finding that the VCITs used the technologies inconsistently. For example, with respect to the NTC usage, our report states, "Overall, during the 1-year period following the implementation of the initial 15 VCITs, NTC data showed a 15-percent increase in the number of trace requests it received from those cities. However, because the city-wide NTC data is not specific to the VCIT target areas, the changes may not be attributable to VCIT operations. We also noted that while 11 of the cities increased their NTC usage, 4 submitted fewer trace requests."³⁴ Further, over half of the VCIT cities made fewer submissions to the NIBIN after ATF implemented local VCIT operations.

5. Work in Partnership with Other Department Law Enforcement Components

ATF stated that its greatest concern regarding the OIG's finding on the VCITs' working in partnership with other Department law enforcement components is that the OIG measured this element by the participation levels of the other components. ATF also stated that ATF is concerned that local law enforcement participation is understated in the report.

The OIG disagrees with ATF's contention that partnerships with other Department components should not be used to measure law enforcement coordination because it is not consistent with the VCIT Strategy. While ATF was assigned to be the lead agency, the VCIT initiative was intended to involve the Department's other law enforcement components. This is reflected in the VCIT Strategy and in virtually every Department press

³⁴ Annual firearms tracing data was unavailable for the VCITs that were added in 2005.

release and speech by ATF and Department officials addressing the VCIT program.

Although we believed ATF's argument regarding federal partners to be unpersuasive, we added to the report older data on law enforcement partnerships during the pilot period. The report now includes Department component partner data obtained through the VCIT Coordinator Survey for both the pilot period (June 2004 through November 2004) and for September 2005.

In addition, the OIG agrees with ATF that local law enforcement agencies are a key resource for VCIT in achieving many of the program's objectives, and we included local and state law enforcement partners in our descriptions of the VCITs we visited. These groups play a key role in identifying appropriate target areas, identifying and arresting the "worst of the worst" violent offenders in those areas, and in identifying and reaching out to community groups to gain support and cooperation.

ATF'S RESPONSE TO OIG'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Establish specific operational guidelines for VCIT implementation, and provide training based on these guidelines for ATF Special Agents in Charge and VCIT Coordinators on tailoring the VCIT initiative to local crime problems.

Status: Resolved – Open

Summary of ATF's Response: ATF concurred with this recommendation. In addition, ATF reported that it had completed an in-depth assessment of the 6-month pilot implementation of VCIT, which included meetings with all VCIT Coordinators in August 2005. During these meetings, the VCIT Coordinators articulated their VCIT teams' strategies. ATF provided the Coordinators with preliminary copies of a report, *Violent Crime Impact Teams: Best Practices*, and ATF personnel made presentations on the overall VCIT Strategy, reporting requirements, the NIBIN, and operational guidelines for VCIT implementation.

ATF also responded that the 10 best practices contained in the *Best Practices* report "have been established as the basic tenets for all VCIT cities." ATF stated that its "executive leadership" and ODAG "senior staff" have met with senior representatives from all partner agencies prior to each VCIT implementation to ensure that the VCITs are tailored to local crime problems and to address the concerns of the communities where the VCITs

were to be located. They further stated that this practice will continue as ATF implements additional VCITs. Finally, ATF stated that VCIT implementations may vary within the *Best Practices* framework.

OIG's Analysis: ATF's actions are partially responsive to this recommendation. We agree that ATF has taken an important first step in developing operational guidance for implementing the VCIT strategy by defining the 10 best practices that each VCIT should implement. We also agree with ATF that the VCITs must be tailored to local crime problems. Because a key finding of our review was that rather than tailoring the key elements of the VCIT Strategy to local operations, VCITs ignored many of the elements, ATF's operational guidance should clarify that all VCITs are required to adapt the 10 best practices and also set standards and provide guidance for implementing each practice.

For example, ATF should include guidance to the Field Divisions regarding criteria and standards for selecting target areas to address issues such as level of crime, size, population density, and the number of ATF Special Agents to be assigned. The standards would become the basis for ATF to determine whether a VCIT is, in fact, implementing the best practices.

To close this recommendation, by August 15, 2006, please provide the OIG with the guidance provided to ATF Field Divisions explaining ATF requirement that VCITs tailor the 10 best practices to local conditions and the standards that ATF will use to judge whether each of the 10 best practices has been implemented. In addition, please provide the OIG with copies of the presentations, including any handouts used during VCIT Coordinator meetings, on how to implement the VCIT Strategy, meet reporting requirements, and use the NIBIN.

Recommendation 2: Develop and implement a pre-deployment assessment for prospective VCIT locations to determine the potential applicability of VCIT to local violent crime problems.

Status: Resolved – Open

Summary of ATF's Response: ATF concurred with this recommendation. ATF stated that it has surveyed all ATF Special Agents in Charge (SAC) requesting recommendations for cities where future VCITs might be deployed. The SACs reportedly based their recommendations on preliminary analyses of site surveys, which addressed crime rates, the exact nature of the crime problem in each of the recommended cities, the specific size and location of the proposed VCIT target area, and the level of support

anticipated from other law enforcement agencies. In addition, ATF reported that it has worked with the Attorney General's Anti-Gang Coordinating Committee in developing a Gang Threat Assessment and Law Enforcement Activity Recommendation. The Committee, composed of one representative from each of the Department's law enforcement and criminal prosecution components, will review and approve all future VCIT sites. According to ATF's response, "The [Activity] Recommendation is a thorough assessment, an analysis of ongoing law enforcement and task force operations, and a specific plan of operations, including the proposed area of operations and specific goals of the proposed task force." In its response, ATF stated that it will use the Activity Recommendation as a template for the submission of all future VCIT sites to the Anti-Gang Coordinating Committee for consideration.

OIG's Analysis: ATF's actions are responsive to our recommendation. The OIG agrees that ATF's new process involves its SACs in selecting cities for VCIT deployment. That change should provide ATF Headquarters with better information about local crime conditions and law enforcement resources, something the OIG found lacking when the original cities were selected. To close this recommendation, by August 15, 2006, please provide a copy of, or provide access to the OIG to review, the site survey used to collect information from ATF SACs and the Coordinating Committee's assessment and recommendation forms. In addition, please provide three examples of the survey responses and the assessment and recommendation for cities under active consideration for VCIT implementation.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement an adequate evaluation strategy to assess VCIT performance and impact on violent firearms crime.

Status: Resolved – Open

Summary of ATF's Response: ATF concurred with this recommendation and stated that it will base its program evaluation on official, validated, crime data as reported through the FBI's UCR. ATF's explained that it now believes that its initial selection of four performance measures, which included all homicides and all violent crimes, was overreaching. ATF stated that "considering ATF's firearms jurisdiction, ATF determined that any evaluation [of VCIT effectiveness] should be measured by its impact on firearms-related crimes." It further concurred with the OIG that "the best overall evaluation of the VCIT program's success would be the number of violent criminal acts [committed] with a firearm."

ATF explained that data on the reports of criminal acts committed with a firearm could not be satisfactorily validated until the underlying data that make up the UCR were released to law enforcement agencies for analysis. Further, ATF stated that as of May 1, 2006 (18 months after the end of the pilot), these data were still not available from the FBI. Because firearms-related violent crime data were not available from the FBI's UCR, ATF used homicide data to determine the impact of the VCITs. Acknowledging that the number of homicides committed with a firearm was small in some VCIT cities, ATF stated that "when the homicide data is analyzed over the 15 VCIT cities and compared to the rest of the cities in the United States, ATF feels any large difference in a trend is statistically significant."

ATF's response included an analysis of UCR data for total homicides reported (as opposed to firearms-related homicides) that shows the homicide rate during the VCIT pilot period (June 2004 through November 2004) in the 15 VCIT cities fell 8.2 percent, while the homicide rate during the same period in all other U.S. cities fell 1.5 percent. ATF concluded by saying that it does not claim that the VCIT initiative alone was responsible for these results. However, ATF said it does believe that there was a "unique and positive occurrence" in the VCIT communities and that the decline in homicides "seems beyond mere coincidences and happenstance." Finally, ATF stated that the homicide measures used seem appropriate given ATF's mission.

OIG's Analysis: ATF's actions are partially responsive to this recommendation. The OIG agrees with ATF that continued emphasis on evaluation of the VCIT initiative is critical. We also agree that the best outcome measure of VCIT success is changes in violent firearms crime rather than only changes in the number of homicides committed with firearms. The OIG does not agree with ATF's contention that UCR data are appropriate for measuring the impact of VCITs on violent firearms crimes and also disagrees with conclusions based on the analysis of UCR homicide data. FBI Uniform Crime Reports are issued for U.S. cities approximately 2 years after the year for which the data are collected (e.g., 2004 data will be released in 2006). However, to determine whether violent firearms crime is declining in the part of a city where a VCIT operates, ATF needs to obtain crime data for the target area at regular intervals from the local police department. For example, the ATF could collect data from a local police crime-mapping program or from victimization surveys in the target area.³⁵

³⁵ To ensure that the necessary target area data are available to evaluate the impact of VCIT on violent firearm crime, ATF's site survey should request information on the
(Continued)

To correctly attribute to VCITs any observed crime reductions, the evaluation strategy must assess how well the VCITs have implemented the 10 best practices. In the section of our report on evaluation, we provided examples of performance measures that could be used to assess how well VCITs implemented the five key elements, which are included in the 10 best practices.

To close this recommendation, by August 15, 2006, please provide the OIG with a copy of ATF's guidance to the Field Divisions on implementing an evaluation strategy that provides information on how well local VCIT operations are adapting and implementing the 10 best practices, outcome data on violent firearms crime in the target area, and requirements for reporting evaluation data and information to ATF Headquarters.

Recommendation 4: For existing VCITs, where possible, and for future VCITs, establish interagency agreements with federal and local partner agencies that define resource commitments and operational responsibilities.

Status: Resolved – Open

Summary of ATF's Response: ATF concurred with this recommendation. ATF stated that it has developed uniform Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for all future VCIT operations and that these MOUs are under review by ATF counsel. ATF stated that the MOUs, in conjunction with the Coordinating Committee's assessment and recommendation forms that require concurrence by all participating law enforcement agencies, will provide a full understanding of resource commitments and operational responsibilities.

ATF further responded that the DEA and USMS fiscal year 2008 budget request will include funding for 2 full-time positions to serve on each of 40 VCITs.

OIG's Analysis: ATF's actions are responsive to this recommendation. To close this recommendation, by August 15, 2006, please provide copies of ATF counsel-approved standard MOUs that ATF plans to use in the future.

accessibility of such data. ATF should also address access to local crime data in its Memorandums of Understanding with local law enforcement agencies (see Recommendation 4).

Recommendation 5: Establish management authority and responsibility for overseeing the implementation and evaluation of local VCIT operations in accordance with ATF's VCIT Strategy and the guidelines developed in response to Recommendation 1.

Status: Resolved – Open

Summary of ATF's Response: ATF concurred with this recommendation. ATF stated that VCIT was a pilot program and therefore ATF provided broad guidance to the field to gauge what practices would prove most successful as well as to allow each VCIT to address specific community issues and unique problems that were the root causes of the violent crime problem.

ATF's response states that its *Best Practices* report will continue to serve as clear operational guidance for the VCITs' operations. Additionally, ATF Field Divisions are now required to submit biannual plans that address or reevaluate current crime problems, target areas, and concepts of operations. The Field Divisions must also submit written justifications if they wish to vary from the approved local VCIT strategic plans. In addition, Field Divisions are required to submit weekly workload statistics on arrests, gun traces, and seizures, and monthly performance reports on outcome measures such as number of homicides and, where available, violent crime statistics.

OIG's Analysis: ATF's actions are partially responsive to our recommendation. We agree that the information ATF now requires from each Field Division on its VCIT operations will assist ATF Headquarters in overseeing the implementation of the VCIT initiative. However, ATF did not identify the organizational units at ATF Headquarters that have the responsibility for reviewing and assessing this information and the authority to direct adjustments in VCIT implementation where necessary.

To close this recommendation, by August 15, 2006, please identify the organizational units within ATF that will be responsible for overseeing:

- (1) the implementation and evaluation of local VCIT operations and ensuring that the local VCITs are meeting their reporting requirements and
- (2) compliance with ATF's VCIT Strategy, including the guidelines developed in response to Recommendation 1. If these responsibilities are allocated among different units, provide a description of how these units communicate and coordinate to ensure compliance with VCIT operating, reporting, and evaluation guidelines.