



# Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program



AUDIT DIVISION

24-078

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program

### Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) is effectively meeting its mission regarding analytical support for and coordination with law enforcement agencies. Specifically, our audit evaluated ViCAP's: (1) data collection efforts to determine whether it sufficiently and appropriately generates actionable leads and program participation and (2) outreach, training, and coordination efforts with law enforcement agencies.

### Results in Brief

We found that ViCAP has experienced challenges effectively meeting its mission of providing coordination and support to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. Recently enacted state legislation and Department of Justice (DOJ) grants requiring ViCAP usage have caused case submissions to increase almost 3,000 percent since fiscal year (FY) 2018, while ViCAP's technology processes, funding, and staffing remained essentially unchanged. As a result, ViCAP's workload has significantly increased, causing a backlog of almost 19,000 case entries needing review, a delay in and denial of investigative analysis requests, a lack of technological improvements, and unmet training demands. Yet, we found that the FBI does not have a comprehensive strategy to address these challenges. With the expected continued growth of case submissions, we believe the FBI should evaluate ViCAP's required personnel and financial resources and establish a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses these concerns, anticipates future demand for ViCAP services, and ensures long-term success.

### Recommendations

We identified three recommendations for the FBI to address the challenges facing ViCAP's effective achievement of its mission. The FBI's response to our draft audit report can be found in Appendix 2.

### Audit Results

Established by a congressional mandate, ViCAP conducts crime and case linkage analysis of certain types of violent crimes shared within its database by law enforcement agencies nationwide to facilitate investigative coordination among these agencies for the apprehension of violent, serial offenders. For FYs 2018 through 2023, submissions into the ViCAP Database grew almost 3,000 percent, largely due to recent state legislation for law enforcement agencies in Texas and Georgia, as well as a DOJ grant program, to submit eligible cases.

We found that this growth, along with antiquated technology and flat staffing and funding levels, has resulted in a backlog of almost 19,000 case entries needing a quality control review, ViCAP having to delay and deny requests for analysis, and a lack of technological advancements and in-person opportunities to provide outreach and training. In addition, despite the substantial increase in case submissions, we found a relatively low percentage of law enforcement agencies are registered ViCAP users, and some, including those from large cities, were not actively submitting cases into the ViCAP Database. Because ViCAP's effectiveness relies upon an expansive data set, the limited participation and the data entry backlog ultimately reduce the ability to link crimes. Moreover, these challenges create the risk that ViCAP will not fully achieve its mission, as they may hinder law enforcement agencies' confidence in the program, thereby further reducing participation.

We also found that the FBI does not have a comprehensive strategy to address these challenges, nor has it established performance metrics that could help assess ViCAP's effectiveness and resource needs. We believe the FBI should formally evaluate the increasing demand for ViCAP's services along with its technological and resource needs, and develop a comprehensive strategy to address the sustainability and long-term success of ViCAP.

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
OIG Audit Approach.....	3
<b>Audit Results.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Significant Growth in Submissions Without Increased Resources or Improved Technology Has Resulted in Unmet Program Demands.....	4
ViCAP Database and Technological Improvements.....	6
Quality Control of Case Submissions.....	7
Investigative Analysis.....	8
Outreach and Training Efforts.....	9
Program Planning Efforts.....	11
<b>Conclusion and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Objective.....	16
Scope and Methodology.....	16
Statement on Compliance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards.....	16
Internal Controls.....	17
Computer-Processed Data.....	17
<b>APPENDIX 2: The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Response to the Draft Audit Report.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: OIG Analysis and Summary of Actions Necessary to Close the Audit Report.....</b>	<b>20</b>

## Introduction

In response to a congressional mandate, in 1985 the Department of Justice (DOJ) established the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) to provide expertise to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies confronted with unusual, particularly vicious, and/or repetitive violent crime. Within the NCAVC, the FBI created the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) to provide law enforcement agencies reporting similarly patterned violent crimes with the information necessary to initiate a coordinated multi-agency investigation, which could lead to the expeditious identification and apprehension of the offender responsible for the crimes. ViCAP's mission is to: (1) operate and maintain the ViCAP National Crime Database (ViCAP Database), the only nationwide investigative repository of violent crimes that allows law enforcement agencies to make cross-jurisdictional matches of significant violent crimes; (2) provide crime analysis support to investigative and analytical components of local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies; and (3) facilitate communication and investigative coordination among law enforcement agencies for the apprehension of violent, serial offenders. As part of this mission, ViCAP analyzes data to identify potential links among cases involving categories of homicides, sexual assaults, missing persons, or unidentified human remains, which ViCAP refers to as "criteria cases." For example, by identifying commonalities in cases, ViCAP played an instrumental role in convicting Samuel Little, who confessed to murdering almost 100 individuals across 19 states between 1970 and 2005. The success of ViCAP in linking crimes, however, directly correlates to the quantity and quality of behavior-based information that participating law enforcement agencies enter into the ViCAP Database, which is voluntary.

### ViCAP Criteria Cases

*Homicides (and attempts) that are apparently random, motiveless, or sexually oriented, or are known or suspected to be part of a series.*

*Sexual assaults committed by a stranger, or those known or suspected to be part of a series.*

*Missing persons where the circumstances indicate a strong possibility of foul play and the victim is still missing.*

*Unidentified human remains where the manner of death is known or suspected to be homicide.*

Source: FBI

The NCAVC's ViCAP is housed within one of the FBI's Investigative Operations Support Section's Behavioral Analysis Units, which falls under the FBI's Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG). ViCAP is staffed by Crime Analysts and a team of system developers and support staff contracted to perform maintenance and updates to the ViCAP system. ViCAP Crime Analysts are assigned to a geographic region covering four to nine states and territories and are responsible for carrying out ViCAP's mission. Among their responsibilities, ViCAP Crime Analysts conduct quality control reviews of each ViCAP Database entry to ensure records are accurate, complete, and meet the ViCAP case criteria, as well as to identify duplicate cases and any sensitive information, such as victim names. These analysts also perform investigative analysis—either upon request from a law enforcement agency or when self-initiated based upon identified cases for which they believe they can add value. The analysts are aided in their efforts by the ViCAP Database's daily case matching functionality, which automatically compares each new case against existing cases to identify similar characteristics and generate potential investigative leads.<sup>1</sup> ViCAP Crime Analysts can produce an array of products tailored to the recipient's needs, such as Crime Analysis Reports (CAR),

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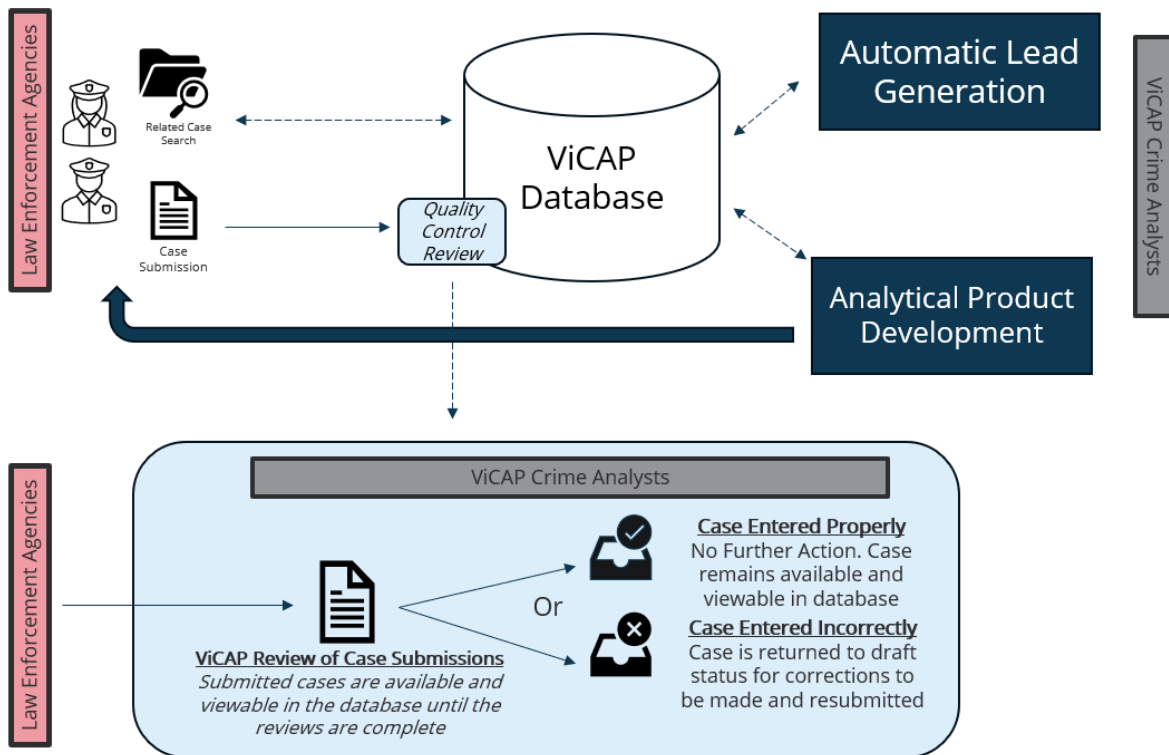
<sup>1</sup> Law enforcement agencies that are registered users of ViCAP can also conduct their own analyses of case submissions within the ViCAP Database.

which contain a summary of analytical findings, as well as recommendations of additional investigative leads and resources. In addition, ViCAP Crime Analysts coordinate with law enforcement agencies through outreach and training efforts.

Figure 1 shows the ViCAP workflow process, from the initial case submission by a law enforcement agency to ViCAP's provision of investigative analysis and case linkage support.

Figure 1

ViCAP Workflow Process



Source: OIG Analysis of ViCAP Processes

## OIG Audit Approach

The objective of our audit was to determine whether ViCAP is effectively meeting its mission regarding analytical support for and coordination with law enforcement agencies. Specifically, our audit evaluated ViCAP's: (1) data collection efforts to determine whether it sufficiently and appropriately generated actionable leads and program participation; and (2) outreach, training, and coordination efforts with law enforcement agencies. To accomplish our objective, we interviewed several FBI personnel, including the Assistant Director of CIRG, the Section Chief and Assistant Section Chief of the Investigative Operations Support Section, ViCAP's Supervisory Crime Analyst and Crime Analysts, and field office personnel involved with ViCAP. We also interviewed an official from the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Bureau of Justice Assistance regarding DOJ grant programs that have ViCAP requirements. In addition, we interviewed federal and local law enforcement agency officials and other recipients of ViCAP analytical products. Further, we reviewed ViCAP-related documentation, including policies, guidance, training presentations; a judgmental sample of ViCAP analytical products; and certain state laws requiring the submission of information into the ViCAP Database. Appendix 1 contains further details on our audit objective, scope, and methodology.

## Audit Results

We found that ViCAP has experienced challenges effectively meeting its mission of providing coordination and support to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies, and that the FBI does not have a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges. We found that between fiscal year (FY) 2018 and FY 2023, the number of case submissions entered into the ViCAP Database increased by almost 3,000 percent, while ViCAP's personnel and financial resources for technological advancements and other program activity remained relatively unchanged. With this situation compounded by antiquated technological processes, such as its automated case linkage tool that has not been updated since its development in 2010 and manual quality control reviews, ViCAP has been unable to keep pace with its workload, including demands for investigative assistance, system improvements, outreach, and training—leading to delayed and, in some instances, denied requests for analysis and training. Further, despite the overall increased number of case submissions, we found that several large law enforcement agencies in metropolitan areas are not actively submitting cases into the ViCAP Database.

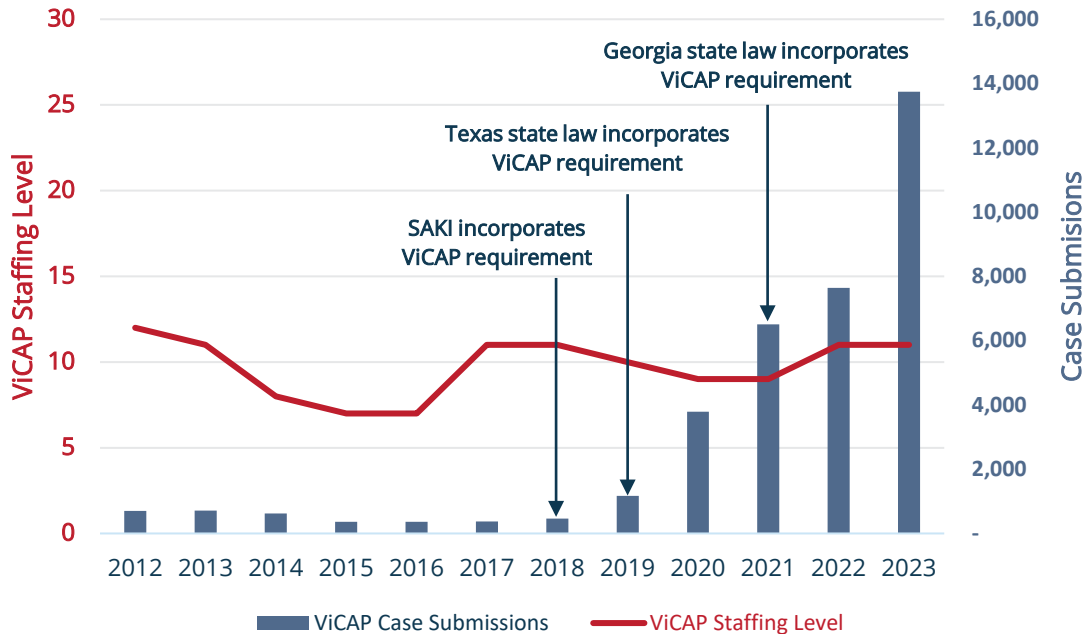
Given the increasing imbalance between the demand for ViCAP's services and its resources, we believe it is vital that CIRG formally evaluate the personnel and financial resources needed to respond to anticipated future demand for ViCAP services and share the results with FBI executive leadership which, in turn, should determine what actions necessary to meet ViCAP's anticipated needs should be taken (e.g., whether to allocate the needed resources and/or leverage other similar activities within the FBI). Once such an evaluation is completed and a determination is made, ViCAP would then be positioned to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that accounts for any anticipated short-term and long-term changes in demands for its services, quality control, technological advancements, and outreach and training, and includes meaningful and achievable performance measures that can help define the program's future success. Without such a plan, we believe that ViCAP risks losing the confidence of its participants, which could hinder their participation in the program and, in turn, erode ViCAP's ability to link crimes.

### **Significant Growth in Submissions Without Increased Resources or Improved Technology Has Resulted in Unmet Program Demands**

The number of case submissions into the ViCAP Database has significantly increased from 463 in FY 2018 to 13,750 in FY 2023, an almost 3,000-percent increase, as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

ViCAP Case Submissions and Staffing Levels  
FYs 2012 to 2023



Source: OIG analysis of FBI data

New requirements included in some state legislation and requirements in a DOJ grant program contributed to the spikes in submissions over the past several years. Specifically, in 2019 and 2021 two states—Texas and Georgia, respectively—enacted legislation that mandates their law enforcement agencies enter case data into the ViCAP Database.<sup>2</sup> In addition, DOJ’s Bureau of Justice Assistance *Sexual Assault Kit Initiative* (SAKI) grant program incorporated a requirement to submit case information into the ViCAP Database as part of the grant agreement.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on entering case information into the ViCAP Database by states and grant-making components demonstrates that these entities value a nationwide database that can help solve crimes and assist in the apprehension of violent criminals.

<sup>2</sup> Texas Government Code Title 4, Section 420.036, <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/GV/htm/GV.420.htm>. Georgia General Assembly O.C.G.A. § 35-1-23, <https://www.fultoncountyga.gov/commissioners/clerk-to-the-commission/code-of-georgia>.

<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) completed an audit of the Bureau of Justice Assistance *Sexual Assault Kit Initiative* in July 2022. DOJ OIG Audit of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Sexual Assault Kit Initiative, Audit Report 22-092 (July 2022), [oig.justice.gov/reports/audit-bureau-justice-assistances-national-sexual-assault-kit-initiative](https://oig.justice.gov/reports/audit-bureau-justice-assistances-national-sexual-assault-kit-initiative). In addition to the SAKI grant program, DOJ administers two other grant programs—the *Missing and Unidentified Human Remains Program* and *Prosecuting Cold Cases Using DNA*—that also include a requirement for grant recipients to enter relevant case information into the ViCAP Database.



Despite this increase in case submissions, ViCAP's staffing and funding levels have remained relatively flat since FY 2018, when the first of the new requirements began, with an average of approximately 10 positions allocated at \$1.6 million in personnel costs and approximately \$1.4 million budgeted annually to fund the non-personnel costs of the program. Exacerbating the situation, and as a result of the stagnant staffing levels and funding, certain ViCAP technological processes are antiquated and have not evolved. For example, law enforcement agencies manually enter detailed case information into the ViCAP Database, and ViCAP's quality control process requires the manual review of responses to nearly 100 questions concerning case information, some with multiple data fields. In addition, as described in more detail below, ViCAP's automated case linkage tool, developed over a decade ago, has not been updated to keep pace with industry standards for voluminous database analysis. The lack of staffing and the antiquated technology and processes have left ViCAP Crime Analysts unable to keep pace with the increased workload and demand for services, with specific difficulties coming in the areas of conducting quality control reviews, investigative analysis, outreach, and training.

### **ViCAP Database and Technological Improvements**

The success of ViCAP is dependent upon the ViCAP Database's ability to successfully link case information. Yet, despite the large increase in case submissions and an information technology system in need of upgrade, ViCAP's information technology contract budget has remained essentially unchanged over the last 4 years. According to ViCAP staff, continuing the current level of funding will lead to further issues, including delays in system updates.

Given the volume of information within the ViCAP Database and its expected continued growth arising from state and Department requirements, ViCAP must ensure that its system has a process to handle the information, which includes the effective and efficient collection, storage, and analysis of information. However, we believe that the current system is not sufficient for the task. For example, law enforcement officials described a burdensome case entry process, which makes participation in ViCAP difficult for agencies with a lack of resources and investigators with heavy caseloads. Likewise, a ViCAP official indicated to us that ViCAP's automated case linkage tool—which operates in the background of the ViCAP Database and provides computer-generated linkages among cases by comparing attributes, scoring the results, and ranking potential linked cases based on defined thresholds—has not been significantly updated since its development by FBI personnel in 2010, and it therefore does not incorporate advanced technology, such as machine learning, which has become the industry standard for voluminous database analysis. In addition, ViCAP's quality control review process is largely manual, which takes time away from investigative analysis and has led to a significant backlog in case submissions in need of review, as discussed further below.

To address these concerns, ViCAP has implemented certain system features and has additional planned upgrades for its system. For example, ViCAP wants to implement a tool to help expedite law enforcement agencies' case entry efforts. However, this tool and other enhancements have been postponed because immediate attention has been required of ViCAP's limited information technology staff to address more critical enhancements, such as system maintenance. The continued postponement of planned upgrades could risk negatively impacting law enforcement agency usage of ViCAP and the resulting investigative analysis. With the ViCAP Database serving as the cornerstone of ViCAP's ability to fulfill its mission, we believe the FBI must consider how certain technological advancements, or lack thereof, may impact ViCAP's operations.

## Quality Control of Case Submissions

ViCAP's success in linking cases and generating investigative leads is also dependent on the information input by law enforcement agencies. As a result, ViCAP Crime Analysts perform manual quality control reviews on all case entries to ensure that they are complete, accurate, and meet eligibility standards, such as satisfying case criteria definitions. ViCAP procedures place a 7-day quality control completion timeframe on all case entries, yet ViCAP management acknowledged that ViCAP does not have the necessary resources to keep pace with the growing number of case submissions. As of March 1, 2023, ViCAP had a backlog of over 12,000 cases requiring quality control review, which increased to nearly 16,000 at the beginning of July 2023, and surpassed 18,600 by October 15, 2023. To help address the backlog while balancing the analytical workload, ViCAP management set an informal goal for each analyst to quality control review 240 case entries per year. Although the Crime Analysts surpassed this goal in FY 2023 by reviewing a total of 3,225 case entries, even at this rate ViCAP will be unable to address the current backlog, as well as the quality control review of new case submissions.

ViCAP's quality control backlog presents operational challenges. If quality control is not completed timely, ViCAP risks having incomplete, inaccurate, or ineligible cases in the ViCAP Database. It is also possible for eligible cases not to be shared, as the ViCAP system allows law enforcement agencies to designate entries with sensitive information as non-shareable, which means other law enforcement agencies cannot see or search on those records, and at times law enforcement agencies have incorrectly used the non-shareable designation due to the law enforcement agencies' misunderstanding of the ViCAP Database's access controls. Such errors are typically caught during quality control, and therefore, delays in conducting that quality control can limit how productive database searches are and result in missed opportunities to generate investigative leads.

Importantly, the same Crime Analysts who conduct quality control reviews are also responsible for other critical services, most notably investigative analysis, discussed in more detail below. We, therefore, believe that ViCAP's efforts to address its growing quality control backlog should be considered as part of a comprehensive strategic assessment of ViCAP's mission success. Such an assessment should include an examination of the relative importance of its quality control responsibilities and its investigative analysis priorities, and where the Crime Analysts' efforts are better placed. It should also include an examination of the existing quality control review methodology, with an emphasis on identifying opportunities to streamline its operations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For example, quality control reviews include a search for potentially sensitive information, including victim names. While the ViCAP system is designed to automatically mask surviving victim names when entered in designated data fields, ViCAP officials told us that the responsibility to remove surviving victim identities or other sensitive information in either open-ended narratives or supporting attachments resides with the agency submitting the case information. Although ViCAP Crime Analysts highlighted the importance of their work to identify potentially sensitive information during the quality control review process and were understandably concerned about this information being viewable by other law enforcement agencies, a representative from the FBI's Office of the General Counsel told us that, as reflected in the ViCAP Database's Privacy Impact Assessment, the ViCAP system has adequate controls to mitigate these sensitivity concerns, and that verified law enforcement agencies voluntarily enter information for the purpose of sharing and helping solve crimes. Implicit in this view of the FBI Office of the General Counsel representative is the possibility that ViCAP may not need to spend time during quality control reviews looking for sensitive information that law enforcement agencies have chosen to share. We did not attempt as part of this audit to resolve the ViCAP analysts' and the OGC representative's apparently divergent viewpoints on this matter.

## Investigative Analysis

One of ViCAP's main functions is conducting investigative analyses, either in response to specific requests from law enforcement agencies or when self-initiated by ViCAP Crime Analysts. ViCAP management reviews all analysis requests, determines whether the requests fit within ViCAP's purview, and then assigns those requests based upon ViCAP's current caseload, which is prioritized based on the type of crime. The comprehensive product that ViCAP Crime Analysts develop to document their analysis is a Crime Analysis Report (CAR). CARs contain a case synopsis, summary of analytical findings, and recommendations of additional investigative resources, along with appendices that can be tailored to the recipient's needs, such as investigative leads matrices, timelines, and biographical summaries. For FYs 2017 to 2023, ViCAP produced an average of 82 CARs annually.

To understand the value of ViCAP and its investigative analysis, we judgmentally selected a sample of CARs and spoke to the recipients of those reports.<sup>5</sup> All the recipients with whom we spoke provided positive feedback regarding the investigative analysis contained within the CARs. Specifically, recipients spoke about the value of receiving information after a case had gone cold, the ability to link cases or exclude them from a possible pattern analysis, and how ViCAP's expert analysis augments the efforts of investigators and Special Agents with heavy caseloads and limited investigative resources. In addition, some of the CARs we reviewed included a ViCAP Alert, or bulletin, that was disseminated to all ViCAP users nationwide to share and draw attention to the specifics of a particular case or cases, and that resulted in coordination and discussion with other agencies. For instance, one recipient stated that they received multiple calls from other law enforcement agencies within 15 minutes of the ViCAP Alert being issued.<sup>6</sup> Based upon their experiences, the CAR recipients told us that they would either continue or were more likely to continue requesting ViCAP analysis. To highlight the importance of ViCAP within the FBI, one FBI Special Agent told us that the CAR they received was a "lifesaver," as ViCAP is the "only team in the FBI with the time to support a case agent with a large-scale deep dive of potential suspects and victims."

Despite the value that ViCAP's analytical efforts provide, ViCAP Crime Analysts told us that their current workload prohibits them from conducting some proactive, self-initiated, risk-based searches and providing resulting analysis to law enforcement agencies. ViCAP officials also informed us that they have delayed and denied requests for investigative analysis due to the Crime Analysts' significant workload. According to ViCAP, from October 31, 2022, through September 30, 2023, it delayed or denied 101 requests for analysis at the time of receipt, or over 40 percent of 232 eligible requests pertaining to cases in the ViCAP Database. While we understand the increasing workload for the ViCAP Crime Analysts, it is concerning that there are law enforcement agencies unable to receive the assistance that ViCAP promotes and that has been beneficial to those who have received assistance. We believe ViCAP's inability to provide requested analysis, as well as to conduct proactive searches and provide preemptive analysis, can increase the potential for law enforcement agencies to stop entering cases into the ViCAP Database, as well as diminish the purpose and functionality of the ViCAP Database to effectively link cases and help apprehend serial violent criminals. However, as noted above, because the same Crime Analysts who conduct investigative analysis are also

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<sup>5</sup> We employed a judgmental sampling design to provide coverage of various characteristics, such as the type of criteria case and law enforcement agency, geographical location, and number of leads generated from the product. We were able to speak with the recipients from 9 of the 16 selected CARs, which included 17 officials from local law enforcement agencies, FBI Special Agents, and another federal agency.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of ViCAP Alerts can be found at <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/vicap>.

responsible for other critical services, including quality control reviews, we also believe that any expansion to ViCAP's capacity for investigative analysis needs to be planned as part of a more comprehensive strategic assessment of ViCAP's mission success.

## Outreach and Training Efforts

Another important aspect of ViCAP's mission is to facilitate communication and investigative coordination with and among law enforcement agencies. ViCAP accomplishes this through outreach efforts, as well as in-person and virtual training that teaches users about ViCAP's services and how to properly enter and search case data. ViCAP management stated that historically they focused solely on registering law enforcement agencies within the ViCAP Database and did not assess the volume of case submissions or other forms of active participation.

We determined that as of October 15, 2023, 1,674 law enforcement agencies were registered ViCAP users, which is about 9 percent of approximately 18,500 total law enforcement agencies in the United States and its territories.<sup>7</sup> We also found that being a registered ViCAP user does not necessarily translate into active participation. For example, we found, as shown in Table 3, that the largest metropolitan police departments (New York City Police Department, Los Angeles Police Department, and Chicago Police Department) only entered 63 total cases into the ViCAP Database between FY 2017 and FY 2020, which is many fewer than the number of murders, nonnegligent manslaughters, and rapes that those agencies reported through the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program during those calendar years.<sup>8</sup> Between FY 2021 and FY 2023, the Chicago Police Department had not entered any cases and the Los Angeles Police Department had only entered an additional nine cases into the ViCAP Database. The New York City Police Department entered 604 cases during this timeframe, with 569 of these cases entered in FY 2023, which were likely attributed to the SAKI grant requirement.

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<sup>7</sup> Participation in ViCAP is voluntary. To help inform law enforcement agencies about ViCAP and encourage participation, the FBI conducts ViCAP presentations at various law enforcement conferences, provides ViCAP-related virtual training through the law enforcement portal, and, more recently, implemented the ViCAP Coordinator Program (discussed later in this section). ViCAP officials do not keep statistics about how many law enforcement agencies these efforts have reached. According to FBI officials, not all of the 18,500 law enforcement agencies encounter ViCAP criteria cases. However, there is no readily available data on this.

<sup>8</sup> The FBI's UCR Program generates crime statistics for use in law enforcement and includes data voluntarily supplied from more than 18,500 law enforcement agencies. The UCR data in Table 3 include reported instances of murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, and rape cases. While information reported to the FBI's UCR Program for these categories include crimes beyond those that meet ViCAP's criteria case definitions, the vast differences between ViCAP case entries and the reported data strongly suggest a lack of ViCAP usage by these large metropolitan police departments. The New York City Police Department, Los Angeles Police Department, and Chicago Police Department had not reported their 2021 crime statistics to the FBI's UCR Program because, according to the FBI, these entities were transitioning to the National Incident-Based Reporting System. Moreover, at the time of our analysis, the 2022 and 2023 UCR data was not available.

Table 3

Comparison of ViCAP Case Submissions to UCR Data

Date Range	New York City Police Department		Los Angeles Police Department		Chicago Police Department	
	ViCAP Case Entries	UCR Data	ViCAP Case Entries	UCR Data	ViCAP Case Entries	UCR Data
2017 – 2020	6	11,586	13	10,388	44	9,146

Source: OIG analysis of FBI data

Officials from the New York City Police Department and Los Angeles Police Department told us that the low number of case entries was due to a lack of knowledge within their departments about ViCAP. Specifically, they noted what they perceived to be a lack of outreach directed to detectives and investigators who would be most instrumental with the submission of cases into the ViCAP Database.<sup>9</sup> Several CAR recipients with whom we spoke similarly described a lack of knowledge about ViCAP and told us that more outreach is needed. We believe the FBI could enhance ViCAP’s impact and reach by increasing its outreach efforts and evaluating the participation of active agencies, and coordinate with those agencies whose case submissions seem inconsistent with other available crime data.

Regarding ViCAP training efforts, ViCAP officials told us that its training schedule is dictated by its available funding and Crime Analysts’ assessments about the training needs within their geographic regions. ViCAP offers both in-person and virtual training. Law enforcement officials with whom we spoke and who received in-person, hands-on training stated that it was valuable; however, the number of in-person trainings ViCAP can offer are restricted due to budget constraints: currently each Crime Analyst can only travel twice annually to conduct in-person training within their geographic regions.<sup>10</sup> In comparison, CAR recipients we interviewed were largely unaware of ViCAP’s virtual training options and supplemental resources, even though these options are available on a law enforcement website portal for agencies that are unable to attend in-person training events or that seek to broaden their knowledge and skills of the ViCAP Database.

Due to the limited number of in-person training opportunities and lack of awareness of virtual training options, it is possible that participating agencies may not receive the necessary training or guidance for successful and efficient ViCAP usage. For example, a CAR recipient who had never received ViCAP training told us that they needed assistance from a ViCAP Crime Analyst when entering their case into the ViCAP

<sup>9</sup> We interviewed the ViCAP Law Enforcement Agency Managers within the New York City and Los Angeles police departments. While these statements may not be reflective of these departments’ knowledge about ViCAP more broadly, the statements are reflective of these particular individuals within the police departments.

<sup>10</sup> Each ViCAP Crime Analyst can travel once to conduct in-person training for general ViCAP users and can travel a second time for in-person training focused solely on SAKI grant recipients’ case entry requirements. The Bureau of Justice Assistance funds the SAKI-related training delivered by ViCAP Crime Analysts.

Database, and another official responsible for entering their agency's cases into the ViCAP Database did not have a clear understanding of the types of cases that could be entered.

To alleviate some of the Crime Analysts' training and outreach responsibilities, in 2021 ViCAP implemented the ViCAP Coordinator Program, which requires each FBI field office to provide professional or support staff to serve in a corollary role as a liaison among ViCAP, FBI field offices, and other law enforcement agencies.<sup>11</sup> However, we are concerned that the FBI has not sufficiently supported ViCAP by staffing and fostering ViCAP Coordinator positions in areas that may require a greater amount of participant training, enrollment, and assistance.<sup>12</sup> For example, Texas and Georgia, which due to statutory requirements in those states now constitute an outsized proportion of the ViCAP workload, have some FBI field offices without a ViCAP Coordinator and others with less staff serving as ViCAP Coordinators than allotted.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, although the role is a corollary duty, we do not believe that the FBI's expectations for this program are being universally met and, therefore, some ViCAP Coordinators may not be acting as a force multiplier to substantially provide access and training or increase ViCAP's ability to efficiently assist FBI field offices, as well as local, state, tribal, and other federal law enforcement partners. For instance, we found varied levels of access to resources, engagement, and effort among different ViCAP Coordinators. While one ViCAP Coordinator we interviewed was proactive in enrolling a large number of law enforcement agencies, another ViCAP Coordinator we interviewed took a reactive approach and only handled ViCAP matters when they came to the ViCAP Coordinator's attention.

Outreach and training is critical to ensuring that case submissions are accurate and that ViCAP's products and services are used and understood by those who would most benefit from them. Without proper training and guidance for users, there is an increased risk that cases submitted into the ViCAP Database are incomplete, inaccurate, or do not meet eligibility standards, which increases the workload of ViCAP Crime Analysts who identify and help address the case submission deficiencies and could impact the ability to identify trends among submitted cases. However, efforts to increase and enhance training and outreach will likely lead to additional case submissions and an even greater workload for ViCAP's existing staff and, therefore, must be balanced with ViCAP's other competing priorities and considered in an overall assessment of ViCAP's mission success.

## Program Planning Efforts

Overall, we found that the FBI does not have a comprehensive strategic plan to address the previously discussed challenges that impact ViCAP's ability to carry out its mission. While the FBI stated that individual ViCAP initiatives, such as the ViCAP Coordinator Program, represent what it believes is a strategic implementation plan based on existing resources, we believe this plan will not address the underlying issues affecting ViCAP's workload without support from FBI executive leadership. In addition, as discussed below, we found several areas that will further compound the existing challenges to the ViCAP Program if not

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<sup>11</sup> The number of staff within a field office who can serve as a ViCAP Coordinator is based upon field office size.

<sup>12</sup> According to Investigative Operations Support Section and ViCAP officials, CIRG cannot require FBI field offices to use field office personnel to fill the ViCAP Coordinator role.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the FBI Atlanta Field Office, which has the entire state of Georgia as its area of responsibility, did not staff as many ViCAP Coordinators as was recommended.

accounted for within a strategic plan: expectations and initiatives for increasing case submissions, a lack of performance metrics and feedback mechanisms, and low resource prioritization within CIRG.

As previously discussed, the number of case submissions into the ViCAP Database increased by almost 3,000 percent from October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2023—with nearly 14,000 case submissions in FY 2023. Based upon discussions with ViCAP personnel, the number of case submissions are expected to continue increasing for the following reasons:

- State legislation – We identified some states with similar legislation to Texas and Georgia requiring ViCAP case submissions that, if enforced, would further increase the volume of cases submitted into the ViCAP Database.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, ViCAP’s National Advisory Board (NAB), which is comprised of ViCAP officials and state and local law enforcement personnel who actively use ViCAP, provides consultation and direction to ViCAP about its program and assists with outreach efforts. The NAB’s current focus is to assist with helping more states enact legislation that would include a requirement for case submissions into the ViCAP Database.
- Grant programs – OJP is continuing to fund grant programs, including the SAKI grant program, that include a requirement for grant recipients to enter relevant case information into the ViCAP Database. An April 2019 Memorandum of Understanding between the FBI and OJP related to the SAKI grant program estimated that over 100,000 cases would be entered into the ViCAP Database between 2022 and 2024.
- Criteria case expansion – The FBI is considering the expansion of ViCAP’s criteria case definitions to include crimes with behaviors that serial violent criminals often exhibit, such as “peeping Toms,” stalking, and other sexual offenses.

Throughout this report we have highlighted the increasing workload facing ViCAP and its impact on ViCAP’s ability to fulfill its responsibilities. While increased case submissions by law enforcement agencies can help produce case linkages and assist with the apprehension of serial violent criminals, such increases would simultaneously accentuate many of ViCAP’s current challenges, including those relating to quality control reviews, investigative analysis, technological improvements, and outreach and training. While ViCAP leadership has taken certain actions to address these challenges, such as expanding system storage when necessary, offering virtual training opportunities, and establishing the ViCAP Coordinator position, we found that the FBI does not have a comprehensive plan for how these efforts will complement each other to allow ViCAP to support this anticipated growth and to ensure ViCAP’s sustainability and long-term success. Without such a plan, we believe that ViCAP risks losing the confidence of its participants, which could hinder their participation in the program and, in turn, erode ViCAP’s ability to link crimes.

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<sup>14</sup> New Jersey and Illinois require, in certain instances, submission of case information into the ViCAP Database. In contrast, New York and California require statewide databases that track case information with similar criteria as the ViCAP Database but do not require submission of qualified cases into the ViCAP Database. Our review of case entry information for several of these states reveals that there may be instances of significant underreporting into the ViCAP Database.

We also found that ViCAP does not maintain comprehensive or meaningful performance metrics to assess the effectiveness of its program or to support its need for additional personnel and financial resources to meet the current program's demands. Although ViCAP can provide data for the number of trainings conducted and the number of analytical products issued annually, we found that this data was tracked inconsistently. We also found that while ViCAP leadership encourages its Crime Analysts to obtain feedback, it is not required, and ViCAP does not have a formal feedback mechanism to help measure the program's success. The lack of such a feedback mechanism hinders ViCAP in understanding the value of its products, services, and training, as well as in identifying areas for improvement. We note that ViCAP previously requested CAR recipients to provide feedback. However, ViCAP officials discontinued using this survey because they believed the customer feedback was inconsistent and the duration of time that some leads take to manifest made the feedback less beneficial.

ViCAP officials stated that measuring performance is difficult for many reasons, including varying regional caseloads and priorities, the uniqueness and complexity of each analyzed case, and the inability to control the presence of linkable cases or the accomplishments made by law enforcement agencies with the ViCAP-provided analysis. For example, one CAR recipient stated that ViCAP provided leads related to a kidnapping cold case from 1978, allowing the CAR recipient to determine whether a known offender was responsible for other similar type of crimes; while the leads did not result in solving the case, the CAR recipient acknowledged the value of ViCAP's analysis and the leads it provided. Despite the potential difficulty in determining appropriate program metrics, ViCAP needs to be able to define success and identify ways to track progress towards accomplishing its goals and objectives. If ViCAP had a comprehensive assessment of its program's efforts, it may be able to identify areas in need of attention or enhancement, which could, in turn, help direct program planning and inform personnel and financial resource requests.

Given the growth of ViCAP usage and the resulting challenges, we spoke with CIRG leadership about resource allocation and were told that they prioritize personnel and equipment for CIRG's tactical and cyber operations over ViCAP. Consistent with these statements, documentation we reviewed showed that requests for at least three additional ViCAP Crime Analysts were consistently ranked as some of CIRG's lowest priorities during budget enhancement processes between FYs 2021 and 2023, and ultimately went unfilled. We also found that ViCAP's information technology contract budget has remained stagnant over the last 4 years despite the large increase in case submissions, which we were told has led to delays in system updates. For example, plans to enhance the system's search functions and integrate an investigative toolkit to identify data linkages have been put on hold, as ViCAP's developers only have time to address immediate system needs and maintenance that have arisen from the large influx of case submissions.

Due to its low resource prioritization within CIRG and stagnant funding for its technological needs, we do not believe ViCAP is currently positioned for long-term success. ViCAP is already unable to keep up with its responsibilities in the areas of quality control reviews, investigative analysis, technology upgrades, and training and outreach, and the predicted increased growth in case submissions is likely to further burden ViCAP's existing staff and negatively impact the effective achievement of ViCAP's mission. As a result, FBI executive leadership, in consultation with CIRG, must formally evaluate the sustainability of ViCAP's current operations in view of the existing and foreseeable challenges. To accomplish this, we recommend that the FBI require CIRG to perform a formal evaluation of the personnel and financial resources required to meet anticipated future demand for ViCAP services and provide the results to FBI executive leadership which, in turn, should determine whether to allocate the personnel and financial resources and/or potentially leverage other similar programs and activities within the FBI, necessary to meet ViCAP's anticipated needs.



Further, we recommend that the FBI, based on FBI executive leadership's determination regarding CIRG's formal evaluation, develop a comprehensive strategic plan for ViCAP that accounts for both the resources available to ViCAP and also the anticipated short-term and long-term changes in demand for ViCAP's services. This plan should specifically identify necessary improvements to ViCAP's information technology and quality control functions. In addition, using this strategic plan, we recommend that the FBI establish and maintain comprehensive and meaningful performance metrics, including a mechanism for capturing and evaluating customer feedback, program reach, and active participation, to better assess the value and effectiveness of ViCAP.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Between FY 2018 and FY 2023 the ViCAP Database experienced significant growth in case submissions while the personnel and financial resources for staffing and technological advancements remained stagnant. As a result, ViCAP has been unable to keep pace with its workload. We found that while CIRG personnel have described ongoing efforts to expand the use of ViCAP, the FBI has not strategically accounted for these efforts when allocating personnel and financial resources or assessing its technological needs, and therefore, we do not believe ViCAP is currently positioned for long-term success. It is vital that the FBI formally evaluate ViCAP's sustainability, which includes an assessment of ViCAP's personnel and financial resource needs to meet its customer service-based mission in conjunction with the prioritization of such resources within the FBI. Subsequently, the FBI must develop and execute a comprehensive strategic plan to address the challenges we identified. Without such efforts, ViCAP will be unable to fully achieve its mission, which may hinder confidence and participation in the program, and, in turn, reduce ViCAP's ability to link crimes.

We recommend that the FBI:

1. Require CIRG to perform a formal evaluation of the personnel and financial resources required to meet anticipated future demand for ViCAP services and provide the results to FBI executive leadership. In response to this evaluation, FBI executive leadership should determine whether to allocate the personnel and financial resources, and/or potentially leverage other similar programs and activities within the FBI, necessary to meet ViCAP's anticipated needs.
2. Based on the determination by FBI executive leadership referenced in Recommendation 1, develop a comprehensive strategic plan for ViCAP that accounts for both the resources available to ViCAP and also the anticipated short-term and long-term changes in demand for ViCAP's services. This plan should specifically identify necessary improvements to ViCAP's information technology and quality control functions.
3. Using the strategic plan developed in response to Recommendation 2, establish and maintain comprehensive and meaningful performance metrics, including a mechanism for capturing and evaluating customer feedback, program reach, and active participation, to better assess the value and effectiveness of ViCAP.

# APPENDIX 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

## Objective

The objective of our audit was to determine whether the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) is effectively meeting its mission regarding analytical support for and coordination with law enforcement agencies. Specifically, our audit focused on ViCAP's: (1) data collection efforts to determine whether it sufficiently and appropriately generates actionable leads and program participation; and (2) outreach, training, and coordination efforts with law enforcement agencies.

## Scope and Methodology

The scope of our audit generally covered, but was not limited to, fiscal year (FY) 2017 through FY 2023. To accomplish our objective, we reviewed ViCAP program documentation, including policies and procedures, as well as training materials and analytical products. We also reviewed data related to the number of trainings conducted, attendance at the training events, requests for analysis, and analytical products. In addition, we reviewed Department of Justice grant program documentation that requires recipients to submit cases into the ViCAP Database. We also examined budget documentation for the FBI's Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) and the Investigative Operations Support Section (IOSS). Additionally, we researched and reviewed state legislation that requires or encourages local law enforcement agencies to utilize ViCAP. Standardized performance measures for field offices that relate to Behavioral Analysis Units (BAU) were included in our review as well.

We interviewed ViCAP staff, as well as officials from CIRG, IOSS, and BAU to understand ViCAP's mission, along with roles and responsibilities among the different positions. We also spoke with officials from the FBI's Resource Planning Office, the Finance and Facilities Division, and the Office of the General Counsel. We selected 16 ViCAP Crime Analysis Reports (CAR)—employing a judgmental sample design that provides coverage of various characteristics, such as the type of criteria case and law enforcement agency, geographical location, and number of leads generated from the product. In addition, based on factors such as state legislation requiring ViCAP usage and feedback from ViCAP Crime Analysts and a law enforcement official about ViCAP Coordinator performance levels, we judgmentally selected six field offices and interviewed at least one ViCAP Coordinator in each of those offices. The non-statistical sample designs did not allow projection of the test results to the universe from which the samples were selected. We also spoke with recipients of 9 of the 16 selected CARs, which included local law enforcement agencies, FBI Special Agents, and another federal agency. Additionally, we conducted interviews with FBI field office support staff who serve as ViCAP Coordinators to obtain more background information about that role and responsibilities.

## Statement on Compliance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

## Internal Controls

In this audit, we performed testing of internal controls significant within the context of our audit objective. We did not evaluate the internal controls of ViCAP to provide assurance on its internal control structure as a whole. ViCAP management is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of internal controls in accordance with OMB Circular A-123. Because we do not express an opinion on ViCAP's internal control structure as a whole, we offer this statement solely for the information and use of ViCAP.<sup>15</sup>

In planning and performing our audit, we identified several underlying internal control principles within ViCAP that were significant to the audit objectives, including the principles that management should remediate identified internal control deficiencies on a timely basis and that management should design control activities to achieve objectives while responding to risks. We assessed the design and operational effectiveness of these internal controls and identified deficiencies that we believe could affect ViCAP's ability to carry out its mission. The internal control deficiencies we identified are discussed in the Audit Results section of this report. However, because our review was limited to those internal control components and underlying principles that we found significant to the objective of this audit, our review may not have disclosed all internal control deficiencies that may have existed at the time of this audit.

## Computer-Processed Data

During our audit, we obtained information from ViCAP's Case Management System, FBI's Sentinel System, and the Uniform Crime Reporting Database. We did not test the reliability of those systems as a whole, therefore, any matters involving information from those systems were corroborated with documentation from other sources.

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<sup>15</sup> This restriction is not intended to limit the distribution of this report, which is a matter of public record.

## APPENDIX 2: The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Response to the Draft Audit Report



U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation

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Washington, D. C. 20535-0001

June 25, 2024

The Honorable Michael E. Horowitz  
Inspector General  
Office of the Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Horowitz:

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) appreciates the opportunity to review and respond to your office's report entitled, Audit of the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program.

We look forward to working with the Office of the Inspector General to address the concerns and recommendations provided in the report. The FBI has seen valuable success in the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program's coordination with thousands of law enforcement agencies around the country. We appreciate your feedback as we continue to enhance this program.

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact me. We greatly appreciate the professionalism of your audit staff throughout this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "AP", written over a faint circular stamp.

Steven Palmer  
Acting Assistant Director  
Critical Incident Response Group

**The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Response to the  
Office of the Inspector General's Audit of the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension  
Program**

**Recommendation 1:** "Require CIRG to perform a formal evaluation of the personnel and financial resources required to meet anticipated future demand for ViCAP services and provide the results to FBI executive leadership. In response to this evaluation, FBI executive leadership should determine whether to allocate the personnel and financial resources, and/or potentially leverage other similar programs and activities within the FBI, necessary to meet ViCAP's anticipated needs."

**FBI Response to Recommendation 1:** The FBI concurs with the recommendation.

To accomplish Recommendation #1, the FBI will, at the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG), convene a working group of Investigative and Operations Support Section (IOSS) Executive Management (EM), ViCAP Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), CIRG's Financial and Personnel Management Unit (FPMU) personnel and representation from CIRG EM to conduct the evaluation. The results would be presented to the Criminal, Cyber, Response and Services Branch (CCRSB) Executive Assistant Director (EAD) staff for review.

**Recommendation 2:** "Based on the determination by FBI executive leadership referenced in Recommendation 1, develop a comprehensive strategic plan for ViCAP that accounts for both the resources available to ViCAP and also the anticipated short-term and long-term changes in demand for ViCAP's services. This plan should specifically identify necessary improvements to ViCAP's information technology and quality control functions."

**FBI Response to Recommendation 2:** The FBI concurs with the recommendation.

To accomplish Recommendation #2, CIRG will incorporate CCRSB's feedback to develop a comprehensive strategic plan as noted in Recommendation #2 with the understanding resource allocation may remain the same. However, CIRG will address variations in its short- and long-term goals.

**Recommendation 3:** "Using the strategic plan developed in response to Recommendation 2, establish and maintain comprehensive and meaningful performance metrics, including a mechanism for capturing and evaluating customer feedback, program reach, and active participation, to better assess the value and effectiveness of ViCAP."

**FBI Response to Recommendation 3:** The FBI concurs with the recommendation.

To accomplish Recommendation #3, CIRG will establish a plan to capture items in Recommendation #3.

## **APPENDIX 3: Office of the Inspector General Analysis and Summary of Actions Necessary to Close the Audit Report**

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) provided a draft of this audit report to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI's response is incorporated in Appendix 2 of this final report. In response to our audit report, the FBI concurred with our recommendations and discussed the actions it will implement in response to our findings. As a result, the status of the audit report is resolved. The following provides the OIG analysis of the response and summary of actions necessary to close the report.

### **Recommendations for the FBI:**

- 1. Require the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) to perform a formal evaluation of the personnel and financial resources required to meet anticipated future demand for Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) services and provide the results to FBI executive leadership. In response to this evaluation, FBI executive leadership should determine whether to allocate the personnel and financial resources, and/or potentially leverage other similar programs and activities within the FBI, necessary to meet ViCAP's anticipated needs.**

Resolved. The FBI concurred with our recommendation. The FBI stated in its response that CIRG will convene a working group comprised of Investigative and Operations Support Section Executive Management, ViCAP Subject Matter Experts, CIRG's Financial and Personnel Management Unit personnel, and representation from CIRG Executive Management to conduct the evaluation. The FBI stated that the results will be presented to the Criminal, Cyber, Response and Services Branch (CCRSB) Executive Assistant Director staff for review. As a result, this recommendation is resolved.

This recommendation can be closed when we receive evidence that CIRG convened the working group with personnel as described above and formally evaluated the personnel and financial resources required to meet anticipated future demand for ViCAP services. Once the formal evaluation has been conducted, we will also need evidence of FBI executive leadership's resulting determination of personnel and financial resource allocations, and/or efforts to leverage other similar programs and activities within the FBI, as necessary, to meet ViCAP's anticipated needs.

- 2. Based on the determination by FBI executive leadership referenced in Recommendation 1, develop a comprehensive strategic plan for ViCAP that accounts for both the resources available to ViCAP and also the anticipated short-term and long-term changes in demand for ViCAP's services. This plan should specifically identify necessary improvements to ViCAP's information technology and quality control functions.**

Resolved. The FBI concurred with our recommendation. The FBI stated in its response that CIRG will incorporate CCRSB's feedback to develop a comprehensive strategic plan and noted that the resource allocation may remain the same. The FBI also stated that CIRG will address variations in its short-term and long-term goals. As a result, this recommendation is resolved.

This recommendation can be closed when we receive documentation that based on FBI executive leadership's determination from Recommendation 1, CIRG has developed a comprehensive strategic plan for ViCAP that identifies necessary improvements to ViCAP's information technology and quality control functions, and addresses anticipated short-term and long-term changes in demand for ViCAP's services and the resources available to ViCAP.

- 3. Using the strategic plan developed in response to Recommendation 2, establish and maintain comprehensive and meaningful performance metrics, including a mechanism for capturing and evaluating customer feedback, program reach, and active participation, to better assess the value and effectiveness of ViCAP.**

Resolved. The FBI concurred with our recommendation. The FBI stated in its response that CIRG will establish a plan to capture the performance metrics cited in the recommendation. As a result, this recommendation is resolved.

This recommendation can be closed when we receive evidence that using the strategic plan developed in Recommendation 2, CIRG established and maintains comprehensive and meaningful performance metrics, including a mechanism for capturing and evaluating customer feedback, program reach, and active participation, to better assess the value and effectiveness of ViCAP.