

Program Management

SUMMARY

By statute, CriMNet is supposed to be managed according to industry best practices. For the State of Minnesota, these practices are articulated in a state project management methodology created by the Office of Technology. In comparing CriMNet management to these standards, we found that the CriMNet Office and the CriMNet Policy Group failed in the program's early years to complete critical program planning activities, such as clearly defining program objectives and scope. By late 2002, these shortfalls, along with communication problems and staff shortages, contributed to disappointing outcomes, including failure to establish important integration standards and conflicts among some stakeholders. Over the past year, the Policy Group and CriMNet Office have acted to complete needed program planning tasks, boost staffing, and improve day-to-day management. While progress has been slow and there is still work to be done, CriMNet has become more clearly focused and collaboration among jurisdictions is improving. Still, sustained leadership will be needed to shift the focus of CriMNet program activities from planning to active implementation. We recommend several actions to improve CriMNet Office operations and to strengthen oversight and accountability.

In earlier chapters, we discussed the status of criminal justice information integration thus far and the extent to which agency integration projects proceeded as planned. In this chapter, we take a broader look at management of CriMNet as a whole. Our focus is on two entities—the Policy Group and the CriMNet Office. By law, the CriMNet Policy Group is responsible for (1) setting CriMNet's strategic direction, and (2) ensuring that CriMNet operations follow generally accepted management techniques and meet intended outcomes.¹

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- **To what extent has CriMNet been managed in accordance with accepted program management practices, and what are the consequences of any shortcomings?**
- **What factors contributed to any identified program management weaknesses?**
- **To what extent have recent management actions addressed shortcomings?**

¹ Minn. Stat. (2002), §299C.65, subd. 1b.

To answer these questions, we interviewed CriMNet Office managers and staff, Policy Group and Task Force members, and state and local agency CriMNet project managers. We reviewed reports summarizing the results of two previous program evaluations—one issued by Minnesota’s Office of Technology in October 2002 and a second issued in February 2003 by an outside consultant hired to complete a legislatively-mandated CriMNet risk assessment. To avoid duplication of effort, we relied heavily on the Office of Technology report, in particular, to focus on important issues. In addition, we reviewed a wide variety of CriMNet program documents, reports to the Legislature, Policy Group meeting materials and minutes, and various publications used to explain CriMNet to criminal justice professionals, the Legislature, and the public.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first, we briefly describe the generally accepted planning and management standards that served as the framework for our analysis. The second section describes the state of CriMNet program management in 2001 and 2002. In it, we discuss (1) the extent to which CriMNet planning and management practices conformed to standards, (2) the consequences of any weaknesses, and (3) underlying factors that help explain why things happened the way they did. In the third section, we discuss Policy Group and CriMNet Office actions, from early 2003 forward, to redirect CriMNet management and the extent to which these efforts have addressed identified problems. Recommendations for legislative and Policy Group action are discussed at the end of the chapter.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

The CriMNet Office should follow Minnesota's standard project management methodology.

Minnesota state government has adopted a standard project management methodology, and we used this methodology as a framework for assessing CriMNet program management.² Developed by the Office of Technology, the methodology is based on longstanding, nationally-recognized best practices for initiating, planning, managing, and closing information technology projects. As summarized in Figure 4.1, the methodology defines key activities that should take place and documents that should be produced at various stages. Although the state methodology was developed with individual information technology projects in mind, the principles and standards also apply to management of broader programs, such as CriMNet. Given that CriMNet is an ongoing program, our evaluation focused on the planning and management standards rather than those for project initiation and closure.

It is important to keep in mind that standard practices are tools to help a project meet intended outcomes; applying these practices is not, by itself, the goal. It is possible, for example, to have all of the right processes and documents in place and still have a product that does not meet expectations. Similarly, a haphazardly managed project can sometimes result in an effective solution. Throughout the discussion in this chapter, we compare CriMNet planning and management practices to state standards, but in doing so, we also try to show how the presence

² Minnesota Office of Technology, *State of Minnesota Project Management Methodology*, v. 1.8 (St. Paul, 2002).

Figure 4.1: Major Elements of Minnesota's Project Management Methodology

Project Stages**Initiate****Major Activities**

- Identify an executive sponsor
- Document the business case that justifies the project

Key Document: project charter

Plan**Major Activities**

- Establish a governance structure
- Appoint a project manager
- Define project objectives and scope
- Establish work plan, schedule, budget
- Identify resource needs and ensure they are available
- Establish control procedures to manage the project once work is underway

Key Documents: strategic plan, scope statement, and work plan

Manage**Major Activities**

- Track and report on project status
- Communicate regularly
- Identify and resolve issues and risks
- Manage changes to time, scope, budget
- Make go/no-go decisions at checkpoints

Key Documents: status reports, updated plans, and project work products

Close**Major Activities**

- Review and accept final work products
- Assess whether outcomes met objectives

Key Document: project closeout report

SOURCE: Minnesota Office of Technology, *Quick Reference Project Start-up Guide* (St. Paul, 2003) and *State of Minnesota Project Management Methodology, v. 1.8* (St. Paul, 2002).

or absence of standard practices affected the pace, cost, and quality of the work that was completed.

We consider CriMNet program management to encompass two areas: (1) managing the CriMNet Office's internal operations, and (2) coordinating and overseeing, at a higher level, progress of CriMNet projects implemented by various state and local agencies. CriMNet Office internal operations include such things as developing and maintaining a strategic plan, administering local grants, identifying and documenting user needs, and defining security standards. Program coordination activities include such things as maintaining a programwide budget, tracking the status of state and local projects, and ensuring that these projects conform to the state's integration standards.

We divided our analysis of program management practices into two general time periods. The first covers calendar years 2001 and 2002. This timeframe reflects what we consider to be a start-up period for the CriMNet Office and the beginning of significant state funding for CriMNet. The second time period covers January 2003 to the present. This period reflects a number of events to redirect CriMNet Office operations, including several program reviews that criticized aspects of CriMNet operations and a concurrent change in CriMNet Office executive leadership.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT, 2001-02

The CriMNet Office faced the challenges of a start-up organization in 2001.

Although the state had been pursuing criminal justice information integration for a number of years, the CriMNet Office was essentially a start-up organization in 2001. Establishing program operations was complicated by the fact that the office was entering an ongoing endeavor mid-stream. Early CriMNet staff were faced with (1) pulling together integration projects already underway at various state agencies, (2) determining additional needs, (3) clarifying the CriMNet Office's role in meeting those needs, and (4) moving forward under the agreed-upon management model. In this section of the report, we use a framework of standard planning and management practices to discuss the extent to which CriMNet Office operations were structured to meet these challenges and problems that resulted from any shortfalls.

In comparing CriMNet management through 2002 to accepted practices, we found that:

- **After the CriMNet Office was formally established in 2001, CriMNet Office managers and the Policy Group failed to make crucial planning decisions, such as defining CriMNet's objectives and scope, or to establish standard mechanisms for monitoring progress and resolving problems. These weaknesses had negative effects on priority setting, budgeting, and staffing.**

Through 2002, the Policy Group and CriMNet stakeholders could not agree on CriMNet program objectives.

Planning

For CriMNet to be more than a loosely connected set of projects initiated by various jurisdictions, it must have an effective program planning process. That process should include planning decisions that lead CriMNet from a broad statement of vision (statewide integration), to a narrower set of objectives (statewide search of local criminal history data, for example), to the specific projects and activities that must take place to achieve those objectives (such as, resolving data practice issues or acquiring a technical product), to the order in which those projects and activities will be done given available resources. The purpose of approaching planning this way is to make sure resources are targeted to the highest-priority projects and work gets done in the right order.

Planning decisions regarding CriMNet's scope and direction did not proceed according to this process. Based on our review of CriMNet program documents, the Legislature and CriMNet stakeholders have had a unified sense of CriMNet's vision—integrating criminal justice data to make it easier to identify offenders and know their full criminal histories. However, the Policy Group and CriMNet Office failed to fully translate this vision into an agreed-upon set of objectives and an associated statement of projects and activities to support them. The Policy Group and others were aware that disagreements over CriMNet objectives were hurting the program, and in September 2002, Policy Group and Task Force members, CriMNet Office staff, and local representatives met at a multi-day retreat. The purpose of the meeting was to reach consensus on CriMNet goals and objectives, but according to the facilitators' final report, participants were not able to do so.

Absence of a defined CriMNet program scope manifested itself in several ways. For example, defining user needs is an activity that fell under the purview of the CriMNet Office but was never pulled into the scope of CriMNet Office activities. Several of the ongoing projects, notably the Integration Backbone, suffered for lack of clearly stated outcome requirements the system was to achieve. In addition, under standard practices, decisions regarding program scope are used to develop work plans. Work plans are tools to coordinate the timing of interdependent activities; to hold staff accountable for completing assigned work; and to develop staff, schedule, and funding estimates. The CriMNet Office operated through 2002 without a work plan integrating its activities with major work phases of ongoing state and local projects.

Program Controls

Accepted program practices also call for setting up various control processes, described in Table 4.1, that should be used to provide a structure for managing the program on a day-to-day basis. The purpose of these processes, individually and collectively, is to help identify problems and find appropriate solutions.

Table 4.1: Standard Program Controls

Control Mechanism	Definition
Steering Committee Meetings	A steering committee is a group of key stakeholders. Its purpose is to provide high-level project oversight, to make key decisions regarding the project's direction, and to help solve problems. To provide consistent direction, meetings should have a standard agenda that includes reviewing project status, reviewing and approving scope changes, formally accepting major work products, assessing accomplishments against expectations set at the last meeting, and making go/no-go decisions at appropriate points, such as the end of a design phase.
Monthly Status Report	A report that documents progress, issues, cost, and schedule status. It is used to help identify and resolve problems and to measure progress against original expectations.
Communication Management	A process to ensure accurate and sufficient communication about the project such that (1) stakeholders and project team members are informed and aware of project activities and status and (2) messages to external audiences support the project's goals and objectives.
Risk Management	A process to assess factors, such as insufficient staffing, that may lead to project failure and to develop strategies to avoid or mitigate them.
Issue Management	A mechanism to document, track, and resolve obstacles that arise during project implementation and require a coordinated effort to fix.
Change Management	A process to ensure that changes to scope, cost, schedule, and work products are formally reviewed, approved, and documented so that project teams, reviewers, and other stakeholders share a common set of expectations.

SOURCE: Minnesota Office of Technology, *State of Minnesota Project Management Methodology*, v. 1.8 (St. Paul, 2002) and *Quick Reference Project Start-up Guide* (St. Paul, 2003).

CriMNet lacked some standard policies and procedures that would have helped with day-to-day management.

As with other program planning steps, CriMNet officials did some of the tasks necessary to establish these control procedures, but failed to do so fully. For example:

- Status reporting to the Policy Group was sporadic through 2002, and reports were inconsistent in terms of content and quality;
- The CriMNet Office did not comprehensively track costs for its own activities, local grant projects, or other agency projects;
- Communication about CriMNet was not guided by a Policy Group-approved communication strategy or review procedure;
- The CriMNet Office did not systematically identify and resolve programwide implementation issues or risks; and

- The CriMNet Office did not have a procedure in place to ensure that major program changes, such as adding to a project's scope, were reviewed, approved, and communicated.

Some of these management practices would have been difficult to fully implement because prerequisite work had not been completed. For example, meaningful status reporting requires baseline expectations against which to measure progress. Absent time, scope, and budget planning estimates for CriMNet Office work, a status report on progress was of limited value. As we discuss in more detail later, financial tracking for CriMNet is complicated by a number of factors, including (1) limitations in the state's accounting system that make it difficult to isolate CriMNet spending and (2) questions regarding the extent to which agencies are obligated to provide project cost and status information to the CriMNet Office and Policy Group.

Consequences

As we said earlier, compliance with standard practices is important insofar as it affected the ability of the Policy Group and CriMNet Office to manage the program. In that regard, we found that:

- **By late 2002, there were clear signs of CriMNet management problems and lost momentum.**

Program management weaknesses made it more difficult to manage CriMNet on a day-to-day basis and to identify and resolve problems. This resulted in incomplete information regarding CriMNet's costs and future investments, unrealistic expectations regarding the extent and nature of ongoing integration activities, and conflicts among some stakeholders. In the end, important tasks did not get completed, and CriMNet lost momentum.

As discussed above, CriMNet did not have several needed tools that would have helped CriMNet managers, the Policy Group, and others outside of the program understand CriMNet spending and progress. For example, ideally, the CriMNet Office would maintain (1) a CriMNet Office budget and project-specific budget information linked to major milestones (such as a project design phase), and (2) data on spending compared to budget. However, state and local agencies that are implementing integration projects have not produced consistent statements of spending to date or reliable cost projections.

In reviewing CriMNet documentation, we found few examples of detailed budget proposals or spending reports used internally by the CriMNet Office or by the Policy Group. According to current CriMNet officials, staff created one of the first comprehensive spending reports in January 2003, though they also reported that it was difficult to compile and not as detailed as they would have liked. Absence of a program plan has also undermined efforts to discuss the specifics of future investments. Without comprehensive financial data and a plan for CriMNet's next steps, CriMNet officials were not able to answer basic questions, such as ours, regarding how much has been spent to date or what investments are expected in the next several years.

**CriMNet
policymakers
and managers
did not have
reliable spending
data.**

Aggressive marketing of CriMNet created expectations that could not realistically be met.

Throughout our evaluation, we noted many instances in which CriMNet stakeholders voiced expectations for CriMNet that had not been met—in some cases because expectations were unrealistic and in others because work products were not delivered as expected. For example, the CriMNet Office asked pilot counties in early 2002 to focus their efforts on intra-county system enhancements and integration rather than statewide integration until the state developed work process, data, and technical standards. These standards, in large part, have not been forthcoming. In general, stakeholders said that unmet expectations were a factor that eroded trust. CriMNet's success requires participation and collaboration at all levels, so lack of trust can have serious consequences.

In a broader sense, aggressive marketing of the CriMNet vision has contributed to gaps between stakeholders' beliefs regarding the extent of integration to date and actual progress achieved. Many of the CriMNet materials that we reviewed—literature, videos, and other presentations—did not clearly distinguish between actual progress to date and integration capabilities that are planned for the future. For example, the CD-ROM multimedia product depicting search, subscription, and workflow models for the Integration Backbone project (discussed in Chapter 3) accurately presents the vision for criminal justice information sharing in Minnesota. But, this presentation does not make clear that many of the functions for moving information among systems are actually years away from being implemented. Clearly articulating the end-state vision for CriMNet is important, but we think it is equally important to establish clear and realistic expectations for the incremental steps required to move from the current state of integration to the vision.

Some local stakeholders lost confidence in CriMNet.

Some local government representatives reported to us that their participation in CriMNet and overall confidence in state CriMNet administration had declined by varying degrees through 2002. Dissatisfaction with the 2001-02 local grant award process was a primary source of frustration. According to CriMNet documents, the grant criteria changed fundamentally between the first grant announcement issued in the fall of 2001 and the final grant request for proposals issued in February 2002. The first solicited grant proposals related to inter-jurisdictional integration; the final criteria gave strong preference to local system enhancements that would facilitate integration at a later date. In addition to this change in direction, local representatives were particularly frustrated by grant requirements that explicitly prohibited communication and coordination among grant applicants, a requirement that appears contrary to the notion that CriMNet is inherently a cooperative endeavor. Overall, local governments were discouraged by the time, effort, and uncertainty involved in preparing multiple grant proposals, and Minnesota's two largest counties, Hennepin and Ramsey, eventually dropped out of the state's grant process at that time.³ Hennepin County continued with its integration projects using county funds and grants received directly from the federal government and later reentered the state's process, receiving a CriMNet grant in November 2003 for \$420,000. According to the Ramsey County official that led its 2001-02 grant proposal, the county's implementation of its integration plan has largely stalled.

³ County representatives also reported that the grant application was long and cumbersome and that the grant criteria were applied inconsistently, with the final terms being determined through a negotiation process with CriMNet Office officials.

City and county representatives voiced other misgivings, including (1) concerns over the accuracy of reports to the public and the Legislature regarding the actual status of the Integration Backbone project and statewide integration as whole, and (2) failure of the state to provide technical specifications for how local systems should be configured. Several of the implementation grant counties reported that they have had little interaction with the CriMNet Office as their grant projects are proceeding. Open communication with the Policy Group and CriMNet Office and state leadership on standards are particularly important issues to cities and counties because the state integration model requires that local governments make significant financial investments.

Factors Contributing to Program Management Weaknesses

A number of systemic factors contributed to the problems just described. CriMNet officials struggled to establish a focused program management structure in 2001-02 in part because of the inherent complexity of the task at hand and an understandable learning curve. We found that:

- **A variety of factors contributed to program management shortcomings, including CriMNet Office staffing issues, insufficient attention to important program management responsibilities, and governance weaknesses.**

The CriMNet Office has been understaffed from the start.

We discuss each of these issues in turn.

Staffing Problems

The CriMNet Office has had staffing problems since its inception. Based on our analysis of CriMNet Office staff records and interviews with CriMNet officials, the CriMNet Office through calendar year 2002 lacked both a sufficient number of staff and an appropriate skill mix for an effort as large and complex as CriMNet. When first created in early 2001, the CriMNet Office had about three full-time staff. As shown in Table 4.2, the office in fiscal year 2002 had approximately ten full-time staff. During these years, CriMNet Office managers relied heavily on volunteers from other state and local agencies that donated time to CriMNet. While this donated staff time is an important demonstration of shared responsibility for criminal justice integration, CriMNet cannot function effectively over the long-term without a sufficient core of full-time staff. A shortage of full-time business and technical analysts in the CriMNet Office most certainly slowed efforts to complete key program management tasks and technical work to support the Integration Backbone project. Staffing increases in fiscal year 2003 were a direct attempt to address the staffing problem. But, of the approximately 17 full-time staff shown in Table 4.2, only 7 were with the office for all or nearly all of the fiscal year. Most of the remaining positions were added between October 2002 and March 2003, and two were filled at the start of the fiscal year but vacant by March 2003. In comparison, the courts' MNCIS project team included over 20 administrative, business, and technical staff in fiscal year 2003, and the CriMNet Office staffing plan approved by the Policy Group in 2003 (discussed below) authorizes 26 CriMNet Office positions.

Table 4.2: Estimated Number of CriMNet Office Staff Positions Filled, FY 2002-04

Primary Area of Responsibility	Estimated Number of Positions Filled		
	FY 2002	FY 2003 ^a	FY 2004
Program Management	5.0	6.5	7.5
Integration Backbone Project	4.5	10.0	9.0
CriMNet Office Total	9.5	16.5	16.5

NOTES: Position counts are estimates and include administrative, professional, and supervisory full-time positions filled at some point in the fiscal year. Counts include contract employees hired to do CriMNet Office work and staff from other state agencies working for the CriMNet Office under formal interagency agreements. Counts exclude student interns and state and local government employees doing CriMNet work through informal agreements.

^aTotals for fiscal year 2003 overstate the number of staff on board for the full fiscal year. Of the total positions shown, only seven of the staff worked at the CriMNet Office for all or nearly all of the fiscal year.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of CriMNet Office staff lists and CriMNet Office estimates of full-time equivalent positions.

The Policy Group and CriMNet Office let staffing problems persist too long.

It is not clear to us why staffing problems persisted for so long. The CriMNet Office deputy directors pointed to a number of inhibiting factors—lack of funding for new positions and lack of a clear directive from the Policy Group to initiate hiring. While these are certainly barriers, neither appears to be insurmountable. We found evidence that CriMNet Office officials repeatedly reported to the Policy Group in 2002 that staff shortages were slowing progress, and Policy Group members acknowledge that understaffing was, and still is, a problem. It also is not clear to us that funding for staff positions was unavailable, but assuming that state CriMNet funding was insufficient to support additional staff, federal funding was an option. As we discuss below, current CriMNet Office officials sought and received federal funding in 2003 to support new staff positions. Overall, we found understaffing to be a clear case of a pressing need with a systemic failure to address it.

Administrative Problems

We also found that former CriMNet Office managers did not pay sufficient attention to the full range of their program management responsibilities.⁴ This is particularly true of the director who was in place from late 2001 to late 2002. He was described by many of the officials we interviewed as a “poor fit” for CriMNet. Our review of program documents produced during his tenure supports officials’ views that the former Executive Director focused his attention primarily on the technical aspects of the Integration Backbone project and placed little emphasis on broader CriMNet concerns. He did not pay adequate attention to documenting the needs of prospective system users, establishing technical standards, conducting long-term planning, or building collaborative relationships.

⁴ The CriMNet Office had an Executive Director for a short time in early 2001, followed by an interim Director, and finally a third Director who served from late 2001 through 2002.

Former CriMNet Executive Directors did not complete key tasks, such as assessing CriMNet user needs.

To monitor overall progress of the CriMNet program, the Policy Group expected to get programwide information—including the status of agency and local projects— from the CriMNet Office. But according to officials we interviewed, some state and local agency project teams were reluctant to provide such information. It was not clear to us, though, if they were hesitant because they mistrusted the CriMNet Office or because they did not find reporting to the CriMNet Office appropriate. In any case, it is imperative for the CriMNet Office to serve as a conduit of programwide information to ensure compliance with the state’s integration model and to help facilitate the entire process. From an accountability perspective, CriMNet projects led by state and local agencies receive state funds, and these agencies should report to the CriMNet Office as needed.

Beginning in the summer of 2002, the Policy Group started making stronger and more specific requests that the Executive Director meet his program management responsibilities. Two primary vehicles through which they did this were requests for regular, programwide status reports and written documentation regarding CriMNet program scope. According to CriMNet documents, the former Executive Director cited a number of reasons for delays in meeting these expectations, including staffing shortages, pressure to complete the Integration Backbone project, poor cooperation from agencies running CriMNet projects, and lack of clear direction from the Policy Group regarding program scope. While each of these factors undoubtedly played a part, the Policy Group was dissatisfied with his attempts to rectify these problems and voted in January 2003 to terminate his contract.

Governance Weaknesses

Because of the systemic and long-standing nature of many of the management problems we have discussed, we think governance must also be considered a contributing factor. The Policy Group is, by law, accountable for CriMNet program outcomes, and its role encompasses both setting strategic direction and ensuring that the strategy is implemented via the CriMNet Office. As we discuss later in the chapter, the Policy Group’s membership brings perspectives that are needed to discuss and set CriMNet strategy. But, the extent and duration of CriMNet Office performance problems experienced through 2002 highlight limitations in the Policy Group’s ability to manage day-to-day CriMNet Office operations.

The Policy Group did not provide the day-to-day oversight required to rectify management problems.

Documents we reviewed show that the Policy Group met frequently throughout 2001 and 2002. Policy Group members were clearly committed to CriMNet and made good-faith efforts to guide the program. But, after identifying CriMNet Office performance problems in the spring of 2002, the Policy Group allowed the problems to continue without measurable improvement for the remainder of the year. In our view, the Policy Group did not provide the level of timely oversight and action needed in a poor-performance situation. The Policy Group met and discussed performance-related issues, but did not provide the follow-through required to rectify problems.

Day-to-day monitoring and direction for CriMNet Office operations might have come from the Department of Public Safety where the CriMNet Office is an organizational unit. But through 2002, the CriMNet Office was not substantively integrated into Public Safety's management structure. Public Safety provided support services, such as payroll, personnel, and contracting assistance, but we found little evidence that the department provided authoritative, day-to-day supervision, or that the Policy Group encouraged Public Safety to play this stronger role.

Our findings regarding program management problems and governance weaknesses through 2002 should not be construed to mean that CriMNet had gone completely awry. As we discussed in Chapter 2, the state made important progress in integrating criminal justice information in spite of these problems. In addition, the Integration Backbone project continued to move forward. Rather, our conclusion is that the program was not managed with the rigor and discipline needed for such a complex and important venture. Some important tasks, such as resolving data practice issues, setting integration standards, and planning for local integration, were not adequately addressed. As a result, at the end of 2002, the CriMNet Office was ill-positioned to move forward with new integration initiatives.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE CRIMNET MANAGEMENT, 2003-04

The Policy Group and CriMNet Office initiated a mid-course correction in early 2003.

The Policy Group came to a similar conclusion about CriMNet Office performance problems, and in September 2002, it directed Office of Technology staff to review CriMNet operations. In its report of October 2002, the office made numerous recommendations, including that the CriMNet Office identify integration requirements, define the scope of CriMNet Office operations, and develop an overall program plan. They also recommended changes to staffing, communication, and program controls. In essence, the Office of Technology recommended that CriMNet be managed according to the standards set forth in the state's program management methodology.⁵

Following this review, the Policy Group initiated a series of events that, by January 2003, resulted in the CriMNet program management function essentially being restarted. We assessed the nature and extent of these efforts to reinvigorate CriMNet program management and found that:

- **Beginning in early 2003, the Policy Group and a new CriMNet Executive Director initiated a mid-course correction that demonstrates a strong commitment to strengthening program management.**

Actions to date have been aimed primarily at rectifying planning shortfalls. These efforts are an essential investment to get and keep CriMNet on track, but we also found that:

⁵ Minnesota Office of Technology, *CriMNet Program Review Report*, Presentation to the CriMNet Policy Group, October 25, 2002.

- **Despite recent corrective actions, progress is still slower than expected, in large part because insufficient staffing remains a critical problem. Sustained leadership and resources will be needed to shift the focus of CriMNet Office activities from planning and capacity building to active implementation of projects and activities that directly further statewide integration.**

In the last year, CriMNet officials have made progress in several areas: (1) staffing, (2) defining CriMNet's scope and direction, (3) governance, and (4) program controls. We discuss each of these areas in turn, focusing on the extent to which CriMNet management is getting closer to meeting state standards.

Staffing

CriMNet has made limited progress in rectifying persistent staffing problems, as summarized in Table 4.3. Overall:

- **A change in executive leadership and approval of a new staffing plan are steps in the right direction, but the CriMNet Office needs to get permanent staff on board.**

The Policy Group has a plan to reorganize and enlarge the CriMNet Office.

Table 4.3: Progress Addressing CriMNet Office Staffing Needs, as of January 2004

Action Needed	Status	Accomplishments	Work Remaining
Appoint a Program Director	Implemented	New CriMNet Executive Director appointed in October 2003.	Provide sufficient assistance to balance CriMNet and Bureau of Criminal Apprehension responsibilities.
Ensure Sufficient Staff Resources	Partially Implemented	Staffing plan approved in June 2003. Necessary federal funding received in September 2003. Hiring process initiated for most positions.	Get needed staff on board. As of January 2004, three of the new staff positions had been filled.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of CriMNet Office planning documents and staffing data.

One of the most important efforts to improve CriMNet management was a change in executive leadership at the CriMNet Office. In December 2002, the Policy Group named the Office of Technology Director as interim Executive Director, and in January 2003, voted to terminate the former Executive Director's contract. In February 2003, the Policy Group named the Director of Criminal Justice Information Systems (CJIS) at the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension as interim director. In October 2003, after a national search, the policy group named the interim director as permanent Executive Director.

Staffing remains a critical concern because, to date, few of the authorized CriMNet Office staff have been hired.

As a temporary measure beginning in late 2002, the CriMNet Office also received an infusion of staff on loan from the State Court Administrator's Office, the departments of Corrections, Public Safety, and Administration, and counties. These staff were assigned to complete some critical tasks (for example, the 2002 report to the Legislature), to assess the then-current status of CriMNet operations, and to add technical resources to the Integration Backbone project.

But, relying on volunteer staffing is insufficient for a program like CriMNet. With this in mind, the interim Executive Director developed a CriMNet Office organization and staffing plan, which was presented to the Policy Group and approved in June 2003. The plan calls for (1) changes in the organizational structure to better focus CriMNet Office resources on statewide issues, such as common work practices, user requirements, and integration standards and (2) an increase in CriMNet Office staff resources.

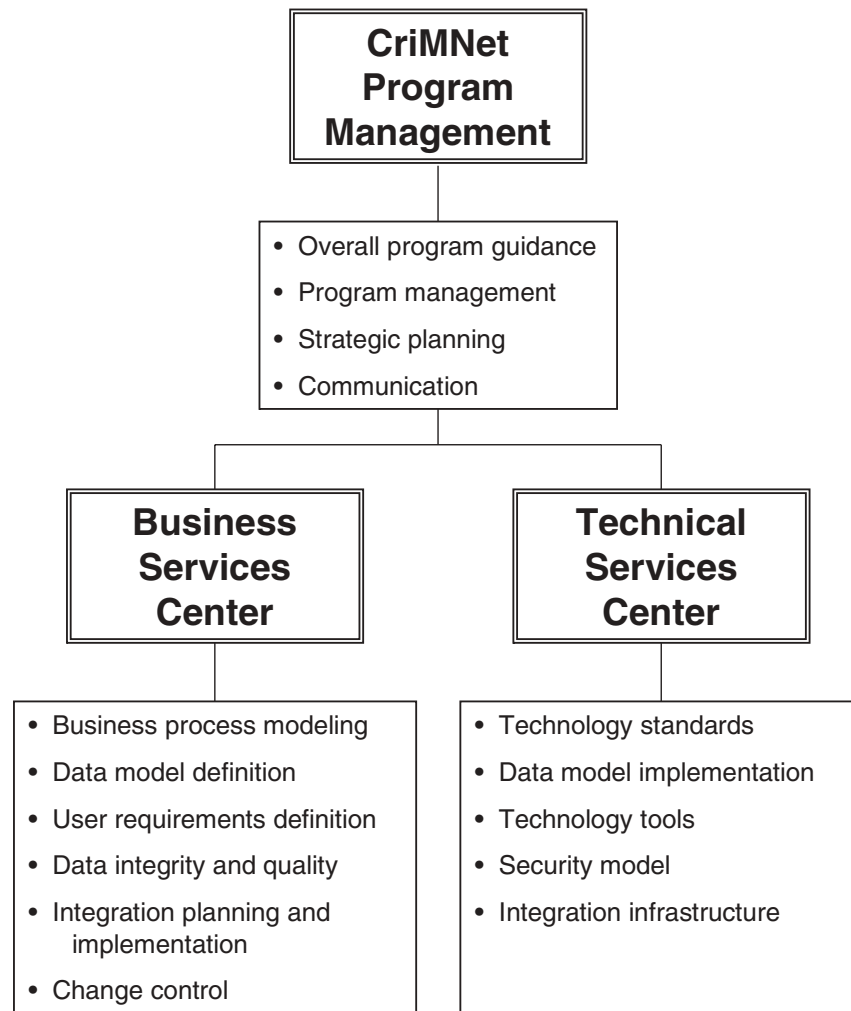
At the Department of Public Safety's suggestion, the Policy Group has discussed separating the Integration Backbone project team from the CriMNet Office, making it into a stand-alone entity within the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension's CJIS division. This would treat the Integration Backbone project like other CriMNet system projects—managed within a state agency but with reporting obligations to the CriMNet Office. Because CJIS maintains other statewide criminal justice information systems, we agree that this placement would make sense. For now, the Integration Backbone project team remains in the CriMNet Office and will be organized into two staff groups: (1) system development and maintenance and (2) operations support.

According to the organization plan, the remaining CriMNet Office staff will be divided into two main groups more clearly focused on program management, as shown in Figure 4.2. One group is to focus on criminal justice practices and user needs and the other on technical standards and assistance. Again, based on our discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 regarding the impact of shortfalls in these areas on specific projects, we agree with the plan's emphasis on addressing these issues.

We also agree with plans to increase the number of CriMNet Office staff. According to the staffing plan, the CriMNet Office would have a total of 14 full-time program management positions with the Integration Backbone team having another 12. To better ensure that the CriMNet Office and Integration Backbone project team have an appropriate mix of staff skills, the Policy Group also agreed that all positions would be staffed through a competitive process, meaning that existing CriMNet staff would have to apply for a position in the new organization.

Insufficient staffing, however, remains a critical problem. Although various personnel-related processes are underway, as of January 2004, few of the program management or Integration Backbone positions had been filled. The Executive Director said two factors underlie the slower than expected progress. First, state funding for the CriMNet Office was not sufficient to support planned staffing levels. As a result, the CriMNet Office had to obtain federal grant funding for over half of the planned positions; this funding was not secured until September 2003. Second, navigating the state's personnel procedures required to create and fill new positions has taken longer than expected.

Figure 4.2: CriMNet Office Organization Plan for Program Management Staff, as Approved June 2003



NOTE: Along with program management staff organized as shown, the CriMNet Office includes an Integration Backbone project team, organized into two groups: (1) system development and maintenance and (2) operations support.

SOURCE: CriMNet Office planning documents.

Program Direction and Scope

- In 2003, CriMNet officials made noteworthy progress in defining program objectives and setting CriMNet Office near-term priorities. However, some projects, particularly those related to defining user needs and technical system requirements, need to be completed to support credible planning for future integration.

As shown in Table 4.4, the Policy Group formally adopted a CriMNet strategic plan in September 2003. The plan's goals, objectives, and approach are described in Chapter 1. Defining CriMNet objectives has been a divisive issue among CriMNet stakeholders, so Policy Group approval of the strategic plan was an important step toward resolving questions of program direction.

The CriMNet strategic plan, approved in 2003, has not yet been translated into a more detailed work plan.

Table 4.4: Progress Defining Program Direction and Scope, as of January 2004

Action Needed	Status	Accomplishments	Work Remaining
Define Vision and Strategic Objectives	Strategic Plan Completed	Plan approved in September 2003.	Develop a long-range strategic plan.
Define Scope of Projects and Activities	Partially Implemented	Discussions underway and draft document prepared regarding specific projects and activities that will be led or coordinated by the CriMNet Office.	Task Force review and Policy Group approval (target date March 2004).

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of CriMNet Office documents and interviews.

As we discussed earlier, it is important to translate these objectives into an agreed-upon set of projects and activities with accountability and resources assigned. CriMNet officials made progress in this regard on two different levels: (1) implementing a plan to bring program management policies and procedures up to standards and (2) setting an agenda for CriMNet Office projects to support integration, such as gathering user requirements and defining security standards. Although the scope of CriMNet activities in these areas had been the subject of intense discussion throughout 2003, the specifics have not been formally agreed upon. The CriMNet Office has drafted a document (called a scope statement) that communicates the details of the agenda for the next several years, and it will be debated by the Task Force and presented to the Policy Group for approval.⁶ Given CriMNet's history, we think that completing this document is important, in that it will help set baseline expectations for products, time frames, and costs and establish control mechanisms to support effective oversight.

⁶ The document is scheduled to go to the Policy Group for approval in March 2004.

Supporting work needs to be completed before CriMNet policymakers can set a longer-term integration agenda.

The Policy Group's advisory task force has been given greater responsibility for CriMNet projects.

As yet, CriMNet officials have not defined longer-term integration priorities. To better position itself to do so, the CriMNet Office needs to complete a number of important prerequisite activities, such as assessing user needs, assessing local jurisdictions' capacities to integrate, and resolving data practice issues. As discussed above, it is imperative that the CriMNet Office get needed staff resources on board to direct these efforts, which will, by necessity, continue to involve extensive collaboration with staff in state and local agencies.

Governance Changes

The Policy Group, Task Force, and CriMNet Office made several changes in CriMNet governance to improve collaboration, more clearly define a CriMNet Office chain of accountability, and facilitate timely decisionmaking. Changes in 2003 included assigning more responsibility to the Task Force and embedding the CriMNet Office more fully within the Department of Public Safety management structure. At this point:

- **Governance changes initiated in mid-2003 make sense, but it is too early to assess their impact on accountability and decisionmaking.**

In June 2003, the Policy Group approved a revamped charter for the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Task Force. The new charter modified the Task Force's roles and responsibilities to more closely align with those of a traditional technology project steering committee and to have its members, via subcommittees (called delivery teams), investigate specific problems and develop recommendations. For example, a Task Force subcommittee investigated data practice issues and, in December 2003, recommended to the Policy Group a list of legislative proposals. The Policy Group members we interviewed commented on the added value of this Task Force work, citing the strength of the background work that they do and the importance of obtaining input from the diverse perspectives presented by Task Force members. Using the Task Force in this way, rather than as simply a discussion forum, better reflects the collaborative nature of CriMNet and brings needed resources to the program.

Transition to the Task Force's new role has not been without bumps. According to some stakeholders, group members are at times struggling to shift their perspectives from advocacy for their respective jurisdictions to a more collaborative, problem-solving role. Several of the stakeholders we interviewed commented that trust is an issue in this transition. They added that trust among stakeholders at all levels eroded during 2002, and that melding the CriMNet Office, Task Force, and Policy Group into a unified force will take time.

As we said earlier, the CriMNet Office has always been an organizational unit within the Department of Public Safety, but through 2002, it operated largely outside of the department's day-to-day management structure. In 2003, the Commissioner of Public Safety changed that relationship and made the CriMNet Office an organizational unit within the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, with the CriMNet Executive Director reporting to the bureau's superintendent. At its December 2003 meeting, the Policy Group tacitly supported this arrangement, although members raised several questions regarding the line between day-to-day supervision of CriMNet Office operations and the Policy Group's statutory

Not all stakeholders agree with the decision to give the Department of Public Safety greater authority over the CriMNet Office.

authority. The Policy Group clearly has authority in setting the strategic direction of CriMNet Office work by, for example, approving the strategic plan. It also has broad oversight authority over CriMNet and the responsibility to ensure that expected outcomes are met. But, by more clearly placing the CriMNet Office within the Department of Public Safety, the department will have more control over day-to-day decisionmaking.⁷

Not all stakeholders are comfortable with this arrangement. Some are concerned that Public Safety's influence on the CriMNet program will be too great, undermining the collaborative nature of CriMNet at a time when improving collaborative relationships is paramount. In contrast, others suggest that CriMNet be integrated fully into the Department of Public Safety, with the Policy Group functioning as an advisory body to the Commissioner of Public Safety and with no direct authority over the CriMNet Office. Based on our work, we have concluded that:

- **Keeping the CriMNet Office under the Policy Group's strategic direction serves important policy goals, but the office also needs direct day-to-day support and direction from the Department of Public Safety.**

We agree that CriMNet's governance structure and operations should reflect CriMNet's multi-jurisdictional nature, so we see the merits of the Legislature's governance design and the importance of the Policy Group. But, Policy Group oversight of CriMNet Office operations has its limits, as demonstrated in the performance problems experienced through 2002. Given the complexity of the CriMNet Office's mission and the level of effort needed to bring CriMNet program management practices up to par, we think it is important to have the CriMNet Office embedded in a clear, day-to-day accountability structure, which the Policy Group simply cannot provide. The Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, given its existing responsibility for the state's criminal justice data network, is a logical choice. Where strategic direction ends and day-to-day supervision begins is, of course, a gray area. Minimizing conflicting direction to the CriMNet Office will require close communication among the Executive Director, the Commissioner of Public Safety, and the Policy Group.

Another governance issue raised in 2003 is whether the Policy Group should include one or more local government representatives as voting members. Some criminal justice functions, such as prosecution, also are not represented. In our view:

- **Expanding the Policy Group to include local representatives would provide a perspective that is currently absent and would better reflect the collaborative nature of CriMNet.**

⁷ In December 2003, the Policy Group voted to recommend to the Legislature that the law be changed to state specifically that the CriMNet program manager serves at the pleasure of the Policy Group. According to Policy Group members, the recommended statutory language regarding the relationship between the CriMNet Office and the Policy Group simply states more clearly a relationship already established in the law—that the CriMNet Office was created to implement the work of the Policy Group. Since the Policy Group has always selected the CriMNet program manager, we do not take a position on this issue.

Local jurisdictions should have a place on the Policy Group.

The Policy Group chose not make such a recommendation in its proposals for the 2004 legislative session, but this remains a high profile issue for cities and counties.⁸ Those opposed to changing the Policy Group's composition said that they understood the philosophical importance of having local representation on the Policy Group, but were uncomfortable with the logistics of choosing who that might be. They also said that the majority of the Task Force is comprised of local representatives, and as restructured, the Task Force has a great deal of influence on CriMNet strategy and operations. Those in favor of local participation on the Policy Group argue that (1) cooperation from local jurisdictions is vital to CriMNet's success; (2) local criminal justice professionals have a unique, front-line perspective that should be reflected in CriMNet's strategic direction; and (3) a voting seat on the Policy Group is more influential than an advisory role on the Task Force. We find the rationale for adding local representation to be more compelling.

Program Controls

CriMNet has made progress in implementing standard program control procedures, as summarized in Table 4.5. To date, efforts that are farthest along include formal program status reporting and strengthening program review and decisionmaking by the Task Force and Policy Group. Other controls are in various stages of design. Overall, we found that:

- **CriMNet officials have designed structured processes to help manage and oversee CriMNet operations, but it is important to shift from *planning* these controls to actively *using* them to manage CriMNet work.**

Status Reporting

The new CriMNet Office team took immediate steps in mid-2003 to improve program status reporting. At first, these reports were filled with lists of program management and Integration Backbone project tasks that had gone undone in previous years. Later reports focused on the status of efforts to complete this make-up work. Improvements in status reporting worked in tandem with the substantive work being done by the Task Force to better focus Policy Group meetings and to improve the quantity and quality of information available about CriMNet's status. Still, work remains in this area. As of December 2003, neither the Task Force nor Policy Group had consistently reviewed program status during their respective meetings. Instead, both groups' meetings focused on other issues, such as legislative proposals for data practices and other statutory changes. While these are, without a doubt, important issues, it is imperative from a program

⁸ The Task Force twice put forward recommended statutory language that would add Task Force leaders to the Policy Group—once recommending that the Task Force chair and two vice-chairs be added and the second time recommending only the Task Force chair. In discussing the merits of the recommendation, a key sticking point for Policy Group members was that the Task Force chair might not necessarily be a local employee because the Task Force includes members from, for example, the state and private sector. At the December 2003 Policy Group meeting, the Commissioner of Public Safety suggested that the proposal be modified such that the Task Force chair would appoint to the Policy Group a Task Force member who was also a local jurisdiction employee. The Task Force Chair did not support this suggestion, and the motion failed.

Table 4.5: Progress Establishing Program Controls, as of January 2004

Action Needed	Status	Accomplishments	Work Remaining
Hold Regular Steering Committee Meetings	Implemented	Task Force meets monthly and the Policy Group quarterly.	Increase frequency of meetings and adjust agendas as needed to ensure timely decisionmaking and thorough review of program status on a regular basis.
Report on Program Status	Implemented	CriMNet Office started issuing regular monthly status reports in June 2003.	Strengthen the quality of budget data and add high-level status of state and locally-led integration projects.
Monitor Spending	Partially Implemented	CriMNet Office started compiling programwide spending data on a snapshot basis.	Develop a more consistent program accounting structure among agencies receiving CriMNet funds.
Manage Communication	Partially Implemented	Active steps among CriMNet officials to improve communication at all levels. Draft action plan through spring 2004 prepared by Department of Public Safety.	Complete a full communication plan, including procedure for review of messages to external audiences, and obtain Policy Group approval.
Implement Change Control, Risk Management, and Issue Management Processes	Partially Implemented	Change control implemented for strategic plan. Risk and issue management procedures defined in planning documents.	Move these procedures from plans to active use in managing the program.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of CriMNet Office documents and interviews with CriMNet officials.

control perspective that both groups routinely scrutinize CriMNet progress against baseline expectations.

Funding and Spending

Changes in the way CriMNet funding and spending are tracked in the state's accounting system would improve program oversight.

CriMNet financial data are spread among various state entities and local units of government, and we had a great deal of difficulty collating data into a comprehensive picture of CriMNet funding and spending to date. In addition, planning shortfalls have made it difficult to realistically forecast investments needed in the next biennium. The CriMNet Office in 2003 started compiling high-level data from the courts and departments of Corrections and Public Safety to develop estimates for 2002-03 program expenditures and a 2004-05 program budget. But, CriMNet funding and spending should be monitored in more detail, with budget detail aligned with major project phases and products. Our office's CriMNet financial audit report reached a similar conclusion, finding that CriMNet has not been established in the state's accounting system in a way that allows agencies and project managers to have reliable accounting information to monitor, analyze, and control program costs.⁹

A related financial issue that needs to be resolved is how integration costs will be shared by the state and local entities. This means aligning local integration grant criteria with cost-sharing principles and with the CriMNet integration strategy. In the past, the Policy Group approved grants to counties for acquiring or enhancing county systems and required counties to provide matching funds equal to at least

⁹ Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, *CriMNet Financial Audit* (St. Paul, 2004).

The CriMNet Office has made a concerted effort to improve communication with local governments and other stakeholders.

50 percent of the grant amount. There are nuances to the local funding issue that the Policy Group is considering and that may require legislative action. They include: (1) the extent to which counties can use “in kind” matching funds (such as staff time) to meet the local match requirement and (2) the extent to which some smaller counties will be able to meet a 50-percent match requirement at all. The law requires that local grant criteria be consistent for all counties, but adhering to this requirement may affect the pace of integration to the extent that some local jurisdictions are unwilling or unable to meet the standard grant criteria.¹⁰

Communication

In the past year, CriMNet officials have made a concerted effort to refocus their communication strategy to emphasize improving the quality and consistency of communication with project teams and local stakeholders. For example, making the Task Force a more integral element of CriMNet operations along with regular status presentations from the CriMNet Office to the Task Force and Policy Group are important steps toward improving communication among CriMNet stakeholders.



Through Public Safety’s communications director, the CriMNet Office drafted a “Communications Action Plan” covering September 2003 through the spring of 2004 that states as its goals: strengthening CriMNet’s asset base, educating key stakeholders, institutionalizing CriMNet as an operational system, and leveraging accomplishments. The action plan, however, does not establish routine mechanisms for communicating with stakeholders and criminal justice entities at all levels or include an explicit policy for formally reviewing and approving major communication products (such as newsletters). Also, the action plan shows a private sector company as a CriMNet spokesperson for many of the plan’s action items.¹¹ Given past concerns regarding the accuracy and extent of communication about CriMNet, we think it is important for the Policy Group to engage in a discussion regarding CriMNet’s communication strategy and to document that strategy as programwide guidance.

Other Program Controls

Last, CriMNet Office staff have made some progress in designing and implementing project management processes for (1) reviewing and approving changes to time, scope, and budget; (2) identifying and mitigating project risks;

¹⁰ As of January 2004, CriMNet officials were revising the criteria that will be used to award local grants (and the application process itself) and said that the grant criteria would focus on integration investments rather than enhancing local systems.

¹¹ In 2003, this private company produced and distributed a video about CriMNet and the need for criminal justice information integration.

and (3) identifying and resolving business or technical implementation issues that cannot be resolved at the project team level. The office has implemented change control techniques, starting with the strategic plan approved in September 2003. We assume that other key documents and program decisions will fall under the same process, which collectively will provide the CriMNet program with an authoritative set of documents and information that will serve as a baseline against which to measure progress. To date, procedures to identify and manage risks and implementation issues are being planned but have not been uniformly implemented.

Priorities for 2004

The CriMNet Office is poised to shift its focus from planning and capacity building to active implementation of projects and activities that directly further statewide criminal justice information integration. A number of key activities will be pivotal in 2004. While not an exhaustive list, the priorities listed in Table 4.6 include outcomes that need to be achieved to support integration. Legislative policy and appropriation committees should look for progress in these areas.

Meeting these priorities will require action by the CriMNet Office, Policy Group, and Legislature, and all require sustained leadership and resources. Legislative action in the 2004 and 2005 sessions to resolve key data practice issues is particularly critical. As we discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, uncertainty regarding the treatment of certain data has stalled progress on some integration efforts and will likely continue to do so.

Getting staff on board, assessing user needs, and completing key planning tasks are priorities for 2004.

Table 4.6: CriMNet Priorities for 2004

Program Management

- Hire CriMNet Office and Integration Backbone project staff in accordance with the current staffing plan.
- Define and implement a CriMNet Office scope statement and a work plan showing how the office will support work on the integration blueprint, data practices, user requirements, and security.

Integration

- Successfully roll out the Integration Backbone search function.
- Attain legislative action on data practice questions presented to the Legislature in the 2004 session; develop more specific data practice recommendations for action in the 2005 legislative session.
- Assess and document user needs and make material progress translating these needs into integration requirements.
- Make material progress developing the integration blueprint—the collection of integration practices, standards, requirements, and plans that together describe how further integration will proceed.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of CriMNet Office documents and interviews with CriMNet officials.

CONCLUSIONS

Although various integration projects made notable progress, 2002 was a difficult year for CriMNet from a program management perspective. Inattention to program management basics, insufficient staffing, and other issues spiraled into an unfortunate set of interrelated problems. These problems included eroding trust among various stakeholders, little progress on important program management projects, and confusion regarding CriMNet's direction and integration priorities. Absent institutionalized use of standard practices, the Policy Group lacked some important tools, such as a CriMNet Office work plan, that might have helped it pinpoint and address these problems earlier. Implementing standard practices does not, by itself, guarantee that CriMNet will be managed efficiently and effectively. But, the bumps and missteps that CriMNet has experienced thus far demonstrate that more rigorous application of standard methods is needed.

The Policy Group and CriMNet Office staff took important steps in 2003 toward getting CriMNet's program management house in order. Appointing a new Executive Director and implementing a structured program management approach were key to establishing a more disciplined tone for CriMNet Office activities. In addition, Policy Group and Task Force efforts to address some long-standing issues, such as data practices, were equally important. Through sustained leadership, the Policy Group and Commissioner of Public Safety need to ensure that staffing problems are rectified and that basic planning tasks are completed. Action in both areas is needed to establish realistic baseline expectations for time, scope, and budget against which CriMNet progress can be measured.

In sum, CriMNet is at a critical juncture. Although some legislators and others may be disappointed with the extent of integration that has been achieved thus far, the problems driving the need for integration will not go away. Individuals who commit crimes cross jurisdictions, and criminal justice professionals must be able, on a statewide basis, to identify offenders and know their full criminal histories. The state, as a whole, needs to put forth its best effort to solve this problem. The integration process needs to take place through incremental steps, and both policymakers and the various state and local agencies involved need to set aside parochial interests and take responsibility for developing a shared sense of direction and setting priorities. These priorities should reflect the information sharing capabilities that front-line professionals need to do their jobs better. Moving forward, the Legislature should look to the Policy Group for a plan that clearly identifies the next steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fully Staff the CriMNet Office

RECOMMENDATION

To provide appropriate staffing for the CriMNet Office, the Commissioner of Public Safety should expedite filling open CriMNet Office staff positions.

Understaffing at the CriMNet Office is a long-standing problem that needs to be addressed immediately. The CriMNet Office has initiated the personnel actions required to hire staff, but six months after the Policy Group approved the staffing plan, few of the office's staff positions had been filled. We realize that state procedures constrain the speed with which new employees may be hired, but we urge the Commissioner of Public Safety, with support from other Policy Group members as needed, to expedite the hiring process. The CriMNet Office's ability to make material progress on its priorities for 2004 requires that it have sufficient staff.

Complete the Planning Process

RECOMMENDATIONS

To fully articulate the state's incremental approach to integrating criminal justice information, the Policy Group should:

- *Ensure that the CriMNet scope statement outlining projects and program controls is completed and approved as soon as possible;*
- *Ensure that the agreed-upon scope of CriMNet projects in 2004 and 2005 adequately addresses the need to complete work practice, data, and technical requirements as quickly as possible;*
- *Require the CriMNet Office to provide a comprehensive work plan showing time, budget, and outcome milestones for key activities and projects; and*
- *Initiate, as soon as practical, the process of setting integration priorities for 2006-07.*

The Policy Group needs to ensure that program planning is completed and performance benchmarks are set.

CriMNet Office staff worked hard in 2003 to rectify past planning shortfalls. Completing the strategic plan was an important step toward focusing CriMNet resources and creating a common understanding among CriMNet stakeholders regarding CriMNet's direction over the next several years. But, CriMNet operations should be guided by a narrower set of incremental outcomes to be achieved (for example, accomplishments expected in 6- to 12-month increments), and the Policy Group should ensure that the plan for these incremental steps is

well laid out. As of January 2004, some of this detailed planning work was underway; the Policy Group needs to ensure that it is completed as quickly as possible.

We think having a comprehensive plan showing how various CriMNet Office, state agency, and local projects fit together would also be useful from a management and oversight perspective. In addition, the Policy Group needs to present to the 2005 Legislature a CriMNet funding plan for 2006-07. To make a credible presentation, the plan should include an explanation of projects to be funded and how they are linked to the CriMNet strategic plan.

Improve Communication and Accountability

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the timeliness and quality of information on CriMNet program status:

- *The Policy Group should require state agencies implementing CriMNet projects to establish a common coding structure in the state's accounting system that will allow for overall analysis, monitoring, and reporting of CriMNet financial activity.*
- *Policy Group members should ensure (1) that state agency CriMNet project teams report all needed status information, including budget, schedule, and outcome data, to the CriMNet Office and (2) that local grant contracts include the same requirement.*
- *The Policy Group should implement a communication plan that (1) balances external publicity with information sharing and communication among CriMNet project teams and stakeholder groups; (2) defines the parameters of private sector involvement in promoting CriMNet; and (3) includes a requirement for review and approval of key messages and communication materials.*

To provide more meaningful oversight, the Policy Group and Task Force, in collaboration with the CriMNet Office, should adjust meeting agendas and schedules as needed to ensure that CriMNet program status is regularly and rigorously reviewed.

To improve its ability to evaluate CriMNet budget requests, the Legislature should require the Policy Group to present during the biennial appropriation process a comprehensive spending plan showing the status of current projects, the amount of continued funding requested, high-level outcomes expected in the coming biennium, and priorities among new project proposals. In addition, legislative finance and policy committees of jurisdiction should consider specific agency criminal justice information system requests in light of this overall CriMNet plan.

The Legislature should require more detailed and prioritized spending plans for CriMNet projects.

CriMNet is a high profile and important initiative for the state. Based on how difficult it was for agencies to compile CriMNet spending data for their own use and for our evaluation, the program would benefit from a clearer financial accounting structure. Creating a common structure will require cooperation among those agencies receiving CriMNet funds and the Department of Finance to (1) establish a consistent definition of the types of criminal justice information system spending that will be included in CriMNet, and (2) implement a coding structure to track CriMNet spending, including CriMNet costs funded with general operating or general information system funds.

If CriMNet is to function as a collaborative effort among jurisdictions, state and local agencies need to do their part by providing basic project planning and status information to the CriMNet Office where the information can be compiled for a programwide perspective. In addition, to ensure active evaluation of programwide progress against baseline expectations, the Task Force and Policy Group need to reach the program review portions of their respective meeting agendas. From mid-2003 to date, both groups devoted most of their meeting time to discussion of long-standing issues, such as data practices. We certainly do not dispute the importance of resolving these issues, but for accountability, adequate attention must also be paid to the progress of integration projects.

CriMNet's current management team emphasized to us that good communication among CriMNet stakeholders is an important management tool, and past experience has shown how poor communication can damage relationships and contribute to unrealistic expectations. We think it is important to set clear expectations for internal and external communication in a formal plan. The plan should be used as a means to explicitly articulate some important communication decisions, such as (1) how to educate the public about the vision for CriMNet while providing realistic expectations regarding incremental progress; (2) the role of private sector companies in serving as formal spokespersons for the state; and (3) how communication materials, such as speeches and newsletters, should be reviewed to ensure that the message fits with the communication plan.

Address Data Practice Issues

The Legislature needs to act on Policy Group recommendations regarding changes to Minnesota's Data Practices Act.

RECOMMENDATION

To address deficient and conflicting Minnesota statutes pertaining to criminal justice data practices and to ensure that individuals have an appropriate level of access to data about themselves:

- *The Legislature should, during the 2004 legislative session, consider and act on the Policy Group's December 2003 recommendations to modify the Data Practices Act; and*
 - *In future years, the Policy Group should ensure that it makes timely recommendations to the Legislature regarding additional data practice issues requiring legislative action.*
-

In its December 2003 annual report to the Legislature, the Policy Group recommended a number of statutory changes to address conflicting data classifications and rules of access. The Legislature needs to consider and act on these and future recommendations to better ensure that, as CriMNet moves forward, it does so in compliance with the Data Practices Act. Uncertainties regarding compliance with the Data Practices Act have slowed some aspects of CriMNet system design and have affected some local jurisdictions' willingness to share data.

Modify CriMNet's Governance Structure

RECOMMENDATIONS

To better ensure that the perspectives of local jurisdictions are considered in setting CriMNet policy, the Legislature should amend the law to add local representatives to the Policy Group.

To provide stronger day-to-day support and oversight of CriMNet Office operations, the Commissioner of Public Safety and the Policy Group as a whole should clarify for the CriMNet Executive Director distinctions between the Policy Group's strategic authority and the Department of Public Safety's day-to-day management authority.

This is a good time for the Legislature to review CriMNet's governance structure.

The Policy Group should evolve as CriMNet does. Several of the largest statewide integration projects managed as part of CriMNet—MNCIS, the Statewide Supervision System, and Integration Backbone—are well underway or completed. As CriMNet's focus turns toward integrating city and county jurisdictions, the Policy Group's membership should be rebalanced to reflect that shift. Adding local jurisdiction representatives to the Policy Group reinforces the notion that CriMNet is a collaborative effort among branches and levels of government. The Legislature can use this opportunity to consider adding criminal justice functions not currently represented on the Policy Group, including prosecution, public defense, and local law enforcement. It may make sense to choose these representatives from among Task Force members, as they are likely to be well versed in CriMNet issues.

In considering how local representatives may be added to the Policy Group, we suggest that the Legislature engage in a broader discussion regarding the number of executive and judicial branch representatives as well. For example, the Commissioner of Finance has requested that her department no longer serve on the Policy Group because of concern that the department has a role in both crafting CriMNet budget proposals and reviewing them. If the Legislature chooses to act on her recommendation, it may wish to reduce the number of judicial representatives from four to three as well. In general, we think this is a good time for legislators from the House and Senate committees of jurisdiction to meet with Policy Group members and local representatives from the Task Force to discuss how the Policy Group can be configured to best meet the program's needs moving forward.

We support the decision to more closely align CriMNet Office operations with management of other state criminal justice information systems by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. But, we recognize the complications that this dual reporting relationship can present for the CriMNet Executive Director. Our recommendation is intended to urge the Commissioner of Public Safety and other Policy Group members to proactively address and resolve any differences of opinion regarding the bounds of their authority.