



OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR

STATE OF MINNESOTA

CriMNet

March 3, 2004

CriMNet is a Minnesota program to integrate criminal justice information kept in separate systems and jurisdictions. CriMNet is being implemented incrementally through projects managed by state and local agencies. The Policy Group, with representatives from the courts and several state agencies, governs CriMNet. The CriMNet Office in the Department of Public Safety manages day-to-day program activities.

Major Findings:



CriMNet has improved statewide access to criminal justice information, but management problems have impeded its progress.

- Since 1996, nearly \$180 million in state and federal funds have been allocated for criminal justice information system improvements in Minnesota. Of that amount, about \$55 million is the CriMNet program budget for fiscal years 2002-05.
- CriMNet has improved access to criminal justice data, but work remains, such as integrating local jurisdictions' prosecution and law enforcement investigative data and linking offender records into accurate criminal histories.
- Most of the CriMNet projects we reviewed delivered the desired results, though most took longer and cost more than expected. Progress on some projects has slowed because of questions regarding data classification and security and because some system requirements have not been resolved.
- CriMNet's central infrastructure—called the "Integration Backbone"—will serve as the conduit among criminal justice systems and is scheduled to be operational in late 2004. This critical project has experienced significant planning and management problems and will not

deliver some desired results without more work.

- The CriMNet Office and the Policy Group have not always functioned effectively, resulting in personnel problems, unclear priorities, slow progress setting integration standards, and conflicts among stakeholders. Inadequate staffing and lack of defined program scope are contributing factors.
- CriMNet leaders made a mid-course correction in early 2003 and, though progress has been slow, past problems are being addressed. Understaffing of the CriMNet Office remains a critical problem.

Key Recommendations:

- The Legislature should amend state law to resolve criminal justice data classification issues, modify the CriMNet governance structure, and require more detailed information from CriMNet to support pending plans.
- The Department of Public Safety should provide day-to-day support and direction for the CriMNet Office and expedite hiring CriMNet Office staff.
- The Policy Group should ensure that it (1) receives from the CriMNet Office and other agencies the information it needs to assess, prioritize, and facilitate statewide integration efforts and (2) uses this information to make timely decisions.

The full evaluation report, *CriMNet* (#pe04-05), includes the agency's response and is available at 651/296-4708 or:

www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/2004/pe0405.htm

Some important criminal justice data are not yet a part of CriMNet.

Report Summary

In Minnesota, criminal justice information is created and maintained on separate systems by courts, executive agencies, and local jurisdictions. CriMNet is a multi-jurisdictional program to integrate these systems, allowing law enforcement officers, judges, public defenders, and other criminal justice professionals to share certain data on offenders' criminal histories and their status in the justice system. Integrating this information has been an incremental process that started with planning in the early 1990s. In 2001, the Legislature adopted the CriMNet plan for integrating criminal justice information and started making significant investments in new and improved information systems. These and future integration efforts are referred to as "CriMNet."

CriMNet is not itself a database, but projects that help criminal justice personnel share data. One project is to build a connecting infrastructure, called the "Integration Backbone." Other projects aim to establish common work practices for recording and reporting criminal justice events or to improve agencies' criminal justice information systems.

The Policy Group, comprised of four judicial and four executive branch leaders, governs CriMNet. The CriMNet Office manages day-to-day program activities, and a task force of state, local, and other representatives advises the Policy Group. The Policy Group and CriMNet Office are responsible for setting CriMNet's strategic direction, determining priorities, making budget recommendations, and completing support work, such as setting security standards and maintaining data-sharing models. State and local agencies lead specific integration projects.

State and federal funding for CriMNet has typically been provided through appropriations and grants designated as being for "criminal justice information system improvements." For fiscal years 1996-2005, this category of state and federal funding in Minnesota totaled about \$180 million. Of that amount, about \$55 million

is the CriMNet program budget for fiscal years 2002-05.

We evaluated the status of information integration to date; the extent to which state agency integration projects have met time, cost, and result expectations; and how well the CriMNet program overall has been managed.

Minnesota Has Made Significant Progress, But Criminal Justice Information Integration Is Not Yet Seamless

The state has made significant progress improving criminal justice technology and integrating key system components. For example, the Department of Corrections has successfully integrated probation and detention data that had previously been held in separate county and jail systems, and the courts are implementing a new statewide court information system. Other completed projects have made less visible, but necessary, system improvements to facilitate data sharing. For example, the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension upgraded the criminal justice network that many jurisdictions use to transmit data. Other accomplishments include statewide access to electronic fingerprint equipment and statewide databases for predatory offender data and arrest photos.

But some important criminal justice data have not yet been integrated. Public defense, prosecution, and local law enforcement, for example, do not have statewide information systems, although certain data are available statewide through an intermediary (e.g., law enforcement agencies submit some data to the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension). Absent additional statewide systems, fuller integration of these data will depend on local jurisdictions' abilities to link their information systems with the state. At this time, the state does not know how great an investment is needed to integrate more local jurisdictions.

More work also needs to be done to positively identify offenders and link statewide criminal records by fingerprints rather than by less reliable methods. The core technology, electronic fingerprinting,

To make CriMNet more effective, more work needs to be done to build accurate, statewide criminal histories.

is in place and another project to address problems linking fingerprints to arrest records is underway.

Most CriMNet Projects Have Achieved Desired Results, But With More Time and Expense Than Anticipated

Improvements in access to criminal justice information resulted from a series of individual projects at the departments of Public Safety and Corrections, the state courts, and local agencies. While these projects generally achieved desired results, they typically took longer and cost more than anticipated. Although not affecting each project to the same degree, factors influencing costs and timelines included: (1) lack of clear expectations and precise contract language for project deliverables; (2) insufficient state staffing or expertise; (3) challenges coordinating tasks among agencies; (4) inability to resolve work practice and legal issues prior to proceeding with technical development; and (5) changes to project design or scope.

A Central Integration System Should Be Fully Available Statewide in Late 2004, But Without Some Expected Functions

CriMNet's Integration Backbone—a critical CriMNet component—is the technical infrastructure that will connect disparate information systems. The state contracted with a vendor in 2002 to design and build the Backbone, but the project has not proceeded according to the time, cost, and scope parameters of the original vendor proposal and contract. The project is challenging, and some uncertainty in setting performance targets is understandable. But, some of this project's problems could have been avoided with better planning and management by the state.

Initial plans grossly underestimated the time it would take to achieve project goals. Other factors contributed to overruns, including (1) insufficient planning of the system's technical requirements, (2) questionable state decisions regarding vendor work products and priorities, and (3) too few state staff. The state renegotiated contract terms

in mid-2003, and in our view, these changes should produce a better value for the state. The state expects to fully deploy the Integration Backbone in late 2004 with a search function linked to five statewide systems. Other planned functions have been delayed until staff are available to complete necessary supporting work.

Early Failure to Follow Best Practices Contributed to CriMNet Office Management Problems

The Legislature created the CriMNet Office in 2001 to coordinate, manage, and oversee the CriMNet program. However, in the office's early years, CriMNet Office managers and the Policy Group failed to make crucial planning decisions, such as defining CriMNet's objectives and scope, or to implement standard mechanisms for monitoring, tracking, and communicating about CriMNet's status. These weaknesses made it more difficult to manage the program on a day-to-day basis and to identify and resolve problems. This resulted in unfinished tasks (such as setting technical standards), incomplete information regarding CriMNet's cost and progress, and conflicts among stakeholders.

A variety of factors contributed to program management shortcomings. The CriMNet Office lacked sufficient staffing levels and expertise. In addition, previous CriMNet Office managers did not pay sufficient attention to the full range of their program responsibilities, such as setting technical standards and long-term planning. Finally, the Policy Group was not able to make timely decisions regarding critical program issues, such as data practices, or provide sufficient day-to-day supervision of CriMNet Office operations.

Recent Corrective Actions Demonstrate Commitment to Strengthening Program Management

Over the past year, the Policy Group and CriMNet Office managers have acted to improve program management. As a result, CriMNet, in general, has become more clearly focused and stakeholder collaboration is improving.

CriMNet policymakers need to set priorities and complete several key projects.

Changes include appointing a new executive director, plans to restructure and enlarge the CriMNet Office, using the state's project management standards to guide CriMNet Office operations, and adopting a strategic plan. In addition, the Policy Group made several governance changes, including assigning more responsibility to the advisory task force and embedding the CriMNet Office more fully within the Department of Public Safety's management structure.

CriMNet Staffing, Governance, and Other Issues Still Need Attention

Despite recent corrective actions, progress is still slower than is needed, in large part because insufficient staffing remains a critical problem. As of January 2004, the CriMNet Office had hired staff for only a few of 26 planned positions. These staff are needed to complete important activities, such as assessing user needs, defining technical and work process requirements, assessing local jurisdictions' capacities to integrate, and resolving data practice issues. Other matters needing attention include resolving how integration costs will be shared by federal, state, and local entities and implementing a communication strategy. We recommend several actions to improve CriMNet Office operations and to strengthen oversight and accountability.

Some stakeholders have suggested that the Legislature add one or more local jurisdiction representatives to the Policy Group. They argue that (1) cooperation from local jurisdictions is vital as integration progresses from the state to the local level, and (2) the front-line perspective should be reflected in CriMNet's strategic direction. But, other stakeholders argue that local jurisdictions are already represented through the Policy Group's advisory task force and as nonvoting members of the Policy Group. We find the arguments in favor of adding local representatives to the Policy Group to be more compelling, and we recommend that the Legislature modify the law accordingly.

Much of CriMNet's recent efforts have focused on completing state and local projects already underway and, at the CriMNet Office, rectifying management shortfalls. Now CriMNet needs to set priorities and initiate projects that address remaining gaps. The Legislature should look to the Policy Group for a plan that clearly identifies the next steps, as well as when and how CriMNet will resolve concerns with system security, local jurisdictions' needs, and compliance with state data practice laws.

Summary of Agency Responses:

The commissioners of Public Safety and Corrections and the State Court Administrator responded to the report in separate letters sent February 20, 2004. Commissioner of Public Safety Richard Stanek wrote, "the report represents a fair and accurate assessment of the criminal justice projects and the CriMNet program." He added that, in many cases, the department has already acted to rectify problem areas, most notably inadequate staffing of the CriMNet Office, and that CriMNet "is now moving in the right direction."

Commissioner of Corrections Joan Fabian wrote that Minnesota has made significant progress in integrating criminal justice information and that her department's experience working with local agencies and vendors would be of significant value for future CriMNet efforts.

State Court Administrator Sue Dosal wrote that the report recognizes CriMNet's complexity and the commitment of the organizations involved, but she deferred consideration of the report's recommendations to the full Policy Group. She added, "You have the Judiciary's commitment to carefully consider the report and to work expeditiously through the Policy Group process toward resolution of the issues...identified."