

Crime Gun Intelligence Centers **Best Practices Guide**

**Building a Successful CGIC Using
Proven Strategies from the Field**

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What is a Crime Gun Intelligence Center?

Crime Gun Intelligence Centers (CGICs) are an interagency collaboration focused on the immediate collection, management, and analysis of crime gun evidence, such as cartridge casings, in real time to identify prolific shooters, disrupt criminal activity, facilitate successful prosecutions, and prevent future violence. Successful CGICs rely on ongoing collaboration between the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), local law enforcement, crime laboratories, probation and parole agencies, local prosecuting attorneys, the United States Attorney's Office (USAO), crime analysts, and community groups. Supporting the above goals, CGIC outcomes can include the identification of crime gun sources, efficient resource allocation, providing decision makers with the most accurate gun crime data available, increasing case closure rates, and preventing violent crimes committed with firearms.

CGIC Mission

Prevent gun violence by consistently producing timely, precise, and actionable intelligence concerning gun crimes to identify armed violent offenders for investigation, disruption, and targeted enforcement.

Since 2016, the National Policing Institute (NPI), with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), has supported CGIC model implementation throughout the United States, including small, medium, and large jurisdictions in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Based on the [ATF Governing Board's CGIC best practices](#), and in collaboration with ATF, BJA developed the CGIC 7-Step Workflow Model. NPI has evaluated the implementation of this model in over **50** jurisdictions.

Crime Gun Intelligence Center Workflow



NPI has also provided support to various CGICs across the country to improve efficiency, collaboration, and sustainability by identifying areas for improvement and noting where best practices were already in place. Many agencies that have embraced recommendations and guidance provided by NPI have been successful in implementing sustainable CGICs that have increased homicide and nonfatal shootings clearance rates, lowered gun violence, and improved law enforcement-community relations.

Implementing CGIC best practices can provide agencies with a roadmap for building a successful CGIC program that withstands the passage of time, leadership changes, and the implementation of new laws and technologies. Although no single system works in all jurisdictions, the best practices outlined in this guide have been cross-referenced across multiple jurisdictions to identify core principles and structures found in successful CGICs, along with the common challenges that may have to be overcome to implement them.

CGIC Key Terms and Positions

ATF Field Division Crime Gun Intelligence Center – The 25 [ATF Field Division](#) CGICs serve the cities or jurisdictions in which they are located and provide support and guidance to all local jurisdictions within their respective areas of responsibility. Local CGICs operated by a state or local agency outside of the ATF Field Division are under the local ATF Field Office’s purview. The local ATF Field Office will integrate with the local CGIC initiative, provide special agent investigative support, enable firearms-specific training, and recommend federal prosecution, as applicable. ATF Field Division CGICs are the “connective tissue” with these jurisdictions, providing them with additional intelligence assistance and process management while ensuring compliance with national NIBIN standards. ATF Field Division CGICs also maintain nationwide contacts and coordinate with other jurisdictions to share lessons learned with all CGICs within their areas of responsibility. ATF’s primary role is to update, maintain, and communicate best practices so municipalities have the resources and support they need.

ATF Industry Operations Investigator (IOI) – An IOI examines licensees and permittees of firearms and explosives and also assists other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. An IOI is critical to integrating firearms tracing and NIBIN Cto identify sources of crime guns that have been linked to multiple criminal shootings. An IOI identifies at-risk federal firearms licensees (FFLs) who experience a disproportionately high number of crime gun traces involving weapons recovered in serious crimes. These FFLs can be sources for gun trafficking rings. At-risk FFLs may be used by criminals and their straw purchasers based on their geographic location, the types of firearms typically sold, and where they conduct business (e.g., storefront, gun show, private residence).

ATF Intelligence Research Specialist (IRS) – An IRS gathers, analyzes, and assembles information for major complex investigations. In addition, an IRS analyzes intelligence to develop detailed reports and presents briefings on the activities of criminal targets; provides information and advice on significant intelligence trends, critical developments, and changes in procedure; and responds to requests for intelligence from special agents and

task force investigators by extracting, compiling, and analyzing data from various sources of information.

CGIC Leadership Support – Comprised of senior managers and decision-makers from each partnering agency, executive team members meet regularly to set strategic priorities and review the performance of the CGIC.

CGIC Operations Personnel – Responsible for daily operations, activities of this team include, but are not limited to:

- Immediate collection and processing of crime gun evidence (cartridge casings and firearms).
- NIBIN data analysis and lead dissemination.
- Investigation of criminal shootings linked by NIBIN.
- Crime gun tracing and identification of crime gun sources by ATF.
- Firearms trafficking interdiction by ATF and law enforcement partners.
- Identification, disruption, and arrest of armed criminals by ATF and partner law enforcement agencies.
- Strategic prosecution of violent offenders at the federal, state, and local levels.

CGIC Targeting – This process identifies the most violent, active armed offenders and their sources of crime guns using objective technologies, such as National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), eTrace, gunshot detection systems, and dedicated investigative follow-up.

Crime Gun – This term refers to any firearm possessed, used, or intended to be used during or in relation to a crime.

Crime Gun Trace – This is the systematic tracking of the movement of a firearm recovered by law enforcement officials. The trace is conducted from the firearm's importation into or its manufacture in the United States, through the distribution chain of federal firearms licensees, to the point of first retail sale.

eTrace – This paperless ATF firearm trace submission system is readily accessible through the internet. The system provides the necessary utilities

for submitting, retrieving, storing, and querying firearm trace-related information relative to the requestor's agency.

Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL) – An FFL is an individual licensed in the United States to be engaged in the business of the manufacture, importation, or sale of firearms and ammunition.

Huddle – Huddle is a cloud collaboration vendor with FedRAMP Authority to Operate (ATO). Huddle provides collaboration across teams and government agencies, enables effective procurement and supplier management with external partners, offers secure and simple document sharing, and drives the mobile productivity of NIBIN National Correlation and Training Center (NNCTC) employees, contractors, and stakeholders. Huddle meets all requirements for cloud computing security controls, including vulnerability scanning, incident monitoring, logging, and reporting. Huddle adheres to strict security guidelines, and its United States data centers are certified to the highest standards to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of our data, and all adhere to strict certifications spanning access control, data encryption and threat protection.

Integrated Ballistics Identification System™ (IBIS) – This automated ballistics imaging and analysis system populates a computerized database of digital ballistic images of bullets, ammunition, and cartridge casings from crime guns and crime scenes. The system assists forensic experts in making identifications for investigations and trials.

- **BRASSTRAX™** – An acquisition station that specializes in the entry of cartridge casing information into the NIBIN network.
- **MATCHPOINT™** – An analysis station for reviewing the potential matches obtained from IBIS™ correlation algorithms.

Local Crime Gun Intelligence Center – An interagency collaboration focused on the timely collection, management, and analysis of crime gun evidence (e.g., cartridge casings) to identify shooters, disrupt criminal activity, and prevent future violence. The primary purpose of the local CGIC is to identify armed, violent offenders for investigation and prosecution.

National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) – The national database of digital images of spent bullets and cartridge casings found at crime scenes and test-fired from confiscated crime guns. ATF's NIBIN is the only interstate ballistic identification system that allows law enforcement partners to associate ammunition casings, crime guns, and crime scenes.

NIBIN Enforcement Support System (NESS) – ATF's NESS is a web-based investigative tool that provides law enforcement agency personnel with quick and easy access to NIBIN data, basic firearms tracing information, and law enforcement report information in one platform.

NIBIN Contractor – An individual who facilitates NIBIN entries, assists in crime gun tracing, and reviews crime reports related to NIBIN leads/hits to support the development and distribution of NIBIN referrals to analytical personnel. A NIBIN contractor can be a contractor for ATF or a local law enforcement agency.

NIBIN Hit – Linkage of two or more pieces of ballistic evidence, such as crime scene cartridge casings or crime gun test-fire cartridge casing exemplars, through the use of NIBIN technology *and confirmed* by microscopic examination by two firearm and tool-mark examiners.

NIBIN Lead – Linkage of two or more pieces of ballistic evidence, such as crime scene cartridge casings or crime gun test-fire cartridge casing exemplars, through the use of NIBIN technology *but not confirmed* by microscopic examination by firearm and tool-mark examiners.

NIBIN Lead/Hit Referral Sheet – A document produced by a CGIC analyst listing all NIBIN leads/hits and distributed to investigative personnel for follow-up assignment and investigation.

NIBIN-Related Case – A case involving a NIBIN hit and/or NIBIN lead.

Referral Lists – A function of eTrace that links each trace result to lists of associated prior firearm traces submitted by any agency found to have a common purchaser, possessor, dealer, and/or recovery location. Agencies can view previous traces submitted by their agency instantly in eTrace. For prior traces submitted by other agencies, the eTrace referral list provides the other

agency's name, the trace identification number, contact name, and phone number.

RMS – A Records Management System.

Suspect/Unrecovered Firearm – NIBIN links between multiple shootings associated with the same crime gun where the firearm has not yet been recovered.

Time to First Shooting (TTFS) – The time from the last known retail sale of a firearm to the first known date that a firearm was used in a shooting (e.g., NIBIN event).

Time to Crime (TTC) – The time from the last known retail sale of a firearm to when it is recovered in a crime.

Vertical Prosecution – One prosecutor is assigned responsibility for a case from intake to the disposition of the case.



Executive Summary

Across jurisdictions of every size and governance structure, gun violence continues to challenge public safety institutions and test collective capacity to respond effectively. Many agencies turn to the CGIC model because it offers a disciplined and operationally focused way to address the limitations of purely reactive enforcement. When supported by sustained executive engagement and clear operational expectations, CGICs have consistently demonstrated their value through the identification of firearms, individuals, and networks associated with violent crime by intervening with greater speed, precision, and accountability.

One of the clearest lessons to emerge is that the CGIC model's strength lies in its ability to transform ballistic and firearm trace data into timely, actionable intelligence. When this process works as intended, agencies move beyond retrospective case processing and operate in an intelligence-led posture that informs investigative decisions, supports prosecutorial strategies, and aligns enforcement activity with broader violence reduction objectives. Experience has also shown that technology, while essential, is not sufficient on its own. Meaningful outcomes depend on visible executive commitment, clear policy alignment, and deliberate coordination among agencies that share responsibility across the criminal justice system.

Over time, effective CGIC operations tend to converge around the seven interdependent practices that constitute the CGIC workflow. While jurisdictions will, and should, tailor implementation to local legal authorities, organizational structures, and resource constraints, these principles have proven highly transferable across jurisdictions.

1

First, **COMPREHENSIVE EVIDENCE COLLECTION** is foundational. Agencies that view cartridge casings and crime guns as routine property inevitably forfeit critical intelligence. Jurisdictions that achieve measurable results establish clear, agencywide expectations that all ballistic evidence is an intelligence asset from the moment it is encountered, recovered, and documented.

2

Second, **TIMELY NATIONAL INTEGRATED BALLISTICS INFORMATION NETWORK (NIBIN) ENTRY, CORRELATION, AND FIREARMS TRACING** must be treated as standard operating procedure, rather than a discretionary activity. When eligible evidence is entered and processed promptly and consistently, correlations and trace results begin to reveal a firearm's activity history while investigations are still active, allowing intelligence to shape investigative direction and charging decisions, not merely supplement them after the fact.

3

Third, **CRIME GUN INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS** cannot be incidental or unfunded. Agencies that designate dedicated analytical capacity by integrating crime gun intelligence data such as NIBIN leads, trace information, case files, and contextual intelligence, are far better positioned to identify patterns, prioritize the most consequential cases, and guide investigative resources toward the individuals and networks driving the greatest harm.

4

Fourth, practical experience has underscored the need for **STRUCTURED LEAD ASSIGNMENT AND INVESTIGATION**. Clear triage and assignment protocols ensure that every lead is reviewed, prioritized based on risk and solvability, and pursued with supervisory visibility. Without this discipline, even highquality intelligence tends to dissipate before it translates into outcomes.

5

Fifth, consistent **COLLABORATION AMONG CRIMINAL JUSTICE STAKEHOLDERS** is essential. Regular, structured engagement among law enforcement, prosecutors, ATF, corrections, probation and parole, and other partners reduces accountability gaps to ensure that enforcement strategies are mutually reinforced rather than misaligned across systems.

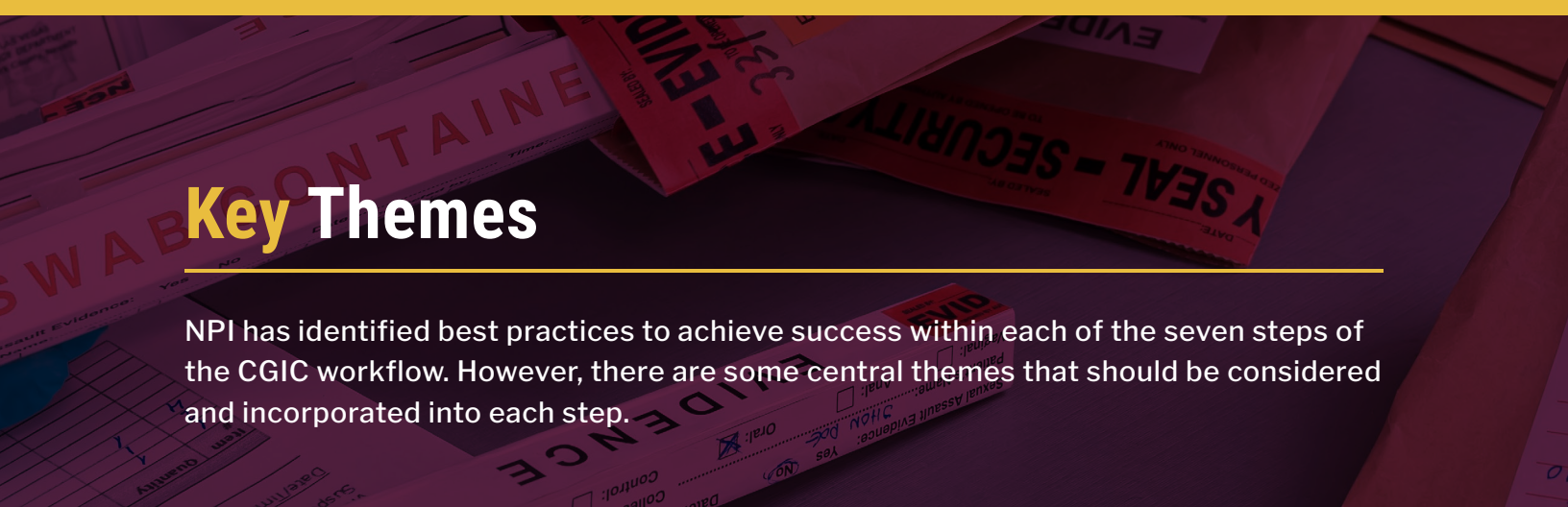
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Sixth, jurisdictions that incorporate **EARLY AND SUSTAINED PROSECUTORIAL ENGAGEMENT**, at both the state and federal levels, consistently report stronger cases and fewer downstream challenges. Early prosecutor involvement improves charging decisions, mitigates evidentiary and discovery risks, and supports deliberate coordination between state and federal authorities when parallel jurisdiction exists.

7

Finally, experience demonstrates that **FEEDBACK AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT** are necessary to sustain performance. Formal mechanisms that communicate outcomes to those involved reinforce accountability, highlight effective practices, generate community support, and provide leadership with the information needed to refine policy, training, and operational practices over time.

CGICs are not a rigid organizational template to be replicated wholesale. Rather, they represent a set of leadership principles and operational disciplines that can and should be adapted to local statutory frameworks, labor agreements, resource realities, and community expectations. The examples that follow are offered not as directives, but as illustrations drawn from implementation experience.



Key Themes

NPI has identified best practices to achieve success within each of the seven steps of the CGIC workflow. However, there are some central themes that should be considered and incorporated into each step.

Prioritizing Non-Fatal Shooting Investigations

In the United States, there are significantly more non-fatal shootings (NFS) than fatal shootings.¹ Unfortunately, in many jurisdictions, NFS are assigned to overworked or inexperienced detectives and prosecutors, while homicides are handled by separate, better-resourced units. This results in lower clearance rates for NFS compared to homicide cases. Research suggests that increasing investigative resources for NFS cases can increase those clearance rates.² Additionally, NFS are major sources of crime gun intelligence that are often underused due to the complexities associated with investigating and prosecuting them. Accordingly, **ALL** CGIC stakeholders should collaborate to mitigate these difficulties.

Victims in NFS cases introduce additional complexities that require specific approaches. Research suggests that very

few gunshot victims cooperate with law enforcement because they do not want to be seen as a “snitch”, lack trust in law enforcement, and desire to retaliate against the shooter themselves, outside of the criminal justice system.³ Because of this, NFS cases frequently rely on digital evidence, surveillance footage, and forensic findings rather than victim or witness cooperation. To build a better case when victim collaboration is lacking, prosecutors should be involved early in NFS investigations to provide guidance on evidence sufficiency and case strategy throughout the investigation. These challenges, in conjunction with the limited resources and expertise that often affect units dedicated to investigating NFS, make these cases more difficult to solve.

Successful CGICs have allocated resources to NFS investigations comparable to those traditionally reserved for homicide investigations and some have even merged their NFS and homicide units. These CGICs

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 5). *Fast facts: Firearm injury and death*. <https://www.cdc.gov/firearm-violence/data-research/facts-stats/index.html>
- 2 Braga, A. A. (2021). *Improving police clearance rates of shootings: A review of the evidence*. Manhattan Institute. <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/improving-police-clearance-rates-shootings-review-evidence-AB.pdf>
- 3 White, K., Cook, P. J., & Pollack, H. A. (2021). Gunshot-victim cooperation with police investigations: Results from the Chicago Inmate Survey. *Preventive Medicine*, 143, 106381. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jypmed.2020.106381>

understand that individuals willing to shoot another person are dangerous drivers of gun violence, regardless of whether the intended victim is killed. Ultimately, CGICs should focus on identifying, arresting, prosecuting, and convicting the dangerous trigger pullers, regardless of whether they have committed a homicide or a NFS.

Comprehensive Policies and Procedures

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are essential for the proper functioning and sustainability of a CGIC. Because CGICs depend on various stakeholders and procedural steps to function properly, many policies can influence them. Some CGICs develop comprehensive manuals that regulate operations through all seven steps of the CGIC workflow. Other jurisdictions have regulated each step of the workflow in the relevant units' policies. Regardless of the approach, it is important to ensure that each step of the process is formalized and documented.

Staffing changes are among the most common risks to CGIC sustainability, but documented procedures can mitigate such risks. Without written, standardized guidance for each step of the CGIC workflow, programs become vulnerable to the gradual erosion of best practices as investigators or leadership move to other positions or units. Across every phase of the CGIC process, from evidence collection to prosecution, documented procedures ensure that institutional knowledge is

preserved and that every participant understands their roles and responsibilities, even when they are new to their positions.

Involving key stakeholders, including local and federal prosecutors, in the policy development process is crucial. As end users, prosecutors should provide critical insight into evidentiary standards and legal requirements to be incorporated into written procedures early to prevent downstream problems in court. Policies developed collaboratively provide the structure that enables every component of the CGIC to function as a unified, accountable system.

CGIC-Related Training

Across every step of the CGIC workflow, the effectiveness of written procedures depends on whether the personnel responsible for carrying them out have been properly trained to do so. From patrol officers collecting cartridge casings at a shots-fired scene, to prosecutors presenting ballistic evidence at trial, training ensures that each stakeholder understands their role, executes it consistently, and recognizes the impact of their contribution to the CGIC process. Education is a key component of generating buy-in and commitment from CGIC participants; as a result, a robust training program can ensure long-term program sustainability.

Training ensures that patrol crime scene technicians and forensic lab personnel understand the importance of comprehensive collection and how



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CGIC Metrics and
Tracking** [↗](#)

to properly handle evidence without compromising its forensic integrity, including during test fires and NIBIN acquisitions. Education is also necessary to ensure that CGIC analysts and investigators understand how NIBIN leads are generated, what they represent, and how they can be leveraged in an investigation. Prosecutors should also receive CGIC-specific training to ensure they are better equipped to provide pre-arrest guidance, make informed charging decisions, and effectively leverage crime gun intelligence in court. In addition to these job-specific duties, personnel need training in overall CGIC concepts, so they understand why they are being asked to perform certain tasks and how those tasks contribute to the CGIC's mission.

Training should be ongoing rather than a one-time event. As technology, legal standards, and investigative techniques continue to evolve, periodic refresher training helps ensure that all CGIC stakeholders remain current and that the program continues to improve. Successful CGICs develop comprehensive training programs for patrol officers, investigators, analysts, and prosecutors that

help generate buy-in for the program and maintain participant engagement.

Tracking NIBIN Leads and CGIC Performance

Consistent tracking of CGIC and NIBIN data is essential for accountability purposes and to demonstrate program impact. Without a reliable tracking system in place, NIBIN leads can go unassigned, backlogs can accumulate, and the connection between the CGIC's work and crime reduction becomes difficult to document.

Effective NIBIN lead tracking supports accountability at every level of the CGIC and among all involved stakeholders. Leveraging a tracking system allows investigative supervisors to assign NIBIN leads for investigation and track their progress for accountability. Additionally, a comprehensive tracking system can help CGIC stakeholders easily visualize NIBIN leads that may be connected by common factors beyond the leads themselves, such as victims, suspects, vehicles, locations, and witnesses. Tracking NIBIN leads is

also crucial for prosecutors, who should establish parallel tracking mechanisms within their case management systems to track NIBIN-related cases from intake through disposition. This can help prosecutors navigate discovery considerations and identify common prosecution challenges and trends. In essence, a tracking system can be a very powerful tool for supervisors, analysts, investigators, and prosecutors alike, enabling a clearer understanding of the gun violence landscape within their jurisdictions and forming a crucial component of any successful CGIC.

Tracking CGIC performance throughout the CGIC workflow is also crucial for continuous improvement and for evaluating its impact. On the front end, tracking turnaround times from evidence recovery through NIBIN entry, lead generation, investigative assignment, and resolution can reveal bottlenecks, staffing gaps, and procedural inefficiencies. Agencies that track these metrics consistently are better positioned to identify where the workflow is breaking down and to make informed decisions about staffing, training, and resource allocation. Additionally, tracking enables

agencies to measure program outcomes, including the number of shooting incidents linked through NIBIN, the number of arrests and prosecutions resulting from NIBIN leads, and the impact of those outcomes on gun violence. These metrics can demonstrate to agency leadership, CGIC stakeholders, and the community the value of the CGIC, something crucial to close the feedback loop and support the program's sustainability.

Some CGICs rely on existing platforms, while others develop an internal NIBIN lead-tracking system. Regardless of the system an agency uses to track its CGIC data, the key is to track each lead and performance metric comprehensively. Ultimately, a NIBIN lead and performance-tracking system is not simply an administrative tool but a necessary component of a successful CGIC, supporting accountability and driving continuous improvement.

Regionalization

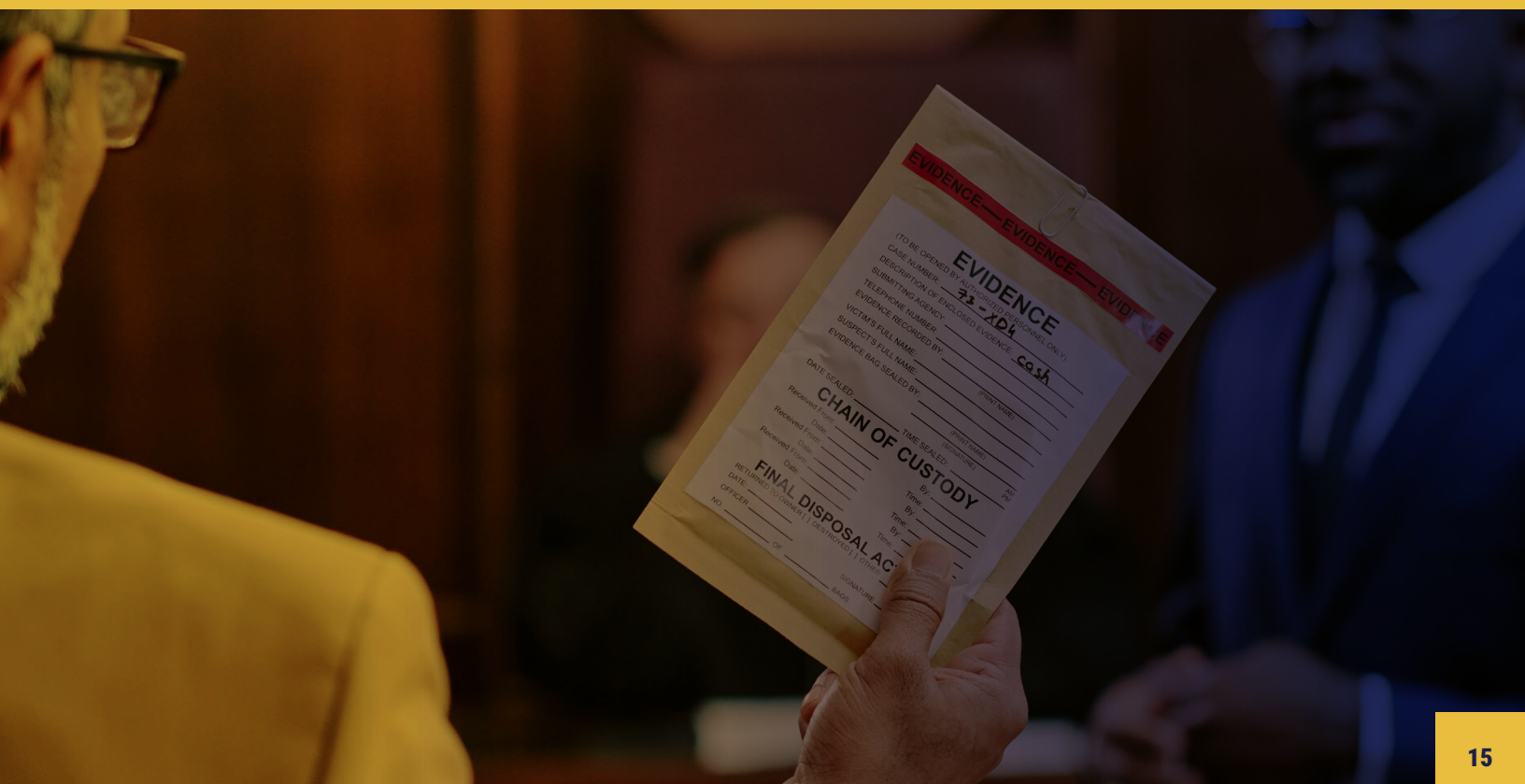
Since gun crime offenders do not follow jurisdictional boundaries, cross-jurisdictional collaboration among agencies is crucial to effectively combating gun crime. The regionalization of a

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Regionalization** [↗](#)

CGIC expands the model across multiple jurisdictions by creating a shared framework for evidence collection, ballistic processing, intelligence sharing, and coordinated investigations. It represents a partnership between local, state, and federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies aimed at gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information about gun crime affecting multiple jurisdictions within a specific geographical area.

Regional CGICs can also broaden access to core crime gun intelligence exploitation tools that would be otherwise unavailable. For example, through a Regional CGIC partnership, an agency or crime lab with its own NIBIN infrastructure can serve agencies that may not have the resources to establish their own. This ensures that cartridge casings and firearms are entered into NIBIN across the region, allowing investigators from all participating jurisdictions to have a clearer picture of where the most prolific guns and offenders are operating. This, in turn, can help get them off the streets. This model is especially valuable for smaller agencies that lack the staffing, funding, or call volume needed to justify their own NIBIN equipment or dedicated CGIC personnel. Smaller agencies benefit from the technical and analytical capacity of larger partners, while larger agencies gain visibility into gun crime trends and evidence recoveries occurring in neighboring communities.

For a Regional CGIC to be effective, all involved agencies should receive the same level of support and collaboration from stakeholders, regardless of size. The result is a unified, region-wide understanding of the prolific guns, offenders, and shooting patterns within the entire region, rather than within just one agency's jurisdiction.



CGIC Workflow Best Practices

As discussed, CGICs are not a standard template that can or should be implemented the same way in every jurisdiction. Rather, each step of the CGIC workflow includes principles that should be incorporated within an agency's framework. The sections that follow highlight those principles and provide examples and resources for implementing them.

1 Step 1: Comprehensive Collection of Cartridge Cases & Crime Guns

One of the main components of a successful CGIC is NIBIN. NIBIN plays a vital role in modern violent crime investigations, allowing law enforcement to link shooting incidents, firearms, and individuals involved in gun-related offenses. Its effectiveness depends entirely on the quality and consistency of the collection of firearms-related evidence, particularly spent cartridge casings and crime guns. To maximize investigative outcomes, reduce liability, and strengthen CGIC efforts, agencies must adopt a structured, department-wide approach to comprehensive evidence collection in all crimes, not just when there is a shooting victim, in support of NIBIN.

Establishing Strong Policies and Procedures

Effective, comprehensive evidence collection begins with a clear, standardized policy. Written procedures ensure that all personnel tasked with collecting evidence, whether it be sworn officers or crime scene technicians, regardless of shift, assignment, or experience level, understand their specific responsibilities during the recovery and documentation of ballistic evidence. When expectations are formally outlined, agencies eliminate the informal or

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Department** [↗](#)

improvisational practices that often lead to missed casings, compromised chain of custody, evidence contamination, or incomplete NIBIN submissions.

In addition to emphasizing comprehensive collection, policies should include standardized procedures designed to minimize contamination and preserve the forensic integrity of all recovered firearms and ballistic evidence. These procedures should emphasize the protection of latent fingerprints, DNA, and trace evidence through controlled handling, packaging, and documentation practices. Firearms recovered during lower-level offenses, NFS, prohibited possessor cases, found property, or domestic seizures should be handled and packaged using the same evidentiary standards as firearms recovered in homicide investigations. Applying uniform recovery protocols ensures that all firearms remain suitable for forensic examination if they are later linked to more serious violent crimes.

Additionally, a well-defined policy creates a foundation for accountability. Supervisors gain clear standards for evaluating compliance, identifying procedural gaps, and reinforcing expectations through training and, as necessary, corrective action. Consistency in evidence handling also reduces departmental liability by demonstrating organizational due diligence and providing defensible guidelines that can withstand scrutiny from courts, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and oversight bodies. Before formalizing any policies or procedures, it is essential to involve key stakeholders early in the development

process. Collaboration with the local prosecutor's office and the USAO ensures all partners share a unified understanding of evidentiary expectations and legal considerations. These partnerships help prevent misunderstandings about how ballistic evidence must be collected, documented, and handled to ensure its admissibility in court. Incorporating prosecutors into the policy development stage ultimately strengthens the agency's ability to support successful prosecutions and enhances the integrity of the overall justice process.

When implemented effectively, policy serves as the backbone of a successful NIBIN and CGIC program, contributing to long-term stability in evidence processing practices and improved investigative outcomes.

Re-Canvassing as a Standard Practice

Re-canvassing a scene—regardless of whether casings were found during the initial response—is a critical component of comprehensive evidence collection. Many shooting scenes are chaotic, poorly lit, or cluttered with debris, all of which increase the likelihood that ballistic evidence may be missed during the first canvass. Environmental factors, such as changing light conditions, weather, or the movement of surrounding objects, can also make casings visible only after some time has passed. For these reasons, returning to the scene, even briefly, often yields additional evidence that can substantially enhance an investigation.

Additional casings discovered during a re-canvass frequently generate new leads, especially in incidents involving multiple shooters, different firing positions, or mixed calibers. These casings can reveal additional firearm types, fill gaps in trajectory mapping, or provide the essential evidence needed to generate a NIBIN correlation. Beyond the evidentiary value, re-canvassing also demonstrates thoroughness, reinforces professional investigative standards, and provides another opportunity for officers to engage with community members affected by gun violence. The [Miami, Florida, Police Department's "Door Hanger"](#) program illustrates how anonymous community input can be preserved while still meaningfully contributing to the investigative process.

In some jurisdictions, explosive detection K9s have proven effective at locating ballistic evidence and should be deployed whenever available. In addition to recovering evidence, K9s often draw the attention of community members and

potential witnesses who might feel more comfortable talking with law enforcement during this time. Beyond its evidentiary value, re-canvassing plays a critical role in shaping public perception and community confidence. Residents in neighborhoods impacted by gun crime want assurance that law enforcement took the incident seriously and made meaningful efforts to follow up. The visible placement of door hangers or the use of a K9 demonstrates that officers were present, actively searching for evidence and witnesses, and that they did not treat the incident as routine or insignificant.

Even a single additional casing can significantly alter the direction of a case, turning a stalled investigation into an actionable lead. For this reason, re-canvassing should be treated as a mandatory procedure rather than an optional step. When additional evidence is located during the re-canvass, it is essential that officers document it thoroughly and accurately to preserve its investigative value and ensure it withstands courtroom and exculpatory scrutiny.

NIBIN Liaison Officers

To improve field-level collection and support CGIC goals, some agencies have implemented patrol-level firearms liaison officers who receive specialized firearms investigation training. These officers are trained on techniques such as triaging a scene, interviewing, photography, processing a recovered firearm in the field for DNA, and latent print analysis. For lower-level crimes, processing a firearm in the field eliminates the need to send it to

Beyond the evidentiary value, re-canvassing also demonstrates thoroughness, reinforces professional investigative standards, and provides another opportunity for officers to engage with community members affected by gun violence.



the crime lab, ensuring a timelier NIBIN submission. A good example is the [Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department's Crime Gun Liaison Program](#). These programs use patrol officers who volunteer to become firearms liaison officers. Research on these programs has shown increased quality of initial field reports, reduced detective follow-up, greater evidence collection, and faster scene clearance times.⁴ Properly trained and dedicated liaisons can serve as training ambassadors and help institutionalize the CGIC culture throughout the agency.

Training in Comprehensive Collection

Training transforms policy into real-world practice. It ensures personnel know how to identify, handle, and preserve casings without damaging them, thereby protecting their suitability for laboratory analysis and NIBIN entry. High-quality training reduces inconsistencies and reinforces the expectation that casing collection and firearm recoveries are critical investigative tasks, rather than secondary or optional responsibilities. Effective training increases the likelihood of obtaining NIBIN leads by encouraging thorough searches and a proper CGIC workflow. Training also improves efficiency because personnel who understand proper search patterns, safety considerations, and documentation requirements complete scenes more effectively, reducing the amount of follow-up needed by investigative units or the laboratory. Over time, consistent training reinforces professional standards, improves officer confidence, and supports a culture that prioritizes complete and accurate evidence collection.

Personnel must understand that casings should be collected not only at major shooting scenes, but also during shots-fired calls and other events involving recovered crime guns. In addition, comprehensive

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4 Huff, J., Freemon, K., & Katz, C. M. (2023). A mixed-methods evaluation of the Phoenix Crime Gun Liaison Program: Leveraging patrol officers for investigations. *Justice Evaluation Journal*, 7(1), 80–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24751979.2023.2232437>



evidence collection must include the proper recovery and preservation of evidence. Firearms recovered at scenes, during arrests, through consent searches, or as abandoned property represent critical intelligence assets and must be treated as such from the moment of recovery. Personnel should follow standardized protocols for gun recovery designed to preserve latent fingerprints, DNA, and trace evidence. Officers or crime scene personnel should handle firearms only when required to render the weapon safe and should document the condition of the firearm exactly as found. Gloves should always be worn to minimize contamination. Those responsible for the collection of crime guns should have an understanding that the firearm, if linked to other crimes through NIBIN, can become crucial evidence in more than just the crime it was collected in.

Agencies such as the Palm Beach County, Florida, Sheriff's Office use gun-recovery checklists that reinforce proper procedures and ensure consistency across shifts and personnel. These checklists reinforce best practices for firearms handling, packaging, and documentation, and support both forensic and intelligence needs.

View the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Firearm Recovery Checklist [↗](#)

Training should not be limited just to individual agencies. Enhanced training for surrounding agencies, local and federal prosecutors, and judges is crucial for a successful CGIC. From nomenclature to standardization, keeping all partners in the CGIC on the same page is crucial for sustained success. When agencies consistently submit high-quality evidence, multi-agency intelligence efforts become more effective and produce better results.

Documentation of Cartridge Casings

Thorough documentation is essential not only for NIBIN purposes but also for reconstructing the events of a gun violence incident (shooting, shots fired, homicide, etc.). Accurate mapping helps investigators identify shooter positions, direction of fire, and movement patterns—all of which enhance the quality of the investigation and support later intelligence findings. When NIBIN links casings to additional shooting scenes, detailed location notes enable detectives to understand how the firearm was used across incidents and whether patterns of behavior, territory, or victim selection exist.

Documenting casing placement also prevents contamination of evidence when scenes involve multiple shooters or multiple firearms. Clear differentiation between calibers and shooter locations helps ensure that evidence sets remain intact and accurately attributed. Good documentation strengthens forensic reliability and reduces the risk of errors in NIBIN entry or correlation.

CRIME SCENE BALLISTICS MAP





Detailed notes and diagrams also improve the quality of reports and testimony. Personnel who thoroughly document location and context can provide more credible statements in court, support trajectory and forensic analyses, and help corroborate video or witness evidence. Proper documentation is a key element of maintaining standards and demonstrates professionalism and due diligence throughout the investigative process. For instance, if casings are located on the porch of a residence where there is a known named suspect, and those casings connect to another incident via NIBIN, there is already an early lead on that incident. This is only successful if initial patrol units and crime scene technicians properly document all ballistic evidence on scene during their initial response.

Overcoming Common Challenges

Comprehensive casing collection is not without its challenges, but each can be addressed with practical solutions. Chaotic or unstable scenes require clear priorities and coordinated responses; implementing designated evidence roles or a [Scene Management Checklist](#) can significantly improve organization. Low visibility and environmental obstacles can be mitigated with appropriate equipment such as scene lighting, metal detectors, magnets, and search aids. Weather conditions may call for rapid evidence-protection protocols, such as tents, covers, or early marking of casings for documentation. The use of body-worn cameras/in-car audio-video camera systems can also aid immensely. Inconsistent field practices are best addressed through recurring training, reference guides, and standardized policy

enforcement. Scenes involving multiple shooters or firearms benefit from color-coded markers, caliber sorting, and careful grouping. Public interference can be reduced by expanding scene perimeters and training officers to recognize and protect evidence early.

One common challenge agencies may face is balancing timely NIBIN entry with the need for prints/DNA from expended cartridge casings. Recent studies have shown that advances in DNA recovery techniques have dramatically increased the potential to obtain usable DNA profiles from expended cartridge casings.⁵ The Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department found a solution that allowed all casings to be submitted to NIBIN for screening and entry while still preserving their ability to collect DNA. This challenge was overcome by changing how expended cartridge casings were packaged, placing each casing in a clear plastic vial with a snap-top lid. The lids are numbered to correspond with the location each casing was found in the scene. These vials allow them to pre-screen all expended casings under the microscope without physically handling them. Then, the NIBIN technician can swab the selected casing prior to entry, preserving any potential DNA and leaving all other expended casings available for further lab testing if needed. Making this one change expedited NIBIN entry and eliminated delays caused by time-consuming lab processing. Additionally, the Phoenix,

Arizona, Police Department Crime Lab has seen an increase in viable DNA profiles collected from these expended cartridge casings, which it attributes to the speed at which DNA is recovered from them under this new procedure.

+ Additional Resources

- [Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department Patrol to Investigations Crime Scene Worksheet](#)
- [Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department's Crime Gun Liaison Program Resources](#)
- [Indianapolis, Indiana, Metropolitan Police Department CGIC Training Video](#)
- [Chattanooga, Tennessee, Police Department Gun Questionnaire](#)

5 Jason, A. (2024, October 11). *Collecting, transporting and processing DNA on fired cartridge casings*. Forensic Magazine. <https://www.forensicmag.com/3425-Featured-Article-List/615476-Collecting-Transporting-and-Processing-DNA-on-Fired-Cartridge-Casings/>



2 Step 2: NIBIN Entry/Correlation & Crime Gun Tracing

The second step of the CGIC workflow is where crime gun evidence begins transforming into actionable intelligence. Using NIBIN and eTrace, agencies can identify the “lifecycle” of a firearm: where it began, who purchased it, what crimes it was used in, and how it was recovered. Whether a department uses an outside-the-lab model or a fully lab-based model for processing firearms and entering evidence into NIBIN, the goals remain the same: fast turnaround, standardized processing, and high-quality ballistic acquisitions that produce timely leads for investigators.

Timely NIBIN Entry for Firearm Test-Fires and Cartridge Casings

Regardless of where an agency's BrassTrax machine is located and operated, either within a laboratory or in a common operational space, a timely NIBIN entry process requires the same basic elements. The most critical component is a **policy-mandated fast track process** ([See Step 1 for SOP examples](#)) for all NIBIN-eligible firearms and casings. High-performing CGICs begin the NIBIN entry process immediately upon evidence recovery. Firearms and cartridge casings should be routed automatically into the NIBIN workflow, without waiting for a detective's request. This eliminates subjectivity and prevents delays that often occur when evidence movement depends on individual discretion. An effective



fast-track pathway is typically supported by clear operational controls. Many CGICs use daily evidence pickup schedules, dedicated NIBIN intake lockers, or streamlined chain-of-custody documentation to keep evidence moving. These practices reduce reliance on informal follow-up and create accountability for timely processing. Agencies that rely on request-based submissions to NIBIN risk missing crucial intelligence from firearms or ballistic evidence that could link to other incidents and help solve cases while waiting for a detective to submit a request.

The Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department operates an outside-the-lab NIBIN process embedded in its Investigations Bureau. In Phoenix, all NIBIN-eligible firearms and cartridge casings are routed directly to NIBIN personnel as mandated in their policies. Trained technicians have immediate access to test-firing facilities and routinely conduct same-day, real-time acquisitions. This often enables detectives to receive preliminary NIBIN leads while a suspect is still in custody or interviews are ongoing, shaping investigative decisions in real time with ballistic intelligence.

Managing DNA and latent print considerations is one of the most common challenges to timely NIBIN entry. Agencies that struggle often default to delaying test-firing until a firearm can be fully processed for forensics (such as DNA and latent fingerprints), which can cause avoidable delays in NIBIN entry and reduce the timeliness of investigative leads.⁶ Additionally, recent studies have shown that advances in DNA recovery techniques have dramatically increased the potential to obtain usable DNA profiles from expended cartridge casings.⁷ This results in an additional challenge agencies have to navigate: balancing timely NIBIN entry with the need to recover potential prints and/or DNA from expended cartridge casings.

6 National Crime Gun Intelligence Governing Board. (2020). *Crime gun intelligence: An evidence-based approach to solving violent crime*. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. <https://crimegunintelcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CGI-Best-Practices-Handbook-2020.pdf>

7 Jason, A. (2024, October 11). *Collecting, transporting and processing DNA on fired cartridge casings*. Forensic Magazine. <https://www.forensicmag.com/3425-Featured-Article-List/615476-Collecting-Transporting-and-Processing-DNA-on-Fired-Cartridge-Casings/>

To compress NIBIN entry turnaround time without sacrificing evidence integrity, high-performing CGICs adopt guidelines that balance forensic value with investigative urgency. In Phoenix, for example, whether a firearm is processed for prints and DNA is based on whether possession was established at the time of recovery and/or whether there is a suspect standard for comparison. If it is determined that a firearm should be processed for prints and/or DNA, it is done so immediately through a streamlined process. Several agencies, including the Phoenix, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Chattanooga Police Departments allow trained NIBIN personnel and/or trained patrol officers to perform limited DNA swabbing of textured firearm surfaces prior to test-firing. This approach preserves potential DNA evidence while allowing NIBIN entry to continue without delay. Smooth surfaces are intentionally left untouched so latent prints can be examined later if needed.

Ultimately, successful NIBIN entry programs are defined by how deliberately they are executed. Different organizational models can achieve the same outcome when core principles are consistently applied. Automatic routing, rapid test-firing, technician-driven acquisition, thoughtful integration of forensic considerations, and coordinated oversight transform NIBIN entry into a reliable intelligence engine. When these elements are present, ballistic evidence is no longer delayed or

underused—it becomes a timely tool that strengthens investigations and supports broader violence reduction strategies.

Ensuring Appropriate Staffing

Agencies that meet national NIBIN entry standards ensure that test fires and casings can be entered on demand or at least daily. This often requires expanding the responsibility of NIBIN entry beyond traditional firearm examiners or other laboratory staff. Many CGICs now rely on trained civilian or sworn technicians to conduct routine test-firing and NIBIN acquisitions, reserving examiners for confirmatory analysis and court testimony. Technician-based acquisition models allow for faster processing, less strain on heavily burdened forensic examiners or detectives, and the ability to widen a center's hours of operation to include nights and weekends if necessary.

Agencies with high volume, such as the Phoenix, Houston, and Detroit Police Departments, supplement staff with ATF NIBIN contractors or reserve, retired, or light-duty officers, allowing the agency to maintain continuity during staffing shortages and expand entry capacity without pulling officers off the street. Both the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Denver, Colorado, Police Departments reported that the use of NIBIN technicians and contracted personnel significantly increased entry capacity without overwhelming laboratory staff.^{8,9} These

8 Koper, C., Vovak, H., & Cowell, B. (2019). *Evaluation of the Milwaukee Police Department's Crime Gun Intelligence Center*. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. <https://www.policinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MPD-CGIC-Evaluation-2019-Final-Report.pdf>

9 White, R. C., & Franey, L. (2014). Denver Crime Gun Intelligence Center: Locked on target. *Police Chief*. <https://cgici.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/DCGIC-Locked-on-Target.pdf>

positions allow agencies to maintain consistent productivity during periods of increased gun violence or when staffing is challenging.

National NIBIN Correlation and Training Center (NNCTC)

When it comes to correlations and identifying NIBIN leads, agencies are encouraged to leverage ATF's NNCTC for correlation review. Multiple CGICs across the country use the NNCTC support to handle their NIBIN correlation workload, allowing local personnel to focus solely on test-firing and acquisitions. These agencies indicate that participation in the NNCTC reduces backlog, improves consistency in hit identification, and strengthens overall program sustainability.¹⁰ For agencies with limited firearm examiner capacity, the NNCTC is often the difference between meeting ATF's 24–48-hour Minimum Required Operating Standard (MROS) and generating a backlog.

**Learn More About
Using Trace
Results in
Investigations** [↗](#)

Firearms Tracing

Tracing recovered crime guns can provide valuable information to law enforcement, including investigative leads, potential witnesses, the identification of co-conspirators, the existence of additional criminal acts, and even ties to other shootings. Every firearm that is NIBIN eligible should also be traced. Firearm tracing is conducted through an ATF web-based platform for law enforcement, eTrace. eTrace is designed to determine the first retail purchaser of a firearm for relevant investigations.

¹⁰ Swatt, M. L., Uchida, C. D., Goedert, A. M., & Wooditch, A. (2024). *An evaluation of the Baltimore Police Department's Crime Gun Intelligence Center. Justice & Security Strategies*. <https://crimegunintelcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BPD-CGIC-Eval-Final-Report-3-28-24.pdf> (pg. 112)



Using eTrace results can tell investigators the **“TIME TO CRIME”** of a firearm, which is the number of days between when a firearm is originally purchased and when it is recovered as a crime gun and traced by law enforcement. Performing a trace on a firearm within the same timeframe as when NIBIN is completed allows investigators access to the full “lifecycle” of the firearm. This can also provide investigators with the **“TIME TO FIRST SHOOTING”**, which is the number of days between when the firearm was originally purchased and when it was first used in a shooting, according to NIBIN. Agencies such as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Police Department integrate eTrace into the firearms impound process, allowing property room personnel to conduct the traces as firearms are initially impounded. Other agencies have the individuals responsible for test-firing the firearms or for NIBIN entries also conduct eTrace entries. Regardless of who submits, the key is timeliness and proper identification of the firearm.

NIBIN Coordinator

Oversight of the NIBIN entry and eTrace process is frequently centralized through a NIBIN coordinator role. While technicians and examiners perform the test-firing and NIBIN entry, the coordinator is responsible for ensuring the workflow remains consistent and that the program meets timeline goals. Coordinators monitor turnaround times, identify bottlenecks, facilitate communication between units, and ensure adherence to operating standards. The NIBIN coordinator should

be someone with strong collaboration skills, excellent time management, and a strong understanding of law enforcement. Coordinators work with patrol, crime scene personnel, evidence/property units, and investigative supervisors to formalize automatic evidence routing, create clear processing procedures, and eliminate delays in the process. In regional CGIC environments, the coordinator also serves as a liaison to partner agencies, helping standardize submission practices, facilitate information sharing, and maintain accountability across jurisdictions.

The coordinator role also supports program sustainability and resilience. NIBIN programs experience stressors that can affect efficiency, such as spikes in evidence recovery, staffing shortages, training delays, and system downtime. The coordinator is responsible for creating plans that mitigate these scenarios and ensure that evidence processing, and lead dissemination are minimally impacted, and that any backlogs are quickly addressed.

Overcoming Common Challenges

If balancing the need for prints and/or DNA is delaying NIBIN entry, collaborating directly with local prosecutors can be a way to develop a solution. Since prosecutors are the end users of forensic evidence, their input is crucial when creating guidelines to regulate when collecting prints and/or DNA from firearms and cartridge casings is necessary. Agencies that formalize the DNA/latent prints process in written SOPs that support of timely test-fire and NIBIN entry report smoother cross-unit

coordination, particularly when prosecutors are included early in protocol development (e.g., Palm Beach County, Florida, Sheriff's Office, West Palm Beach, Florida, Police Department, and Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department).^{11,12}

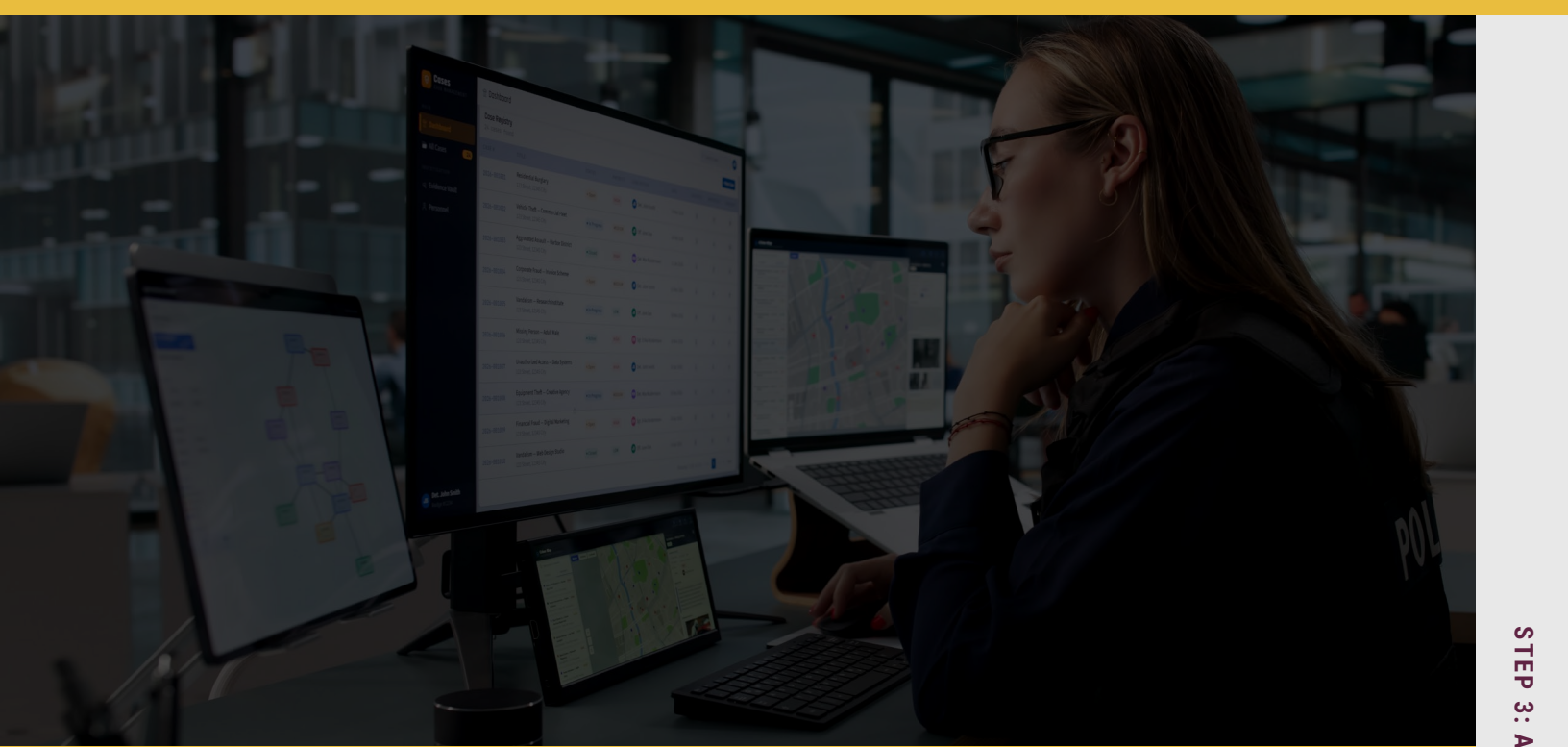
One of the biggest challenges with firearms tracing is proper identification. It is common for collecting officers to misidentify the firearm's make, model, caliber, or importer information. Submitting a trace with incomplete or incorrect information prevents the tracing center from completing the request. It is important that the individuals submitting the trace requests have training specifically related to firearms identification. eTrace training guides are available to assist users in identifying the correct information necessary for a successful trace.

Learn How to Properly Identify a Firearm [↗](#)

+ Additional Resources

- [Forensic-Led Policing – Virtual Training](#)
- [ATF Minimum Required Operating Standards \(MROS\)](#)
- [ATF Police Officer's Guide to Recovered Firearms](#)
- [NNCTC Overview](#)

- 11 Gagliardi, P. (2019). *The 13 critical tasks: An inside-out approach to solving more gun crime* (3rd ed.). Ultra Electronics Forensic Technology.
- 12 Katz, C. M., Flippin, M., Huff, J., & King, W. R. (2021). *Evaluation of the Phoenix Crime Gun Intelligence Center*. Center for Violence Prevention & Community Safety, Arizona State University. https://crimegunintelcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Evaluation-of-the-Phoenix-Crime-Gun-Intelligence-Center_Published-Version.pdf



3 Step 3: ATF CGIC Crime Gun Intelligence Analysis

Crime gun intelligence analysis is a key component of the CGIC model, as it involves developing actionable intelligence to support investigations. Analysts assess NIBIN leads and tracing results in context with case reports, subject and vehicle information, lab results, and other available information to identify patterns and develop intelligence that informs investigative decision-making. Effective analysis helps ensure that crime gun intelligence is effectively exploited to identify suspects, connect incidents, and disrupt the shooting cycle.

Dedicated CGIC Analyst

One of the critical roles in a CGIC is that of a dedicated analyst embedded with the CGIC unit ([See Step 4](#)). An analyst directly supporting a dedicated CGIC unit can help determine which leads are most actionable, what supporting intelligence should complement a NIBIN lead, and which investigative unit or personnel should be assigned to investigate it. Some agencies assign analysts to support CGIC operations in a part-time or full-time capacity. This will ultimately depend on the number of NIBIN leads or intelligence the agency produces and available resources. Assigning a well-trained analyst to work hand in hand with investigators enhances efficiency and effectiveness by providing investigators with unique expertise and support. Agencies that lack a dedicated analyst typically rely on investigators to conduct their own intelligence analysis, which takes time away

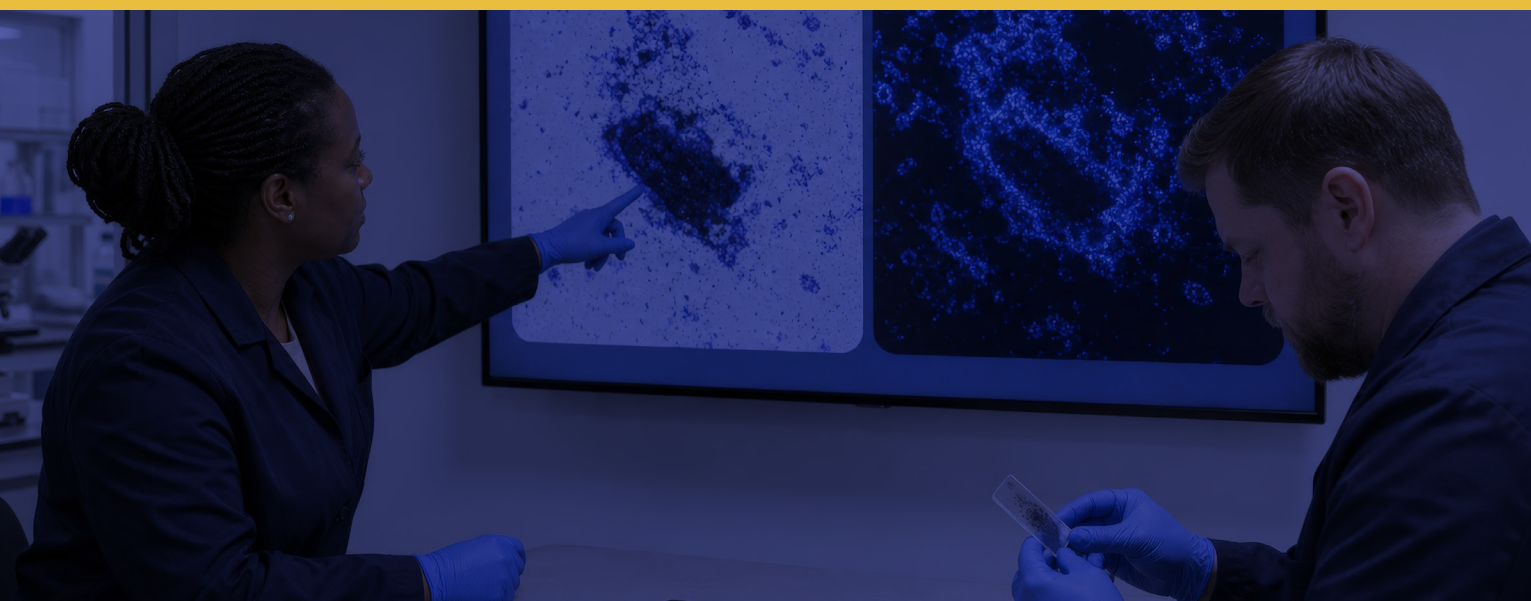
from other investigative work. Further, investigators may not have the skill set of a trained analyst, who should possess unique skills in data analysis, crime mapping, link analysis, and intelligence analysis. As such, a dedicated CGIC analyst can create intelligence packages for investigators and patrol that help identify patterns and trends that may not be apparent to investigators.

To further enhance intelligence analysis capabilities, it is essential for analysts to communicate with other departments and federal partners to share information and be involved in planning NIBIN lead review meetings ([See Step 5](#)). CGIC analysts should play a leading role in investigative meetings and in facilitating meetings with other analysts and ATF Intelligence Research Specialists (IRSs) in neighboring jurisdictions. In a CGIC, analysts should be the primary conduit for intelligence on gun crime and active participants in discussions of trends, recent crimes, and cross-jurisdictional NIBIN leads. To ensure this occurs, agencies may want to consider incorporating the CGIC analyst role into their CGIC SOPs ([See Step 1](#)). This should

include an expectation that detectives will engage with the analyst for specific CGIC-related investigations.

Triage Process for NIBIN Leads

CGIC analysts should be involved as soon as a NIBIN lead is received. They should review the lead and begin identifying commonalities, including spatial and temporal factors, to triage it based on its level of actionability for law enforcement. Analysts, in conjunction with the CGIC investigative unit ([See Step 4](#)), should develop a tier or color-coded system to prioritize cases based on solvability factors and agency priorities. These types of systems can assist CGICs with future volume increases, investigative assignments, oversight, and accountability. For example, a shots-fired incident with no witnesses, no suspect description, and no known video may be considered lower tier, unless it is linked to a recent pattern in the same area. A shots-fired incident with surveillance footage, a witness statement, or a possible suspect vehicle may be elevated because of its greater investigative potential. A homicide,



aggravated assault, or firearm recovery linked to multiple recent incidents would likely be triaged as a higher-tier lead because of both seriousness and solvability. It is important to note that all tiers could have value and should be augmented with intelligence and disseminated to the proper units within the agency. For lower tiers, this could mean patrol officers or patrol NIBIN liaisons ([See Step 1](#)).

GETS

Geography: The physical location of all events, relative to each other, that are involved in the shooting cycle. This includes the initial and subsequent purchase/transfer of a firearm, the linked shooting events, and the recovery of a linked crime gun.

Event: The type of shooting events that are linked, such as homicide, robbery, or shots fired.

Time: The number of days between linked events is important in determining investigative potential. A small number of days between linked events increases the possibility that the same suspect or suspects perpetrated them.

Solvability: Provides non-ballistic links between events or information that raises investigative potential, such as a witness statement, video footage, or modus operandi.

One example of a triage process is the **GETS** (Geography, Event, Time, Solvability) system. GETS is a foundational process that maintains the flexibility to consider localized priorities and objectives related to violent gun crime. The adoption of GETS can help create a standardized triage process that provides flexibility based on site-specific priorities and solvability objectives.

In addition to their own triage processes, analysts

should also use ATF's NIBIN Enforcement Support System (NESS) to help determine case solvability. Additional factors to consider during the triage process include: a short time between crimes, crime guns recovered, the number of incidents involved, the severity of the violence, escalation in frequency, or incidents with subjects already being investigated. The triage of leads should be updated as trends or city priorities evolve. The triage system should be objective, standardized, and consistent to ensure analysts are impartial in recognizing solvability factors that make it a higher tier. Throughout the triage process, the crime analyst should work directly with CGIC supervisors, other analysts, and/or investigators. Some jurisdictions have developed additional tools using the GETS system to facilitate NIBIN lead triage.

Review a Sample Lead Triage Sheet from Louisville, Kentucky, Police Department [↗](#)

Standardized Intelligence Packages

The creation of a standardized intelligence package will assist analysts in streamlining their workflow and provide investigators with actionable intelligence to leverage in their investigations. Intelligence packages can range from comprehensive to more basic documents. When preparing intelligence packages for NIBIN leads, consider including:

■ OPTION A – BASIC PACKAGE FOR LOWER-TIER LEADS

- A brief synopsis of the incidents referenced in the lead, including locations and dates
- Map or incident proximity information ([See Step 1](#) for an example)
- The status of the investigations for each respective incident
- A summary highlighting any commonalities or notable details for each incident
- Patrol-facing bulletin for possible dissemination

■ OPTION B – COMPREHENSIVE PACKAGE FOR HIGHER-TIER LEAD

- Everything noted in the basic package, plus
- Involved persons/vehicles, with possible known locations and associates
- Social media or gang intelligence, if applicable
- Status of crime lab analysis (latent prints and DNA)
- Additional evidence that may be of interest to investigators (devices recovered, video footage, items potentially left by the suspect, etc.)
- Related calls/cases
- eTrace results
- Firearm recovery history

It is important to work with investigators to determine the level of detail they would like to see in the packages. Investigators and supervisors should provide feedback to the CGIC analyst on which information in the intelligence package they like, need, and do not need for investigations. This feedback process will streamline information sharing and prevent duplicate efforts. Although the number of leads and analysts assigned to the CGIC will dictate the capacity and detail of the packages, the goal is to have an intelligence

Lead Packet Template [↗](#)
Sample Link Chart [↗](#)



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NESS+ RMS &
eTrace Direct** [↗](#)

package for all NIBIN leads. Generally, the intelligence package should be distributed to investigators within 24 hours of the lead being generated.

Access to Analytical Tools & Training

Agencies should explore expanding systems access to analysts assigned to the CGIC. The CGIC should partner with the local ATF office to gain access to NESS and other intelligence software used by ATF IRSs. Communication is a key component of intelligence sharing, and easy access to information for investigators is extremely beneficial. One way this can be explored is by integrating the agency's Record Management System (RMS) with NESS (NESS+ RMS) to support lead tracking and investigations and facilitate the population

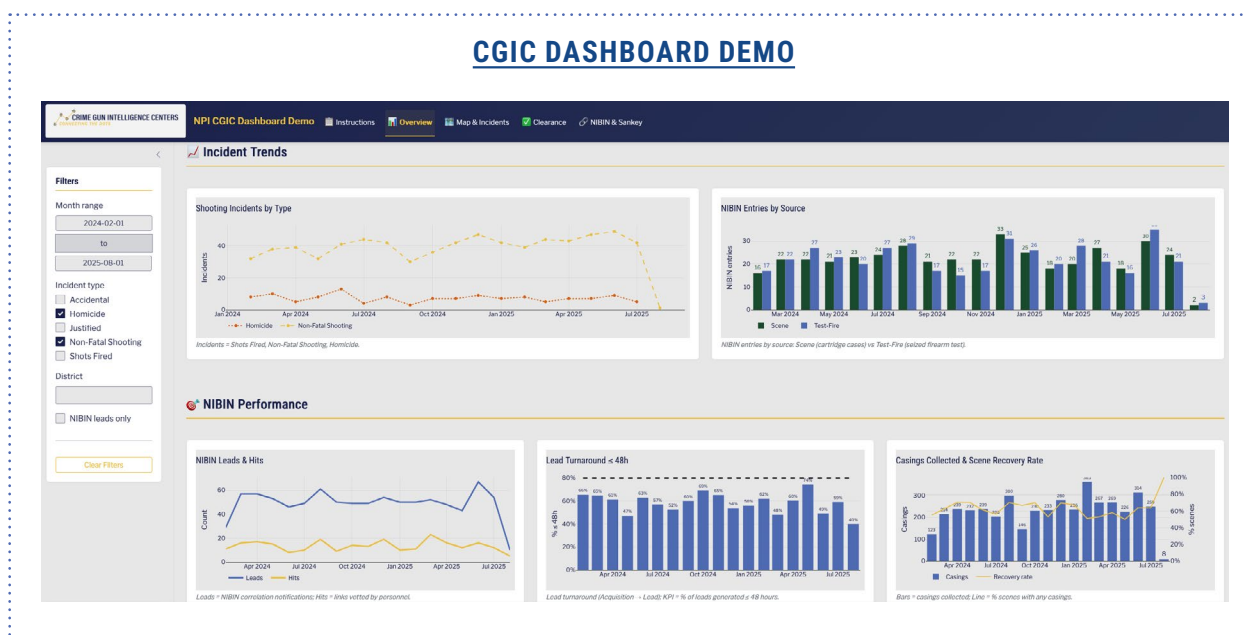
of RMS information into NESS without requiring manual entry. Once eTrace results ([see Step 2](#)) return, they should also be included in analyses when applicable. In addition to NESS+ RMS integration, the agency should coordinate with ATF to adopt eTrace Direct, which will automatically enter firearm information from RMS into eTrace. In the last few years, ATF has also established a collaborative agreement giving analysts full access to NESS through a non-deputized position with access to an ATF computer. This allows analysts unrestricted access to NESS information. Without this access, the analyst can only see their own agency's leads and basic information from incidents that link to outside jurisdictions.

Criminal intelligence-related software, programs, and techniques are continuously developing. Staying current in these areas,

particularly regarding social media technology and techniques, is important for maintaining and improving CGIC capabilities. To support this, intelligence personnel should be afforded opportunities to attend regional and national conferences and training courses, such as those organized by the International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts (IALEIA) or the International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA).

CGIC Dashboards

Creating dashboards can also improve data accessibility and facilitate communication regarding NIBIN leads. Dashboards have fundamentally changed how we communicate crime data and investigative leads. When designed intentionally, they simplify complex datasets into accessible, real-time visuals that can be understood by officers, supervisors, and executive leadership alike. The true value is not just visualization; it is accessibility and speed. Dashboards allow for immediate awareness of patterns, trends, and lead status without requiring technical expertise to interpret raw data. This improves transparency across the department, strengthens communication between analysts and command staff, and ensures that decision-makers, from sergeants to city managers, have timely, actionable information to guide strategy and resource deployment.



Overcoming Common Challenges

For a new CGIC analyst, one of the greatest challenges is understanding how technical systems like NIBIN and CGIC translate into operational impact. The terminology, workflows, and interagency coordination can initially feel overwhelming, particularly when trying to connect ballistic intelligence to real-time investigations. It takes time to understand

not just the technology, but also the relationships among analysts, detectives, ATF partners, and command staff that rely on timely, accurate intelligence. Developing confidence in interpreting leads, understanding the difference between correlation and confirmation, and communicating findings clearly to sworn personnel is a steep learning curve. With time and appropriate training and guidance, analysts can learn to contextualize intelligence to drive investigative action.

Staffing limitations can also pose a challenge for agencies when assigning an analyst. Agencies may not have the resources available to fully dedicate an analyst to supporting the CGIC or NIBIN program. The analyst may be asked to take that on as an additional responsibility instead of their primary assignment. If circumstances dictate that it is the only option, it is recommended to clearly define realistic expectations and priorities as much as possible as it pertains to CGIC investigative support.

Building trust between analysts and investigators is another challenge that some agencies may face, and it is often up to the analysts to foster that relationship. Consistency is one of the main things that can strengthen trust between the analyst and the investigators. This can be demonstrated through consistent quality and timeliness in intelligence packages. Gaining exposure to the investigative process can also be beneficial. Analysts can take proactive approaches to showcase their skill sets to different members of the department. This could include

attending roll calls, requesting attendance at investigative briefings, and leading the NIBIN meetings. Doing so can teach an analyst new skills and demonstrate to investigators that they are invested in the process.

+ Additional Resources

- [Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department, Crime Gun Intelligence Unit Subject Workup Checklist](#)
- [Crime Gun Event Chart & How To](#)
- [ATF NESS Flyer](#)
- [CGIC Dashboard Demo](#)
- [CGIC Analyst Job Posting Example](#)

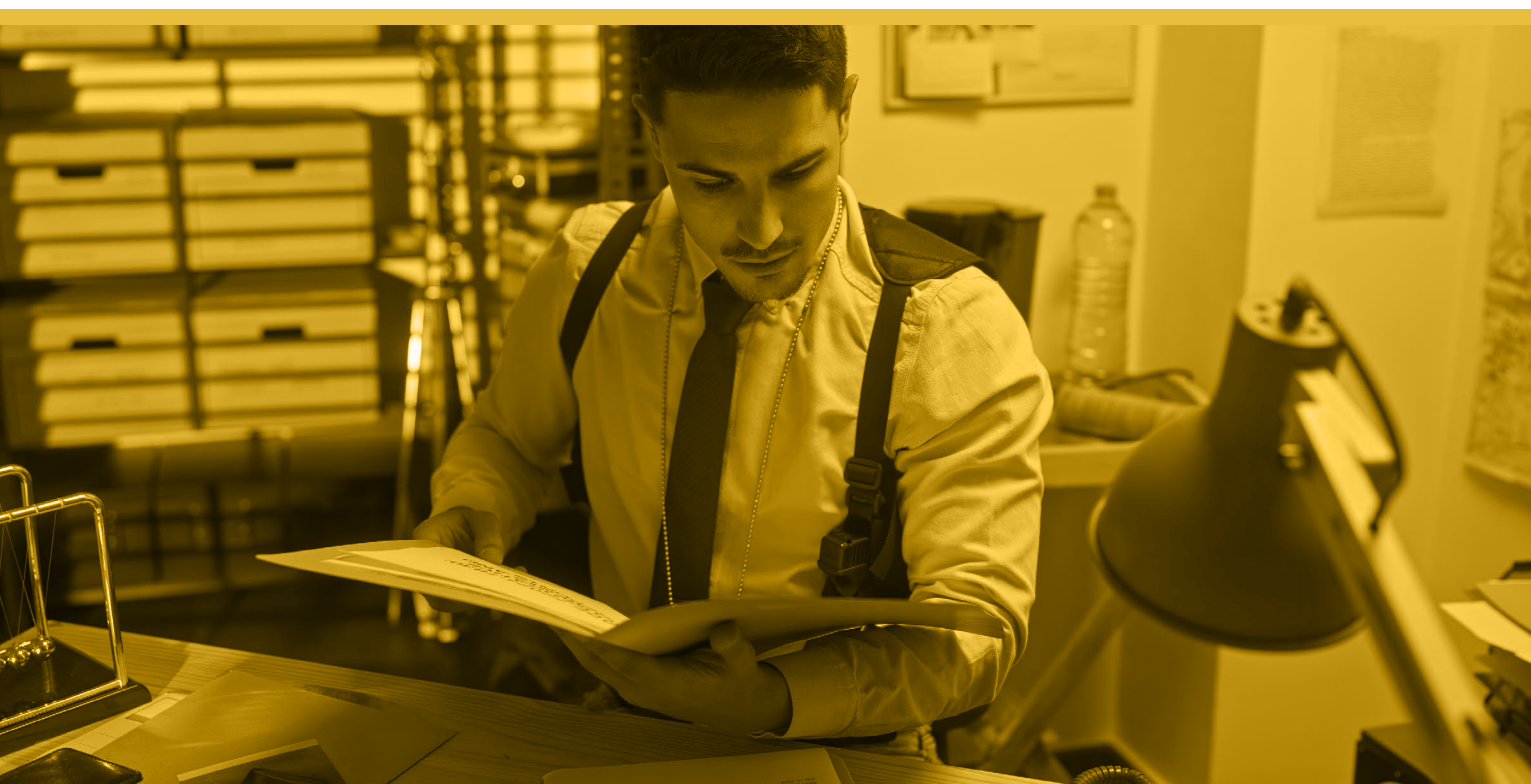
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Step 4: NIBIN Lead/Hit Assignment & Investigation

This step of the CGIC model is the operational phase in which crime gun intelligence is acted upon. Effective lead assignment, triage, supervision, and investigative workflow design are essential to success, ensuring that resources are used efficiently, accountability is maintained, and cases are resolved swiftly. Agencies that maintain structured investigative processes and leverage effective accountability mechanisms are better equipped to prevent retaliatory violence, identify active shooters, and improve community safety.

Dedicated CGIC Unit

Creating a dedicated CGIC investigative unit offers significant advantages for agencies of all sizes. Whether the unit consists of a few detectives in a small department or dozens in a large regional task force, the benefits remain the same. When multiple stakeholders, such as ATF Task Force Officers (TFOs), investigators, crime analysts, supervisors, ATF IRS, and prosecutors, work under a common operational structure, the gun crime investigative process becomes more streamlined, efficient, and effective. A dedicated unit that brings together all involved stakeholders has many benefits for reducing violent crime, including better communication, reduced redundancy, more efficient use of resources, and improved information sharing and data collection. This collaboration will strengthen interagency relationships and increase accountability and oversight of casework.



A unified approach allows resources to be redirected to high-priority or highly solvable cases, enabling such cases to be resolved quickly. A dedicated CGIC unit should be tasked with reviewing all NIBIN leads generated through the CGIC and assigning the most solvable cases to lead case investigators using the unit's resources. The dedicated unit should investigate shootings linked through NIBIN under a single investigation. A dedicated investigation of complex NIBIN leads can clear multiple shootings under a single investigation and contribute to the agency's mission of reducing violent crime. This unit could also be best suited to accomplish the recanvassing of shooting scenes and assisting investigators with follow-up on NIBIN-related shootings. It is recommended that the agency review personnel assignments to establish a dedicated CGIC investigative unit separate from other groups, so that all information, including crime analytical support, flows through a single source and space. Additional responsibilities of a dedicated unit include supplementing TFOs with prohibited possessor cases, monitoring eTrace for straw purchasers, working with various intelligence units to comb social media for firearm violators, and making proactive cases. The CGIC is most effective when supported by an intelligence component and by investigative teams working together.

Cities such as Cincinnati, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Chattanooga, Tennessee; New Haven, Connecticut; Miami, Florida; and many others have created dedicated CGIC units with remarkable success. A dedicated investigative component focused on

related gun crime enables agencies to view gun crime in a jurisdiction, recognizing that shootings, robberies, aggravated assaults, and homicides may all be linked to the same firearm or offenders.

ATF Task Force Officers

ATF TFOs play a particularly significant role within a CGIC and a dedicated unit. Selecting self-motivated, high-performing investigators for these positions significantly expands an agency's investigative and jurisdictional reach. Ideally, individuals designated as TFOs should not only be experienced investigators overall but also have experience working on shooting investigations or homicides. This experience fosters an easy working relationship when assisting homicide or NFS detectives. TFOs have access to federal resources, databases, and technology, enabling them to act as bridges between local and federal agencies. This improves collaboration, communication, and trust among agencies. When assigned to proactive casework and to assisting investigators, TFOs can enhance the effectiveness of NIBIN-related investigations by helping identify multi-jurisdictional offenders, coordinating surveillance or operations, and considering federal charging options when appropriate. Their specialized expertise and shared authority make them invaluable contributors to a department's CGIC and overall violent crime reduction strategy.

NIBIN Lead Assignment

Triaging NIBIN leads is an essential component of an efficient investigative

workflow. When leads are received, ATF initially classifies them into three tiers based on their solvability (high, medium, or low). Ideally, a local crime analyst should subsequently conduct an internal solvability assessment based on department priorities, suspect information, hot-spot locations, or crime type. (See [Step 3](#)) The key principle is that no lead should be unassigned or ignored, and the investigative effort should be proportionate to solvability and risk to public safety. Once the leads have been triaged, they should be assigned to the appropriate unit for follow-up.

NIBIN LEAD ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

Lead Type	Unit Assigned
Tier I – High Solvability & Priority	CGIC/Homicide/Investigations
Tier II – Medium Solvability & Priority	Investigations (Gangs, Nonfatal Shootings, etc.)
Tier III – Low Solvability	Patrol, Situational Awareness, or Cross-Jurisdictional

The lead assignment process is the operational core of the CGIC model. As NIBIN leads are generated, they should be reviewed by the CGIC supervisor, a crime analyst, and the ATF

to ensure each lead receives proper attention. When an intelligence package or summary is produced, all CGIC members should review every NIBIN lead to ensure that potentially significant connections are not overlooked. For example, a seasoned investigator or patrol officer can identify actionable information in leads that may initially have been classified at a lower tier. In such cases, the CGIC supervisor can reassess the lead, reclassify it to a higher-priority tier, and formally assign it to the appropriate investigator or unit. Regardless of which investigator or unit ultimately works the case, communication with the originating patrol officer or detective must be maintained so that case ownership remains transparent and collaborative.

Accountability and Tracking

Effective supervision is crucial to maintaining accountability within the CGIC process. A CGIC supervisor must oversee resource allocation, coordinate with NIBIN-entry personnel and ATF leadership, and ensure that priority cases are assigned promptly. A supervisor should view gun violence through a broader lens than traditional investigative structures, recognizing that an NFS, a car struck by gunfire, or a homicide may be part of the same pattern or involve the same offender. Through daily or weekly briefings, depending on the number of leads an agency receives, supervisors should review all new leads, trace results, and ongoing investigations, ensuring that cases progress and that any gaps or inefficiencies are addressed. Supervisors and CGIC investigators should develop and maintain a reliable system to track NIBIN leads through investigative outcomes. Agencies can leverage existing platforms, such as the ATF NESS, or develop internal systems for tracking NIBIN leads. Tracking NIBIN leads is essential for accountability as well as ensuring an accurate count of firearms on scene, generating additional leads, and providing a mechanism to numerically identify the number of firearms linked through NIBIN.

**Get Lead Tracking
Examples from
Louisville,
Kentucky, Police
Department** 

To further support accountability, agencies should communicate consistently with crime analysts and prosecutors to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in case development. Additionally, CGICs should leverage regular, multi-agency NIBIN meetings to help maintain accountability across jurisdictional boundaries and ensure that investigative and prosecutorial partners remain aligned in their strategies and approaches.

Identifying Prolific Offenders

CGIC investigative work is grounded in fair and impartial policing techniques. NIBIN-led investigations focus on tracking prolific firearms used in crimes rather than individuals. Understanding how the same guns are used across shooting events can help identify the prolific shooters in the community who are driving gun crime. The CGIC's purpose is supported by investigators collaborating with other detectives, surveillance units, and prosecutors to identify suspects, obtain search warrants, locate firearms, and conduct investigative follow-up. When agencies coordinate effectively to focus on identifying, arresting, and prosecuting prolific violent gun offenders, the results can be dramatic. For example, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, NIBIN leads identified a major back-and-forth between the Rollin 20 Bloods and Rollin 40 Crips, resulting in 5 search warrants, the recovery of over 20 firearms (12 with additional NIBIN leads), and over 10,000 fentanyl

pills.¹³ In addition to the leads, working with the intelligence unit determined that most of the suspects in the search warrants were on the department's "Serious Offender List."

This approach allows agencies to remove key drivers of gun violence from the streets, even when the specific crime cannot be effectively prosecuted. Ultimately, removing prolific gun crime offenders from the community reduces gun violence in a jurisdiction. Additionally, leveraging intelligence-led and evidence-based policing to disrupt the shooting cycle before further violence occurs is a primary goal of a CGIC, and collaboration with prosecutors ensures that repeat violent offenders are held in custody and prosecuted effectively.

Overcoming Common Challenges

One of the biggest challenges in establishing a dedicated CGIC investigative unit is the availability of staff and resources. One solution to this issue is to take a global view of the organization and the missions of existing units to consolidate resources and form a larger group across multiple disciplines with common goals. In many cases, the same suspects may be involved in gang, narcotics, NFS, or homicide investigations. Because of this, it may make sense to combine some of these units for a unified violent crime approach focused on pursuing the most prolific shooters. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the police department combined their Gang

13 Chattanooga police recover 10,000 fentanyl pills during search warrant. (2024, October 3). WDEF. <https://www.wdef.com/chattanooga-police-recover-10000-fentanyl-pills-during-search-warrant/>

Unit and NIBIN personnel into one Gun Team. By creating the Gun Team, they were able to be NIBIN-led, focused on their investigations, and still have a handle on gangs and violent crimes because many of their gang members were drivers of gun violence in the city. This approach precisely focuses on those who are actively shooting in the city at the moment. Most CGIC units start small, but grow over time as successful prosecutable cases are built and the number of cases under their purview grows.

Another common challenge in establishing an efficient and sustainable CGIC investigative workflow is memorializing the CGIC investigative process to ensure sustainability. As discussed, agencies should have SOPs that regulate evidence collection and processing. Although some policies might need to be adjusted to better support a CGIC, they are generally already in place. However, few departments have policies governing the triage of NIBIN leads, the assignment of NIBIN leads, or NIBIN lead tracking. These steps can be memorialized individually in unit-specific policies or combined with other NIBIN- and CGIC-related policies to create a comprehensive CGIC SOP or manual ([See Step 1](#)).

Finally, developing and maintaining a NIBIN lead tracking mechanism can be another challenge. Typically, local law enforcement agencies rely on Microsoft or Google office products (Word, Excel, Access) to develop internal tracking systems because they are readily available. Some agencies can acquire third-party software specifically designed for this purpose or leverage

software they already have with NIBIN lead-tracking functionality, such as their RMS. Other agencies have chosen to develop their own comprehensive systems by leveraging internal information technology (IT) capabilities. Many agencies rely on ATF's NESS, which is free and serves as a comprehensive NIBIN tracking system integrated with firearms tracing information. These are all valid options. What is most important is that the adopted system is functional for the CGIC and all involved stakeholders, and that its adoption is sustainable.

+ Additional Resources

- [NIBIN Lead Investigative Checklist](#)
- [Non-Fatal Shooting Investigative Checklist](#)
- [Interviewing Suspects in Gun Crime Investigations – Virtual Training](#)



5 Step 5: Criminal Justice Stakeholder Collaboration

One of the key strengths of the CGIC model is its strong focus on collaboration among criminal justice stakeholders. For the model to be effective in identifying prolific offenders and holding them accountable or diverting them from continuing to participate in the cycle of violence, a holistic approach is necessary. To achieve a CGIC's full potential, various stakeholders must be present and engaged, including law enforcement, prosecutors, parole, probation, corrections, victim and witness services, and community advocacy groups.

Stakeholder Meetings

To establish effective partnerships and focus collective efforts on supporting the CGIC mission, stakeholders must understand what the CGIC is and the role each plays in the CGIC process. To ensure that stakeholders are committed to fulfilling their roles and dedicating the necessary resources for the program's success, they must remain active participants and be recognized for their contributions. For this, it is crucial to create forums where stakeholders can actively participate.

Establishing regular meetings with **all** CGIC stakeholders or refocusing and streamlining existing meetings to support CGIC implementation is critical to a CGIC's success. CGIC leaders should consider adopting distinct types of meetings for different purposes. As the program's implementation progresses, the frequency of these meetings may need to be adjusted to remain efficient and effective.

Potential Meeting Types/Examples:

1. CGIC Implementation/Working Group Meetings
2. CGIC Investigative Meetings
3. Holistic Gun Crime Reduction Meetings

CGIC IMPLEMENTATION/WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

CGIC implementation/working group meetings are especially important in the initial stages of CGIC implementation. The focus of these meetings should be to inform stakeholder organizations about the CGIC model and how they can contribute to establishing a successful CGIC. These meetings should serve as an opportunity to hold each stakeholder accountable and should be attended by individuals who can implement changes within their respective organizations. Implementation meetings will most likely occur more frequently at the beginning of the process, as more substantial adjustments to each stakeholder's internal processes will be needed. These meetings could even be phased out once changes are implemented and SOPs are in place.

CGIC INVESTIGATIVE MEETINGS

CGIC investigative meetings enable stakeholders to collaborate on solving specific gun crime incidents and identifying prolific gun offenders in their jurisdictions. These meetings should occur regularly to address the volume of crime gun intelligence and investigative leads generated by the CGIC. The stakeholders in these meetings should include gun

crime investigators, analysts, ATF, state and federal prosecutors, and probation and parole. Additional stakeholders could include community outreach units, corrections representatives, patrol leadership, and other federal law enforcement agencies as appropriate.

CGIC investigative meetings must be guided by the available intelligence from the CGIC, including a review of all relevant NIBIN leads and trace results generated since the previous meeting. This will allow stakeholders to share what they know about each incident, including associated victims, witnesses, suspects, locations, firearms, and vehicles. These meetings enable investigators to work with both local and federal prosecutors to determine the best avenue of prosecution, assess whether they have sufficient evidence for a solid prosecution, and hold gun offenders accountable and swiftly remove them from the streets. These meetings are typically held weekly or biweekly; however, the frequency should depend on the volume of NIBIN leads generated. Large agency CGICs that generate a high volume of crime gun intelligence, such as Chicago, hold daily CGIC investigative meetings.

HOLISTIC GUN CRIME REDUCTION MEETINGS

Holistic gun crime reduction meetings should build upon CGIC investigative meetings and focus on disrupting the cycle of gun violence and disabling prolific offenders from engaging in violence. These meetings can include additional crime reduction stakeholders, such as city officials, community groups, and

Learn More About GunStat [↗](#)

health professionals. Prolific offenders identified through investigative work and intelligence analysis should be discussed in depth at these meetings and tracked. Stakeholders present should propose measures to disrupt criminal activity, and those measures should be followed up on in future meetings to hold stakeholders accountable. The frequency of these meetings will depend on crime volume and stakeholder needs.

Several jurisdictions across the United States have successfully implemented mechanisms to address prolific gun offenders through holistic approaches. Some jurisdictions leverage shooting reviews or violence interrupter meetings to address gun violence on a broader scale, while others have implemented unique initiatives such as the GunStat model. Developed in Baltimore, Maryland, GunStat focuses on reducing violent crime through the focused identification, prosecution, and post-conviction monitoring of gun offenders. The strategy relies on collaboration among criminal justice stakeholders and shared accountability mechanisms. The Wilmington, Tucson, and Louisville CGICs have adopted GunStat or a variation of it to address gun crime.

Co-Location

To further facilitate stakeholder collaboration, some CGICs have created workspaces where NIBIN personnel, local law enforcement gun crime investigators, ATF Special Agents, local intelligence analysts, and ATF IRSs are co-located with local and federal prosecutors. A single space where all relevant law enforcement resources can work together seamlessly enhances intelligence sharing and coordination, which in turn helps identify prolific gun crime offenders and hold them accountable. Co-locating prosecutors with law enforcement investigators and analysts, even part-time, enables them to provide real-time legal advice

CINCINNATI, OHIO, POLICE DEPARTMENT'S CO-LOCATED CGIC



on ongoing investigations, review search and arrest warrants, and identify the violent crime drivers that should be prioritized. CGICs such as Cincinnati, Tucson, and Chicago have had great success co-locating their core CGIC stakeholders under one roof.

Parole, Probation, & Corrections

Parole and probation can support efforts to hold prolific gun offenders accountable by sharing ankle-monitoring information with investigators (which can then be overlaid with NIBIN information) and by coordinating the execution of arrest and search warrants. Parole and probation internal databases also retain information on home visits, the names of all associated people, and the locations of subjects under supervision, which investigators can leverage when applicable. Corrections agencies also have important resources

they can bring to the table, such as their internal databases and broader access to jail calls. Informing parole, probation, and corrections agencies about which individuals under their supervision are suspected of being prolific drivers of gun crime can help ensure that the criminal justice system's efforts are aligned.

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, parole and probation representatives are assigned to the CGIC program and regularly bring intelligence to NIBIN review meetings that law enforcement lacked direct access to or was unaware of prior to the meeting. CGICs in Milwaukee and Santa Clara County, California, also coordinate with jail intelligence officers to leverage access to inmate communications. The information obtained and shared by these partners can become a key part of the investigative process and assist in making arrests and building prosecutable cases.





**Learn More About
Cincinnati, Ohio's
CCROW Program** [↗](#)

Victim & Witness Services

One of the fundamental issues investigators and prosecutors encounter when working gun crime cases is the lack of victim and witness cooperation. Effectively improving collaboration among victims, witnesses, law enforcement, and prosecutors requires stakeholders to come together and employ coordinated strategies. In some jurisdictions, law enforcement and prosecution victim advocates form dedicated teams to work directly with NFS victims to ensure they are supported throughout the criminal justice process.

Other jurisdictions have developed programs that go beyond victim support to specifically support witnesses throughout the criminal justice process. The Cincinnati Citizens Respect Our Witnesses (CCROW) program has partnered with the Cincinnati CGIC to improve collaboration and police-community relations. The CCROW unit is composed of civilian social workers employed by the Cincinnati, Ohio, Police Department. Their office is next to Cincinnati, Ohio, Police Department investigators and responds to all shooting

scenes and hospitals to engage with victims and/or their families. CCROW has also established working relationships with community advocacy groups and trauma centers to maximize its impact. They also assist investigators after shootings by conducting regular check-in calls with both victims and witnesses to help ensure their engagement throughout the investigation and prosecution of a shooting.

Leveraging the Community

Within law enforcement agencies, there are components that are not traditionally involved in gun crime investigations but could be valuable to bring on board, such as community outreach units. By providing a direct link between law enforcement and the community, these units can serve as human intelligence collectors and provide CGIC investigative components with valuable information that could help identify drivers of gun crime and understand current disputes between groups and individuals that may result in future shootings. Community outreach units can

also improve police-community relations and align the community's priorities with those of the CGIC.

The Chicago, Illinois and Baltimore, Maryland Police Departments have deployed units to neighborhoods affected by gun violence the day after a shooting to engage community members and discuss the incident. At times, these units have coordinated the deployment of city services to clean up and improve public areas. The Oakland, California, Police Department and many other agencies have also involved community advocacy groups, inviting them to participate in portions of the investigative meetings. The advocacy groups may provide insight into potential retaliation, known locations, and available services. In Oakland, the advocacy group, led by a pastor, also meets with the police department's Ceasefire Unit to discuss action plans for service deployment and to develop a communication strategy to address high-risk individuals or incidents.

Overcoming Common Challenges

CGIC leaders may encounter disinterest, hesitancy, or even resistance when trying to bring stakeholders on board. It is crucial to educate stakeholders about the CGIC model and what is required of them for it to be effective. In a world of limited resources, stakeholders must understand why it is beneficial for them to dedicate resources and time to this initiative. CGIC leaders should consider developing stakeholder onboarding informational

materials and training that can be shared with stakeholder agency heads as they get involved. Onboarding documentation should be clear in explaining what CGICs are and how they have contributed to gun crime reduction nationwide.¹⁴ CGIC leaders should also consider offering reluctant stakeholders the opportunity to engage their counterparts in other CGICs and, if necessary, to set up a site visit.

Changes in leadership can also pose significant challenges, particularly for the sustainability of the CGIC program and any existing collaboration agreements. As new leaders are put in place, existing partnerships and resource allocations may be re-evaluated. CGIC leaders should be judicious in tracking CGIC successes and each stakeholder's contributions. Doing so can provide CGIC leaders with a powerful tool to justify commitment to the CGIC if incoming leadership questions the merit or importance of an existing partnership.

+ Additional Resources

- [CGIC Regionalization Toolkit](#)
- [Overcoming Witness Intimidation – Innovative Prosecutor Tools & Techniques – Webinar](#)
- [Interviewing Victims & Witnesses in Gun Crime Investigations – Virtual Training](#)

14 National Policing Institute. (2026). *Crime gun intelligence center regionalization toolkit: Establishing a regional crime gun intelligence center*. <https://crimegunintelcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/CGIC-Regionalization-Toolkit.pdf>

6

Step 6: State or Federal Prosecution

Successful crime gun intelligence programs must have coordination with state and federal prosecutor's offices. All arrests have to pass through a prosecutor's office for legal advice and/or assistance, charging, or to obtain a conviction. In addition, state and federal prosecutors are the chief law enforcement leaders in the area, working collaboratively with multiple police departments, allowing them to help coordinate strategies. They hold a prominent position within the community and can encourage local agencies and community groups to join in a coordinated effort against gun violence.

Dedicated CGIC Prosecutor Liaison

Once the prosecutor's offices, both state and federal, are on board and part of the CGIC working group, it is beneficial to designate a prosecutor from each office as the CGIC prosecutor liaison. This person should be an experienced prosecutor and problem-solver with expertise in providing legal guidance and prosecuting violent crimes. It is also important for them to have a strong working relationship with law enforcement agencies to be most effective in their role. CGIC prosecutor liaisons should be involved early in gun crime investigations, including pre-arrest, and remain involved throughout. When prosecution liaisons are actively engaged pre-arrest and review NIBIN leads for shooting incidents alongside investigators, they can help improve cases and save law enforcement time by providing guidance on which cases are most likely to be accepted for prosecution. This involvement, particularly in complex cases, can help law enforcement focus their investigations and significantly improve the chances of a case being charged. Additionally, engaged prosecution liaisons can provide time-sensitive legal guidance



to investigators and support search warrant requests. Prosecutor liaisons should also be active participants in CGIC coordination efforts and attend regular CGIC meetings ([see Step 5](#)) with investigators to strategize on ongoing cases and identify the most prolific shooters in their jurisdictions.

CGIC prosecutor liaisons should also handle and/or assist in prosecuting NFS cases. These cases can be complex, often involve limited victim cooperation, and rely heavily on digital evidence. When possible, these cases should be assigned vertically to ensure that intelligence is not lost and that the cases receive high priority. Liaisons can also review charging decisions and bail recommendations, if applicable, especially in cases that cannot be vertically prosecuted. As experts on CGIC cases, they should also provide guidance on NIBIN and on how to prove NFS cases to other prosecutors in their offices.

When detectives work closely with prosecutor liaisons, CGICs have the potential to be more successful. For example, when the Paterson, New Jersey, Police Department began their CGIC in 2023, they implemented prosecutorial involvement at the initial stage of CGIC investigations. Prior to August 2023, the prosecutor assigned to work with the Paterson CGIC was not involved in cases from the inception of investigations. As a result, in 2023, the Paterson CGIC had a solvability rate of 32%. In 2024, after dedicating a prosecutor liaison, their solvability rate improved to 57%; by 2025, it was 78%.¹⁵

15 Information provided by Kelly Walsh, Passaic County Prosecutor's Office

Streamlining Processes with Law Enforcement Partners

When onboarding a prosecutor liaison or informing the prosecutor's office about CGIC operations, a walk-through of the CGIC front-end process should be conducted to demonstrate how firearms and cartridge casings are processed from recovery through testing. This includes how DNA and latent fingerprints are collected from recovered guns and cartridge casings, and how and when evidence is entered into NIBIN. This walk-through of the CGIC workflow helps prosecutors understand the steps the department takes with firearm-related evidence and provides insight into changes that could streamline processing. For example, if the prosecutor is aware of a backlog in NIBIN entry or forensic testing, they can highlight unnecessary steps the agency may be taking that are not needed in the courtroom, thereby improving turnaround times and reducing backlogs. This could include determining whether there is a way to triage and reduce the evidence sent to the laboratory, and establishing a system to notify the laboratory when testing is no longer needed for court due to a plea or dismissal.

Prosecutors can also help streamline efforts by notifying law enforcement when a defendant in a CGIC case has been released from custody. Law enforcement can then update prosecutors on whether that defendant has incurred any additional charges. It is important that any new intelligence developed by prosecutors or law enforcement be shared among stakeholders. Additionally,

prosecutors should provide feedback to law enforcement on why a case may not have been accepted for prosecution. This allows CGIC investigators to understand how they can improve the cases they submit for prosecution in the future.

It is crucial that law enforcement notify prosecutors of any new NIBIN leads associated with a pending suspect or case. This can occur if a firearm is not recovered in the pending case and is still in circulation in the community. As the new NIBIN lead must be turned over to the defense as potential exculpatory evidence for discovery purposes, it is crucial that prosecutors are well informed if this happens.

State & Federal Prosecution Coordination

Collaboration between state and federal prosecutors is crucial. In many cases, the local prosecutor and the USAO communicate on an "as-needed basis" and lack a standard system for determining which office should handle a specific CGIC case. The local prosecutor's office and the USAO should hold regular meetings, either in conjunction with CGIC meetings or separately, to determine which office is best positioned to handle a CGIC case and to strategize about known offenders. The local prosecutor's office should consider designating a staff member as a Special Assistant United States Attorney (SAUSA) to facilitate coordination between the offices. A written policy outlining this process will ensure sustainability, even if participants move to other jobs or



**Learn More About a
Prosecutor's Crime
Analyst** [↗](#)

positions. As part of this collaboration, the CGIC prosecution liaisons from each office should coordinate with their counterpart to determine which cases will be referred for federal prosecution. In some instances, a case may originate in the local prosecutor's office before being federally adopted, which requires continuous coordination between both offices.

Enhance Prosecution Capabilities

It is important that, as part of CGIC efforts, local and federal prosecutors understand what the CGIC is and receive specific training on NIBIN and how it can be leveraged in the courtroom. Training should include when and how NIBIN evidence can be introduced at bail hearings and at trial. Some of this training can be conducted jointly with law enforcement and prosecutors, allowing participants to gain perspective from the various agencies involved. Training should ideally include:

1. A tour of the CGIC facilities and the forensic lab that shows the path cartridge casings and guns take from evidence collection to testing,
2. Training on the various types of firearms, including privately made firearms and machine gun conversion devices, and
3. Training on NFS cases and how to leverage the several types of evidence that can help prove a NFS, such as cell phone data, surveillance videos, forensics, and social media. These are especially important when no victim and/or witness collaboration exists

To further enhance capabilities, prosecutors' offices should consider assigning or hiring a crime analyst to analyze digital evidence, review social media, and develop trial exhibits. Analysts can also track NIBIN leads and gun violence patterns and help identify trigger pullers across jurisdictions. Crime analysts within a prosecutor's office who work closely with investigators and prosecutors are becoming invaluable members of investigative teams nationwide and an essential part of modern prosecutors' offices. In the context of a CGIC, a prosecution crime analyst can work closely with the CGIC prosecution liaisons, investigators from various law

enforcement agencies, and ATF analysts to further develop intelligence that can be leveraged in a trial. For example, a member of the National Guard assigned to the Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office as part of their CGIC efforts helps track crime trends and assists in developing intelligence for individual cases. Because prosecutors' offices tend to handle cases from various law enforcement agencies within their jurisdictions, analysts working in prosecutors' offices are better positioned to support investigations and track prolific offenders across jurisdictions.

Tracking Considerations for Prosecutors

To ensure accurate data capture and CGIC performance measurement, protocols should be established within each prosecutor's office and the CGIC to track NIBIN-related cases from NIBIN lead development through state and federal convictions. The prosecutor's office should define which cases are CGIC or NIBIN-related. For example, if a NIBIN lead generates intelligence identifying a suspect but there is insufficient evidence to prove a shooting, a domestic violence (DV) case against that target or suspect may be enhanced. The prosecutor's office must decide whether the enhanced DV case should be counted as a NIBIN-related case. Once the prosecutor's office defines which NIBIN cases it will track, a NIBIN or CGIC flag could be entered into the prosecutor's case management system (CMS) to track the case from intake through disposition. This tracking will allow prosecutors to

monitor all NIBIN-related cases in their CMS and accurately record disposition information, thereby helping to better assess the impact of the CGIC.

Developing a system to track prolific trigger pullers identified through the CGIC is also considered a best practice. A system that alerts law enforcement and prosecutors when prolific offenders are arrested for any offense can help remove them from the streets quickly. If a target is arrested for an unrelated offense, an alert could enable law enforcement and prosecutors to work together to prioritize these cases, thereby keeping the suspect in custody and the community safe. For example, the Bronx, New York, District Attorney's Office has an arrest alert system for defendants, victims, and witnesses that the prosecutor tracks. The person's criminal history number is entered into the prosecutor's CMS, so that when that person is entered into the CMS again on another matter, a notification is sent to the prosecutor who requested the alert.

Overcoming Common Challenges

Obtaining support from the local and federal prosecutors is crucial for developing a collaborative and effective CGIC. The prosecutors must agree to participate and assist with the CGIC process and to devote staff and resources to the initiative. Some of this may involve creating new processes within the prosecutor's office, which can bring additional challenges. Additionally, changing leadership can be detrimental to the CGIC, as it can lead to a prosecutor's office simply following existing procedures

and failing to adopt innovative approaches that could help the CGIC succeed.

To generate buy-in and secure continued participation from prosecution leaders, it is important to clearly identify common goals and communicate how full implementation of the CGIC model can achieve the goals efficiently. Inviting prosecutors to participate in establishing a CGIC from the beginning can help sustain continuous engagement. The CGIC should not be considered a law enforcement structure that requires prosecutor commitment to function properly, but rather a joint venture. Since prosecutors are the end users of a CGIC's investigative work, they have valuable insights that can benefit the CGIC. Inviting prosecutors to participate in training related to gun crime investigations can also help bridge the gap between law enforcement and prosecutors and generate awareness and interest that can support the sustainability of prosecutor involvement in a CGIC as leadership is renewed.

Insufficient resources, which are not uncommon in a prosecutor's office, can also limit an office's ability to partner effectively with a CGIC. These issues should be discussed as a new CGIC is being developed, so expectations can be managed from the beginning. In a world of limited resources, it is crucial to evaluate which existing sections or units within a prosecutor's office might be better suited to be part of the CGIC. For example, the Santa Clara, California, District Attorney's Office and the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Prosecuting Attorney's Office designated

their respective crime strategy units to work directly with their respective CGICs by analyzing current gun data, assisting police in investigating shootings, and leading regular meetings with other law enforcement partners about gun crime. In other jurisdictions, prosecutor's offices have designated gang case intake prosecutors as the CGIC prosecution liaison. Understanding the overlap between the responsibilities of existing personnel and those of a prosecutor liaison is crucial to efficiently allocating resources to support CGIC implementation.

+ Additional Resources

- [NIBIN Toolkit for Prosecutors](#)
- [Investigating Violent Crime: The Prosecutor's Role](#)
- [Reducing Gun Violence: Strategies for Prosecutors](#)
- [CGIC Prosecutions – Virtual Training](#)



7 Step 7: CGIC Feedback to Process Participants

A decisive step of the CGIC model involves providing feedback to CGIC's internal and external participants. This feedback is crucial to the cyclical nature of the CGIC workflow as it motivates stakeholders to participate in the CGIC process. All personnel involved in the CGIC process should receive routine feedback to reinforce the importance of the CGIC program and the critical role **each person or unit** plays in its success. Feedback can be provided in numerous ways and should involve the community, law enforcement, prosecution partners, and other CGIC stakeholders. Feedback helps generate awareness of the violent crime impact that the CGIC can have, promoting buy-in and program sustainability.

Providing Internal Feedback

Internal feedback occurs when the work of individuals who leveraged the CGIC process to investigate and prosecute cases is acknowledged and appreciated. This includes patrol officers or crime scene technicians who collected cartridge casings or recovered a firearm, evidence technicians or forensic lab personnel who ensured the evidence was entered into NIBIN promptly to generate actionable leads, analysts who added valuable context to the NIBIN leads, investigators involved in the case, the attorneys who prosecuted the case, and any other personnel who contributed to a successful CGIC investigation or prosecution.

Internal feedback can be as simple as recognizing individuals during roll calls or meetings, awarding challenge coins, or issuing formal commendations. This approach provides positive reinforcement and emphasizes the CGIC as a collaborative process dependent on contributions from many individuals. This type of feedback fosters a positive culture within a CGIC and supports program sustainability by highlighting each participant's commitment to the program's success. For example, when patrol officers or deputies receive feedback that the casings they collected or the gun they recovered led to a significant arrest, they are more likely to continue the comprehensive collection of cartridge casings and crime guns. When this feedback is provided in a public setting, the impact can be even greater because officers see recognition for excellent work, which can motivate them to put more effort into collecting firearms evidence.

See Internal Feedback Examples:

[Indianapolis, Indiana Commendation Letter Example](#) ↗

[ATF NIBIN Award Nomination Form](#) ↗

It is crucial to develop a tailored system that works best for each agency. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the CGIC awards challenge coins and championship belts to recognize the work of officers who contribute to the success of their CGIC cases. In Indianapolis, Indiana, the CGIC distributes formal commendation letters to the entire department to acknowledge the work of officers who go above and beyond in CGIC cases. In addition to individual agency recognition, ATF also has a program to recognize the dedication of CGIC stakeholders who work to disrupt gun crime. Agencies can [nominate someone for this award](#), and the recipient receives a formal award letter from ATF thanking them for their contributions. It can also be extremely impactful to involve that person's chain of command, even up to the Chief or Sheriff of the agency, to show support of the program.

CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE, POLICE DEPARTMENT CGIC AWARDS



Distributing Success Stories

Law enforcement agencies, ATF, and state and federal prosecutors should compile examples of cases in which violent offenders were investigated, arrested, and prosecuted based on NIBIN leads. This feedback informs the agency, leadership, and community about the work being done to combat gun violence and should be distributed to all CGIC stakeholders, including the agency's public information officers (PIOs).

Sharing successes with executive leadership is vitally important because it emphasizes the significance of the CGIC's work and can help secure continued program support. A redacted



See Sample
Storyboards From:

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin,
Police Department** [↗](#)

**Toledo, Ohio, Police
Department** [↗](#)

version of these successes may also be communicated to community partners to foster support for the initiative and the participating agencies. Gaining support from executive leaders and the community can ensure the program's sustainability by fostering a culture and expectations around solving violent gun crime.

Many local CGICs create a one-page success storyboard for successful NIBIN cases, highlighting the connection between the shooting incident and the arrest of the suspect(s). Storyboards are a way to visualize a successful NIBIN case, particularly those involving multiple leads and/or suspects. The storyboard highlights all the linked events and investigative work conducted. Storyboards have been displayed around NIBIN terminals or CGIC units to show the impact of CGIC cases. ATF and the BrassTrax machine

manufacturer can work with an agency to develop these boards.

Providing Community Feedback and Outreach

All CGIC stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, ATF, and state and federal prosecutors, should consider developing a unified community outreach strategy that explains the CGIC's role and its successes to the public. The goal of the community outreach strategy is to highlight the success of the CGIC and increase transparency and trust between law enforcement and their communities. The strategy should highlight cases in which individuals linked to multiple shootings or violent crimes were identified, arrested, and prosecuted, ultimately making the community safer. This can be achieved in various settings, including community meetings, social media posts, and local news stories.

In Baltimore, Maryland, the CGIC has created their own [Facebook page](#)¹⁶ to keep the community informed and provide them with feedback about the CGIC's work and successes. This allows community members to interact with posts and see the actions law enforcement is taking to combat violent gun crime, thereby strengthening community relationships. In Miami, Florida, the CGIC and the police department have developed a door hanger that can be distributed after a shooting event or a shots-fired call for service while they canvas for potential witnesses and cartridge casings. These door hangers encourage witnesses to provide feedback to law enforcement without worrying about being seen talking to officers due to fear of retaliation.

Engagement in Public Information Campaigns

Public information campaigns can enhance community outreach strategies and encourage residents to contact law enforcement when they hear shots fired. These campaigns should emphasize the CGIC's fair and impartial policing strategies and the use of science and technology to disrupt the cycle of violent gun crime. Public information campaigns can also help address gun theft issues within jurisdictions by raising awareness about gun theft, particularly in vehicles, and providing the community with practical solutions to prevent them from becoming victims of crime.

In Chicago, Illinois, the CGIC invited the local news to come in and take an in-depth look at its CGIC operations. These news stories can be an effective way to reach a broad audience and inform the community about the CGIC's work. In Casa Grande, Arizona, the police department launched a [Save-A-Casing program](#), aimed at reducing gun thefts and empowering gun owners. The program encourages gun owners to collect and store spent cartridge casings in an envelope labeled with the firearm's make, model, and serial number. If the gun is stolen, they can turn those cartridge casings over to law enforcement to be entered into NIBIN.

Overcoming Common Challenges

When developing a community outreach strategy, it is crucial to ensure that all CGIC stakeholders agree on the level of detail to be shared with the public. While some agencies choose to share nearly all of the details of CGIC and NIBIN operations, others feel that they may be giving away too much information about how gun crimes are investigated to potential offenders. Every community is different; therefore, the outreach strategy should reflect the community it is serving.

+ Additional Resources

- [CGIC Feedback Toolkit](#)

¹⁶ Note: You must be logged into Facebook to access this page.



Building a Lasting CGIC

CGICs succeed when they are built on strong interagency collaboration, consistent adherence to the 7-Step Workflow, and a shared commitment to using ballistic and investigative evidence to identify and stop the most prolific gun offenders. While there is no single blueprint for a CGIC, successful programs of every size, in every type of community, have found ways to adapt these best practices to their own resource, governance structures, and challenges. What they share is a disciplined focus on comprehensive collection, timely NIBIN entry, rapid intelligence analysis, coordinated follow-up investigations, and close partnerships with prosecutors and stakeholders.

Building a successful CGIC requires ongoing attention to leadership buy-in, training, performance tracking, and communicating results to stakeholders and the public. Agencies that treat these practices as a continuous process, rather than a one-time implementation, are best positioned to build CGICs that endure leadership transitions, evolving technology, and changing crime trends. By applying the principles and lessons in this guide, agencies can strengthen their capacity to disrupt gun violence, support successful prosecutions, and ultimately make their communities safer.



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