



Office of the Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Justice



# Follow-up Review of the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Intelligence Center

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) 2015 National Drug Threat Assessment states that Mexican transnational criminal organizations are the single greatest criminal drug threat to the United States. The El Paso Intelligence Center (Center, EPIC), a DEA-led, multi-agency intelligence center located in El Paso, Texas, is well positioned to play a key role in law enforcement's efforts to combat these organizations and deter their criminal activities because of its long-standing presence on the U.S. southwest border.

EPIC's mission is to support "law enforcement through the timely analysis and dissemination of intelligence on threats to the nation and those organizations responsible for illegal activities within the Western Hemisphere, having a particular emphasis on Mexico and the southwest border." EPIC's mission statement further explains that it has an "all threats" focus that includes illegal drugs, weapons trafficking, terrorism, human trafficking, human smuggling, illegal migration, money laundering, and bulk cash smuggling. EPIC seeks to accomplish this mission by providing tactical intelligence that law enforcement can use immediately, operational intelligence to support specific cases, and strategic intelligence that informs law enforcement leaders about broad trends and patterns in criminal activity that may help to guide future enforcement strategies and decisions.

The Department of Justice (Department, DOJ) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) previously reviewed EPIC in 2010.<sup>1</sup> During that review, we examined EPIC's roles and functions and its ability to analyze and disseminate intelligence to support federal, state, and local law enforcement operations. The review found that EPIC was highly valued by its partner agencies and customers, who found its products useful. However, we identified several weaknesses in EPIC's operations and, as a result of that review, made 10 recommendations to the DEA, the last of which was closed in March 2014 because we found sufficient evidence that EPIC had taken reasonable steps to address the concerns we had identified.

After discussions with the DEA Acting Administrator, the OIG initiated this review for the purpose of examining EPIC's capabilities and the value it has provided to law enforcement since our prior review. We also assessed EPIC's governance, partner agency resource allocations, ability to fulfill its "all threats" mission focus, and coordination with another southwest border intelligence collection program managed by the DEA Houston Field Division (DEA Houston).

## Results in Brief

Although we found that EPIC's products and services have continued to provide valuable information to law enforcement personnel who use them, our

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<sup>1</sup> DOJ OIG, [Review of the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Intelligence Center](#), Evaluation and Inspections Report I-2010-005 (June 2010).

current review identified deficiencies in EPIC's governance, strategic management, and operations that could limit its effectiveness and value to law enforcement. Several of these deficiencies reflect continuing challenges related to the issues identified in our previous review.

*EPIC's Partner Agencies Are Not Effectively Engaged in Governing EPIC and Have Reduced the Number of Personnel They Assign to the Center*

The DEA and many other partner agencies share the responsibility for governing EPIC. We found that the leaders of these partner agencies have not been effectively engaged in governing the Center because they have not been sufficiently involved in defining its strategic priorities and monitoring its operations and performance. In particular, we found that since early 2014, EPIC's governing bodies have met infrequently and allowed EPIC to operate without an approved, up-to-date strategic plan or effective performance metrics. Consequently, we found that partner agency leaders have not clearly determined the extent to which EPIC provides value to their agencies or how EPIC supports their agencies' missions.

We believe that the inability of partner agency leaders to determine EPIC's value has led, in part, to their decisions to reduce the number of staff they contribute to EPIC. Since October 2012, the total number of staff detailed to EPIC has decreased by 24 percent — a significant decrease to which most of the agencies with personnel assigned to EPIC have contributed. This decrease in staff has reduced EPIC's diversity in partner agency representation, causing the share of EPIC staff who are DEA or DEA contract employees to increase, from 67 percent in 2012 to 77 percent in 2016. This is of particular concern because EPIC depends on its partner agencies to assign appropriately trained and experienced personnel so that EPIC can fulfill its mission.

*EPIC Is Not Effectively Performing Its "All Threats" Mission Focus; Instead, It Operates Primarily as a Tactical Drug Intelligence Center*

We found that EPIC fully addresses only a narrow component of its mission, focusing on providing customers with tactical intelligence in support of drug investigations. Because of high demand for these tactical services, EPIC has also prioritized staffing its tactical sections at the expense of its ability to produce more complex strategic analysis or to address broader criminal threats. EPIC's managers and customers told us that the Center's strength lies in its access to a broad array of information from numerous agencies; however, we believe that EPIC is not yet able to leverage all of its intelligence resources to fully support complex strategic analysis because of staff reductions and the inexperience of the staff that remains.

Specifically, since September 2013 there has been a 45 percent reduction in the number of Intelligence Analysts — the staff best suited to perform complex strategic analysis — assigned to the Center. Also, many of the Intelligence Analysts who remain at EPIC lack the necessary experience and training to develop complex strategic intelligence products. Additionally, we found that Intelligence Analysts spend much of their time responding to time-sensitive customer requests for information regarding pending investigations, which takes priority over developing

strategic intelligence products. Therefore, we believe that if EPIC wishes to successfully pursue the full scope of its “all threats” mission, it needs to reconsider its staffing and allocation of resources accordingly.

*EPIC’s Customer Outreach Efforts Are Insufficient to Convey the Full Range of Products and Services It Can Provide to the Law Enforcement Community*

We found that EPIC’s customer outreach efforts have been insufficient to convey the full range of products and services it provides. In particular, we found that EPIC does not have a comprehensive marketing program and relies instead primarily on in-person interactions to promote its products and services. Current and former EPIC staff believe that EPIC’s limited marketing material is uninformative. We found that this has likely contributed, in part, to EPIC’s customers being most aware of EPIC’s Watch Section, which addresses Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts queries; but this self-reinforcing focus may limit the development and utilization of EPIC’s other tactical and non-tactical intelligence capabilities.

*The DEA Has Not Consolidated Intelligence from Two Similar Data Collection Programs*

We also found that the DEA has supported two similar intelligence collection and dissemination programs, one at EPIC and one at the DEA Houston Field Division, which collect the same type of real-time tactical intelligence along different parts of the southwest border. These programs have operated independently, and we found that the programs generally do not share collected information with the other. As a result, the DEA may not realize the full value of the intelligence it collects to identify trends and patterns of criminal activity all along the southwest border, nor the potential cost savings that could possibly be realized through the consolidation of these similar programs.<sup>2</sup>

## **Recommendations**

We make four recommendations in this report to improve EPIC and its efforts to support the broader law enforcement community by improving EPIC’s governance and strategic management, ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, and improving efficiency and reducing redundancy in southwest border intelligence collection and dissemination.

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<sup>2</sup> After we completed our fieldwork, the DEA informed us that as of January 1, 2017, DEA Houston would no longer fund or operate this intelligence collection program and that an EPIC partner agency may assume responsibility for it. In the event that an EPIC partner agency assumes this responsibility, EPIC should work to ensure that it is able to share appropriately in the intelligence collected in order to maximize the services EPIC offers.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

The El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC, Center), established in 1974, is a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-led, multi-agency intelligence center located in El Paso, Texas. EPIC's mission is to support "law enforcement through the timely analysis and dissemination of intelligence on threats to the nation and those organizations responsible for illegal activities within the Western Hemisphere, having a particular emphasis on Mexico and the U.S. southwest border." EPIC's mission statement further explains that it has an "all threats" focus that includes illegal drugs, weapons trafficking, terrorism, human trafficking, human smuggling, illegal migration, money laundering, and bulk cash smuggling.

The DEA's 2015 National Drug Threat Assessment stated that "Mexican transnational criminal organizations remain the single greatest criminal drug threat to the United States."<sup>3</sup> The Office of National Drug Control Policy identified in its *2016 National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* that many of these organizations further threaten the United States due to their involvement in other criminal activities such as human trafficking, money laundering, and illegal exports of weapons from the United States into Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Given EPIC's access to intelligence resources from many partner agencies and its established processes to fuse this information into intelligence products that can assist law enforcement customers, EPIC continues to be well positioned to play a key role in the national effort to combat southwest border crime.

### *EPIC'S Organizational Structure and Capabilities*

EPIC's intelligence collection and reporting sections parallel the tactical, operational, and strategic intelligence it provides to its law enforcement customers. We describe EPIC's definition of these types of information and the work of these sections below:

- *Tactical intelligence* results from targeted research to fulfill immediate law enforcement information needs.
- *Operational intelligence* results from comprehensive targeted research to support ongoing law enforcement operations.
- *Strategic intelligence* results from all-source research to inform law enforcement agency leadership about criminal threats so leadership can plan and allocate resources to address these threats.

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<sup>3</sup> DEA, [2015 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary](#) (October 2015) (accessed October 6, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, [National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy](#) (May 2016) (accessed January 30, 2017).

## Tactical Sections

The Watch and the Tactical Operations Sections provide tactical intelligence. The Watch Section is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to immediately respond to law enforcement agency requests for information in support of field investigations. The Watch Section staff generally responds to these requests by querying EPIC's Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts (LEIA) system. LEIA simultaneously searches 18 law enforcement databases, including those of the Department of Justice (Department, DOJ), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Department of Transportation, to identify criminal history information pertaining to the queried subject or entity. EPIC customers can obtain LEIA information by calling or emailing the Watch Section or by remotely accessing EPIC's online portal (EPIC Portal).

In addition to conducting LEIA queries, the Watch Section staff also receives information about contraband seizures and records this information in EPIC's National Seizure System (NSS). Watch Section staff can also initiate lookouts for specific subjects such as vehicles, vessels, or individuals on behalf of a law enforcement officer. When the Watch Section staff learns, in response to such a lookout, that another law enforcement officer has spotted the subject, it informs the customer who initiated the lookout.

EPIC's Tactical Operations Section, which is composed of four subordinate units, provides law enforcement officers with real-time tactical intelligence in support of enforcement actions such as interdictions or arrests. We describe the functions of these units in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Tactical Operations Section Units and Functions**

Unit Name	Function
<b>Air Investigative Unit</b>	Supports aviation and aircraft related investigations by providing information on aircraft, pilots, and passengers suspected of having links to criminal activity. This unit also issues lookouts for suspect aircraft and pilots.
<b>Global Tracking Unit</b>	At the request of law enforcement officers, this unit continuously monitors devices that track suspects for investigations or officers for their safety. This unit also monitors surveillance cameras on behalf of law enforcement officers.
<b>Law Enforcement Technical Collections Unit</b>	Operates a real-time intelligence collection program along the southwest border. This program allows EPIC employees to gather intelligence on transnational criminal organization activities in Mexico.
<b>Tactical Analysis Unit</b>	Analyzes and disseminates intelligence collected by the Law Enforcement Technical Collections Unit

Source: EPIC

## Operational Intelligence Section

EPIC's Operational Intelligence Section responds to customer requests for information that (1) require varying levels of research or analysis to address, or (2) access to data that is not readily accessible through LEIA. The units in this Section provide investigators with targeted research to support specific cases or operations. We describe the functions of these units in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Operational Intelligence Section Units and Functions**

Unit	Function
<b>Gang Intelligence Unit</b>	Uses information from EPIC's various partner agencies to identify links between transnational criminal organizations and domestic criminal gangs
<b>Firearms and Explosives Unit</b>	Analyzes the organized criminal use and trade of firearms and explosives
<b>Special Projects Unit</b>	Liaises with EPIC partners to monitor crime trends and law enforcement priorities in the nine Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force regions
<b>Financial Intelligence Unit</b>	Queries criminal and financial information databases to identify assets and other financial interests of investigative subjects

Source: EPIC

## Strategic Analysis Section

Of EPIC's sections, the Strategic Analysis Section (SAS) researches and analyzes the broadest range of intelligence to produce reports describing the operations of specific transnational criminal organizations and trends and patterns in criminal activity. SAS management explained to us that reports are written to inform regional and national-level law enforcement leaders as they plan how best to allocate law enforcement resources to address criminal threats. We describe the functions of the two units in this section in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Strategic Section Units and Functions**

Unit	Function
<b>Trends and Patterns Unit</b>	Provides analysis of drug, firearm, illicit money, and alien movement via maritime, land, and air routes
<b>Criminal Threat Unit</b>	Provides analysis of specific transnational criminal organizations and their related criminal activities

Source: EPIC

## Additional Sections that Support EPIC's Operations

EPIC has several sections that support EPIC's operations, including the Support Section, the Information Management Section, the Administrative Section, and the Office of the Director. We describe selected sections and units below.

**Support Section.** EPIC's Support Section comprises the Joint Collection Management Unit (JCMU), the Production and Dissemination Unit, and the State and Local Programs Unit. The JCMU tracks EPIC work products and assigns customer requests not initially directed to the Watch Section to the appropriate units. The Production and Dissemination Unit reviews and edits reports prior to release to ensure that information is accurate and appropriate for release. The State and Local Programs Unit provides training and investigative support for law enforcement officers who conduct highway and transportation interdiction through its Trucking Initiative Team.<sup>5</sup>

**Information Management Section.** The Information Management Section coordinates, updates, and ensures that EPIC's information technology (IT) infrastructure supports and enhances the Center's mission and operational objectives. In particular, the section developed and maintains the LEIA application and the NSS application, the latter of which is a repository for drug and bulk currency seizure information. EPIC's customers can report seizure activity to be included in the database or access data from the NSS system by contacting the Watch or other EPIC sections.

The Information Management Section also develops and maintains the EPIC Portal, through which users can remotely access a limited version of the LEIA application and the full NSS application. Recent upgrades to the EPIC Portal allow remote users to perform customized intelligence analysis by visualizing NSS seizure data through dashboards, maps, and 3-dimensional imaging software. The Information Management Section has also been involved in the national effort to merge law enforcement de-confliction systems. We detail EPIC's work in this area in the Results section of the report.

**Administrative Section.** The Administrative Section performs the administrative functions that support EPIC, including financial, human resources, security, and facility management.

**Office of the Director.** The Office of the Director consists of EPIC's senior leadership and the support staff that assists the Director with the daily management of the Center.

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<sup>5</sup> The OIG's report, [Review of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Use of Cold Consent Encounters at Mass Transportation Facilities](#), Evaluation and Inspections Report 15-3 (January 2015), noted that EPIC had canceled some interdiction training in 2013 due to sequestration. Sequestration refers to automatic cuts to federal government spending that were authorized with the *Budget Control Act of 2011* and went into effect on March 1, 2013.

## *EPIC's Governance and Management Structure*

EPIC's governance and management structure is defined in the EPIC Charter, which was established in 2011 and updated in 2015 and sets forth EPIC's mission and management principles. The Charter defines the DEA as EPIC's Executive Agent and requires that the DEA provide necessary staff and other resources to support the EPIC mission. Additionally, the Charter establishes a Board of Directors, which is to meet twice a year to set and monitor EPIC's strategic goals, priorities, and performance. As of the most recent Board of Directors meeting, in August 2014, the Board was composed of a representative from 18 federal and state law enforcement agencies, all of which are required by the terms of the Charter to provide human or other intelligence resources to EPIC. According to the Charter, the Board of Directors includes the head of any agency that has at least seven employees assigned to EPIC and the heads of agencies with fewer than seven employees that the Board of Directors approves for membership status. The Charter also requires that the Board of Directors include a representative from a state or local law enforcement agency.<sup>6</sup> The Board of Directors has authorized a group of senior deputy officials, referred to as the "Seniors Group," to oversee EPIC's day-to-day operations. This Seniors Group is composed of representatives from law enforcement agencies affiliated with EPIC, to also include representatives from agencies not on the Board of Directors.

The Charter states that the DEA Administrator, in consultation with the Board of Directors, appoints a DEA Senior Executive Service employee to serve as the EPIC Director. The Director is responsible for EPIC's day-to-day operations and implements the Board of Directors' strategic priorities and performance objectives.

## *EPIC's Staff, Users, and Budget*

### Staff

As of March 2016, 25 agencies were contributing 360 investigative, analytic, and support staff to EPIC. One hundred and thirty-two were from DOJ, 44 were from other federal agencies, 2 were from state and local agencies, 4 were from international partners, and 178 were contractors assigned to EPIC. EPIC assigned the greatest number of its staff to the Watch and Tactical Operations Sections. The Information Management Section had the second highest number of staff. A breakdown of staff allocations by section, which we discuss in our findings later in this report, is set forth in Table 4 below.

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<sup>6</sup> The Board of Directors also may include any federal agency that has successfully petitioned for membership and additionally may appoint *ex officio* members to advise as it deems appropriate.

**Table 4**  
**Staff Allocations by EPIC Section, March 2016**

Section	Staff Allocation
<b>Intelligence Analysis, Collection, and Dissemination Sections</b>	
Watch and Tactical Operations	126
Operational Intelligence Section	35
Strategic Analysis Section	24
<b>Operational Support Sections</b>	
Information Management Section	75
Support Section	36
Administrative Section	28
Office of the Director	18
Other*	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>

\* Contract janitorial and security staff paid for by the DEA

Source: EPIC staffing data

### Users

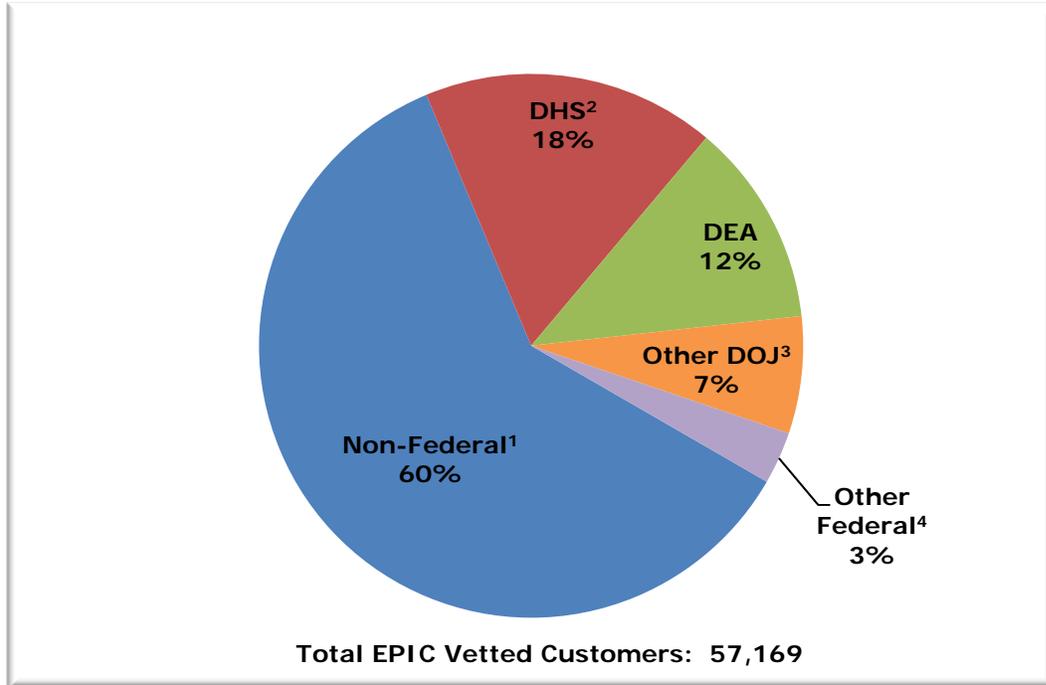
EPIC reports that it had more than 57,000 active, vetted customers who have access to its services and to the EPIC Portal as of August 2016. To become an EPIC vetted user, a law enforcement officer must contact the Center and submit credentials that verify law enforcement status.<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 below shows the distribution of EPIC's vetted users by department or agency type.

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<sup>7</sup> EPIC requires that a prospective user's application include his or her supervisor's and security manager's contact information. EPIC's security manager must then verify that the applicant's parent agency has his or her fingerprints on file. EPIC informs the prospective user's supervisor of the application so that the supervisor can contact EPIC if he or she should not be provided access. EPIC has historically required state and local users to follow this process and began applying it to federal users in 2006.

Figure 1

EPIC Vetted Users by Department or Agency Type  
August 10, 2016



<sup>1</sup> Non-Federal includes state, local, tribal and international law enforcement and High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area users.

<sup>2</sup> DHS includes users from the following DHS components: Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Coast Guard, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Secret Service, and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

<sup>3</sup> Other DOJ includes users from the following DOJ components: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Federal Bureau of Prisons; U.S. Marshals Service; and DOJ headquarters.

<sup>4</sup> Other Federal includes users from 19 other federal agencies.

Source: EPIC data

### Budget

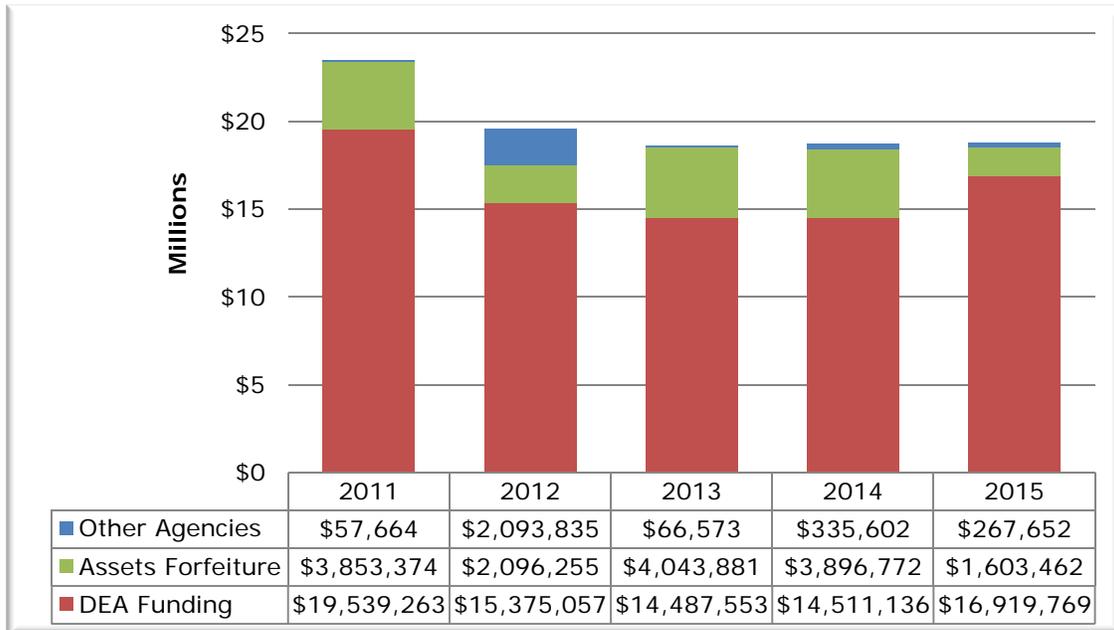
The DEA provides the majority of EPIC's funding for IT infrastructure, facility maintenance, and contract support staff.<sup>8</sup> In fiscal year (FY) 2015, the DEA contributed \$16.9 million (90 percent) of EPIC's budget and EPIC received an additional \$1.6 million from Assets Forfeiture Fund distributions and \$268,000 from

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<sup>8</sup> Federal agencies that have staff detailed to EPIC pay their own employees' salaries. Agencies also supplement their staffing levels at EPIC by paying for contract employees temporarily detailed to EPIC.

other agencies.<sup>9</sup> Figure 2 shows that EPIC’s funding levels declined by approximately \$4.7 million between FY 2011 and FY 2015. This was due in large part to fluctuations in Assets Forfeiture Fund distributions that supported certain tactical functions.

**Figure 2**  
**EPIC’s Budget, FY 2011 – FY 2015**



Source: OIG analysis of EPIC budget data

Of the \$18.8 million in EPIC’s FY 2015 budget, 75 percent was used to cover the expenses of the Information Management and Tactical Sections. Expenses in these sections primarily include payments to contract staff who support EPIC’s IT infrastructure, Watch Section call center, and real-time intelligence collection program.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The Assets Forfeiture Fund is the repository for the proceeds of forfeiture under laws enforced and administered by DOJ. Monies deposited into the Assets Forfeiture Fund are used for many types of expenses, including DOJ investigative expenses leading to seizure. In FY 2015, EPIC’s allocation of monies derived from the Assets Forfeiture Fund was used primarily to pay for contractor staff.

<sup>10</sup> Non-DEA partner agencies separately budget for the salary and contract expenses associated with their government and contract employees detailed to EPIC. As of March 2016, non-DEA partner agencies had assigned a total of 64 government and 19 contract employees to EPIC.

## Prior OIG Work

The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) previously reviewed EPIC in 2010.<sup>11</sup> During that review, the OIG examined EPIC's roles and functions and its ability to analyze and disseminate intelligence to support federal, state, and local law enforcement operations. The review found that EPIC's partner agencies and customers valued it highly; however, the OIG identified several weaknesses in EPIC's operations. As a result of that review, we made 10 recommendations to the DEA, the last of which was closed in March 2014 because we found sufficient evidence that EPIC had taken reasonable steps to address the concerns we had identified in the prior review.

## Scope of the OIG Review

The OIG initiated this review to examine EPIC's current capabilities and the value it provides to law enforcement. We also analyzed EPIC's governance, operations, customer usage, policies, performance, staffing levels, and budget, focusing on the period from the beginning of FY 2015 through August 2016. We held in-person and telephone interviews with EPIC employees, partner agency headquarter officials, and other customers who represented components within DOJ, the DHS, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Defense, High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task forces, and other state and local law enforcement agencies.<sup>12</sup> We also spoke with officials from the DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S Customs and Border Protection, and DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis who represented their agencies at EPIC's Seniors Group meetings. A more detailed description of the methodology of our review is in Appendix 1.

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<sup>11</sup> DOJ OIG, [Review of the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Intelligence Center](#), Evaluation and Inspections Report I-2010-005 (June 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Our interviewees represented geographically distributed law enforcement agencies in Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas.

## RESULTS OF THE REVIEW

### **EPIC's Partner Agencies Are Not Effectively Engaged in Governing EPIC and Have Reduced the Number of Personnel They Assign to the Center**

We found that EPIC's partner agency leaders have not been effectively engaged in governing the Center because they have not been sufficiently involved in defining EPIC's strategic priorities and monitoring EPIC's operations and performance. In particular, we found that EPIC's primary governing bodies, which changed over time and which we define later in this section, have met infrequently and have allowed EPIC to operate without an approved, up-to-date strategic plan with effective performance metrics.

As a result, partner agency leaders have not been able to determine the value EPIC provides to their agencies and how EPIC supports their missions. This is a concern because EPIC depends on partner agency resource commitments to support its mission, and we believe that doubt about EPIC's value may have contributed to partner agencies' decisions to decrease their staffing contributions to EPIC in recent years. As we describe in detail later in this report, since October 2012, the total number of staff at EPIC decreased by 24 percent — a significant decrease to which most of the agencies with personnel at EPIC contributed. Unless partner agencies address these governance issues, we believe that their investments in EPIC are unlikely to increase, which could further imperil EPIC's ability to accomplish its mission.

#### *EPIC's Governing Bodies Have Not Been Effectively Engaged in Governing the Center*

During the current review, we found that EPIC's governing bodies have not met regularly and have not defined EPIC's strategic goals and priorities, and that the Center operates without an up-to-date strategic plan and related performance metrics. As a result, EPIC's governing bodies are unable to assess its performance and cannot determine the value EPIC provides to partner agencies.

Governance and performance measurement issues have been ongoing problems for EPIC. In our 2010 review, we found that EPIC's governance document was insufficient (see the text box below) and that EPIC's strategic plan did not include objective metrics to evaluate the performance of EPIC's programs.<sup>13</sup> As we discuss in the sections below, we found that EPIC's governing bodies have taken steps to address some of these concerns; however, we identified ongoing governance and performance measurement issues that continue to undermine EPIC's effectiveness and ultimately its ability to accomplish its mission.

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<sup>13</sup> DOJ OIG, [Review of the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Intelligence Center](#), Evaluation and Inspections Report I-2010-005 (June 2010).

We found that EPIC’s governing bodies have made efforts to improve EPIC’s governance structure by creating a Charter in 2011 and then updating it in 2015. We found that both versions of the Charter align with best practices in the Department of Justice’s (Department, DOJ) and the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) joint *Fusion Center Guidelines: Developing and Sharing Information and Intelligence in a New Era* (Fusion Center Guidelines), which recommend several best practices to ensure effective governance and performance monitoring.<sup>14</sup> In Table 5, we summarize important best practices described in the Fusion Center Guidelines that are also relevant to our current review of EPIC.

**Governance Document Challenges Identified in Our 2010 Review**

During our previous review, we found that EPIC’s governance document, the 1999 Principals Accord, did not effectively serve as a multi-agency agreement because it did not define member agency participation requirements, outline program goals and priorities, and ensure regular meetings and collaboration among the partners. In that review we also found that EPIC had been unable to sustain key programs, which we also attributed to the lack of an effective multi-agency agreement. In response to this finding, EPIC partner agencies replaced the 1999 Principals Accord with the 2011 EPIC Charter.

Source: DOJ OIG, [El Paso Intelligence Center](#)

**Table 5  
Best Practices Relevant to Our Review**

Best Practice	Purpose and Description
<b>Governance</b>	To have an effective governance structure, the governing body should be composed of officials who have the authority to commit resources and make decisions. The governing body should (1) include members from participating agencies to provide strategic direction and ensure objectives are achieved, (2) review and endorse issues affecting operations, and (3) oversee fusion center operations to identify obstacles and offer resolutions.
<b>Performance Measurement and Evaluation</b>	In order to assess their health and demonstrate value to partner agencies, fusion centers should develop customized processes to systematically review performance. An effective and verifiable performance measurement and review process can justify continued investment in the center. To accomplish this most effectively, fusion centers should consider developing a strategic plan to guide operations.

Source: Fusion Center Guidelines

Although both versions of the EPIC Charter incorporate these best practices, we found that EPIC’s governing bodies have not implemented aspects of the Charters that reflect these practices. In particular, we found that EPIC’s governing

<sup>14</sup> DOJ and DHS, [Fusion Center Guidelines: Developing and Sharing Information and Intelligence in a New Era](#) (2006) (accessed October 6, 2016).

bodies have not met regularly to strategically manage the Center and have not required EPIC management to develop an up-to-date strategic plan that would allow the governing bodies and EPIC management to guide and oversee Center operations. We believe this has undermined its partner agency leaders' ability to assess the value EPIC provides to their agencies and how it supports their missions.

### EPIC's Governing Bodies Have Met Infrequently

We found that EPIC's governing bodies have not met regularly to strategically manage the Center, despite requirements in both EPIC Charters to do so. As a result, EPIC has not had the benefit of consistent, formal involvement by partner agency representatives who have the ability to commit resources and make decisions regarding EPIC's operations.

EPIC's 2011 Charter required the Board of Governors, which consisted of deputy cabinet secretary-level officials, to meet at least twice a year to "approve and monitor the strategic goals, priorities, and performance of EPIC."<sup>15</sup> According to the DEA's Chief of Intelligence, however, the Board of Governors could not regularly meet and instead EPIC's Board of Directors, which consists of agency-level officials, assumed those responsibilities.<sup>16</sup> In 2015, partner agencies updated EPIC's Charter to disband the Board of Governors and to formally delegate their responsibilities to the Board of Directors.

Even though the Board of Directors assumed governance responsibilities for EPIC, this body has not fulfilled the requirement to meet twice a year. We found that the Board of Directors met only three times during the period from January 1, 2013, through September 2016, and instead further delegated its responsibilities to a "Seniors Group" of partner agency representatives.<sup>17</sup> According to the DEA Chief of Intelligence, who has participated Seniors Group meetings, and our review of Board of Directors' meeting summaries, the Seniors Group is an informal group that provides a forum for EPIC management to communicate to representatives from its partner agencies matters that significantly affect the center or its resources. EPIC's Board of Directors established the Seniors Group in April 2013 and required it to meet monthly; but, similar to both the Board of Governors and the Board of Directors, we found that the Seniors Group has met far less frequently than the Charter required. The group met only 14 times with declining regularity between

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<sup>15</sup> According to the 2011 EPIC Charter, the Board of Governors includes the Deputy Attorney General; the Deputy Secretaries of the Departments of Homeland Security, Defense, and Treasury; the Principal Deputy Director for National Intelligence; and state and local law enforcement representatives.

<sup>16</sup> According to the 2011 EPIC Charter, the Board of Directors includes the heads of each element of an executive department and the head of any independent executive agency with a minimum of seven employees permanently assigned or providing direct onsite support to EPIC and state and local law enforcement representatives.

<sup>17</sup> The Seniors Group generally consists of partner agency management officials responsible for law enforcement intelligence functions. For example, the DEA's Chief of Intelligence has frequently represented the DEA in the Seniors Group.

FY 2013 and 2016: six times in 2013, four times in 2014, three times in 2015, and just once in 2016.<sup>18</sup>

Seniors Group meeting summaries showed that the meetings were a forum for discussing partner agency concerns and updating EPIC's governance documents. In 2013 and 2014, the Seniors Group updated EPIC's Mission and Vision statements and Charter. In 2015, the group primarily discussed information sharing and staffing challenges among EPIC partners (staffing is a key challenge that we discuss in more detail later in this report). Although the Seniors Group appears to have played an important role in revising EPIC's foundational governance documents, we question whether EPIC is receiving the appropriate level of strategic management from its partner agencies through this process. Almost all management responsibilities have been delegated to the Seniors Group, which meets infrequently and does not have the formal authority of the Board of Directors to commit resources and make decisions about EPIC's operations.

The Board of Directors and EPIC Management Do Not Have an Approved, Up-to-Date Strategic Plan with Related Metrics to Monitor Performance

We found that in addition to meeting infrequently, the Board of Directors has not engaged with EPIC management to update EPIC's strategic plan to define goals, priorities, and metrics to evaluate performance. The lack of approved goals, priorities, and performance metrics is contrary to the Fusion Center Guidelines, which recommend that governing bodies strategically plan for center operations and enhancements and develop customized processes that systematically review performance. These guidelines recommend effective and verifiable performance measurement and review as critical for assessing the health and demonstrating the value of fusion centers. As we describe below, senior partner agency officials, including the Acting DEA Administrator, reported that they do not have the necessary information to understand how EPIC supports their respective agencies' missions. We believe that a strategic plan and relevant performance metrics developed and approved with the involvement of EPIC management and its governing bodies would allow partner agency leaders to better make this determination. Further, we believe that if such a plan and performance metrics reflected the priorities of partner agency leaders, the Board of Directors would be more engaged in governing EPIC.

Our 2010 review found that "EPIC is not managing the performance of its programs through effective performance measurement" and, as a result, "EPIC cannot ensure its programs are performing adequately and meeting defined objectives." At the time, EPIC had a strategic plan with performance metrics; but we found that EPIC managers did not use them to monitor the performance of their

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<sup>18</sup> In June 2016, the DEA's Chief of Intelligence told us that EPIC's Board of Directors and Seniors Group meetings should be held regularly; however, he also told us that EPIC and its partner agencies decided to suspend Board of Directors and Seniors Group meetings until the DEA receives the results of the OIG review, which was initiated in September 2015. The most recent Seniors Group meeting was held in March 2016.

programs or to identify areas for improvement. We also noted that many of the performance metrics did not reflect actual operations or program constraints. In response to our findings and a recommendation to develop comprehensive performance metrics, EPIC developed an FY 2011–2015 Strategic Plan with performance metrics and stated that it would update the plan and related metrics as EPIC’s mission and organizational structure evolved. We believed this was an important and positive step toward generating the kind of information that would allow managers to evaluate and objectively measure the effectiveness of EPIC’s programs, and we closed the final recommendation in 2012.

During our current review, we found that EPIC discontinued its use of the FY 2011–2015 Strategic Plan and performance metrics in early 2014, because of organizational changes at the Center. According to EPIC’s Acting Deputy Director, EPIC has been working to develop a new strategic plan and performance metrics since that time. These efforts culminated in the development of a draft strategic plan and performance metrics which, according to the Acting Deputy Director, have been used to internally monitor operations of the Center since early FY 2016.<sup>19</sup>

The draft strategic plan and performance metrics appear to be promising initial steps toward effective internal performance measurement. However, we cannot draw any conclusions about their effectiveness because first, as of August 2016, the EPIC Director told us that he could not yet identify any metric that would allow him to assess the effectiveness and health of the Center.<sup>20</sup> Second, these draft materials have not been finalized and may be discarded or modified before they can be fully implemented. We are also concerned that because EPIC developed the draft materials without input from the Seniors Group and Board of Directors, these draft materials may not align with partner agency priorities for the Center or provide the information that partner agencies need to assess how EPIC supports their missions.

Absent implemented performance metrics, we found that the EPIC Director provided the Seniors Group and Board of Directors with data detailing numbers of vetted EPIC users and EPIC’s work product output. Further, he relied on anecdotal success stories as a way to demonstrate EPIC’s effectiveness. EPIC compiles these anecdotes in a publication entitled “EPIC Successes,” which details how EPIC has supported interdiction operations or other intelligence collection efforts. The text box below contains an example.

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<sup>19</sup> The Acting Deputy Director told us that EPIC now measures performance consistent with the goals outlined in its draft strategic plan, and plans to begin using these metrics to inform staff and resource allocation decisions throughout the Center. These metrics detail EPIC’s work outputs, customer feedback, and training efforts. Because we conducted our fieldwork during FY 2016, we did not assess either EPIC’s FY 2016 performance against the draft metrics or the methodology used to develop the metrics themselves.

<sup>20</sup> Following our fieldwork, and while we were writing this report, EPIC received a new Director and the individual who had been the EPIC Director during the course of fieldwork took a different position within the DEA. Therefore, when referring to the EPIC Director in this report, we are referring to the individual who occupied this position during our fieldwork.

### Excerpt from "EPIC Successes"

On May 16, 2015, Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office seized 55 kilograms of cocaine during a traffic stop on Highway 59 and Isleib Road in Fort Bend County, Texas. EPIC Watch personnel identified a historical narcotics record, a previous EPIC search history, and vehicle sighting records while conducting EPIC checks. A consensual search of the pickup truck located the cocaine inside false compartments in the front seat backrest, the passenger seat backrest, rear bottom seat, and rear backrest. The cocaine was wrapped in 50 cellophane bundles imprinted with a fish design. Bleach and ammonia were used as masking agents. The subject was arrested.

Source: EPIC, "EPIC Successes," November 16, 2015

While we do not doubt that such examples reflect valuable contributions by EPIC in particular cases, we do not believe that such success stories are an effective substitute for implemented metrics that would show systemic progress toward specific goals. Several Seniors Group representatives noted that EPIC management does not report metrics to monitor the Center's performance and make strategic decisions, which one Seniors Group member explained would be helpful in understanding the Center's activities.

As mentioned above, we believe that the lack of performance metrics has made it difficult for senior partner agency leaders to determine the extent to which EPIC supports their agencies' missions. In particular, Seniors Group meeting summaries reveal that representatives from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) — both DHS components — do not have enough information to fully assess how EPIC provides value to their agencies and the extent to which it helps their agencies achieve their respective missions. In these summaries, the EPIC Director indicates that DHS headquarters officials are largely unaware of EPIC's value because they do not realize how frequently DHS field employees use EPIC. We found that this is also a problem for the DEA, EPIC's parent agency. The Acting DEA Administrator told us that he does not believe EPIC is able to clearly explain how the DEA staff uses EPIC and, as a result, he too cannot fully assess the value EPIC provides to the DEA. This is particularly concerning because the DEA is responsible for 90 percent of EPIC's budget and 77 percent of its personnel. As we detail in the section below, we believe that partner agencies' inability to determine the value EPIC provides may have contributed to decreases in the number of staff they have assigned to EPIC.

*EPIC's Partner Agencies Have Reduced the Number of Personnel Assigned to EPIC, Affecting EPIC's Ability to Accomplish Its All-Threats Mission*

We found a 24 percent reduction in total staff assigned to EPIC since October 2012. EPIC's Director told us that as a result of these reductions, EPIC is not appropriately staffed. This is a concern because, to fulfill its current "all threats" mission focus, EPIC must receive an adequate number of staff from partner agencies. In addition to impeding EPIC's ability to accomplish its mission, unforeseen recent partner agency staff reductions may lead to an inefficient use of funds, as described in the text box.

While both the DEA and other partner agencies decreased staffing at EPIC, as seen in Figure 3 below, we found the non-DEA staffing decrease to be more substantial. Over the 4-year period we examined, the DEA reduced overall staffing commitments to EPIC by approximately 13 percent, while non-DEA staffing decreased by 47 percent. As a result of these decreases, the DEA constituted 77 percent of EPIC's overall staff in 2016, whereas it accounted for 67 percent in 2012.

**Unforeseen Effect of Partner Agency Staff Reductions**

For FY 2012, EPIC received \$10 million to fund a physical expansion to accommodate increases in personnel. At that time, EPIC was over capacity — it had 447 staff on board and only 414 available workspaces. We found that EPIC's staffing level peaked at 475 at the end of FY 2012; however, since then, EPIC partner agencies have significantly decreased their staffing contributions. As of March 2016, EPIC had 360 personnel and is now well under capacity.

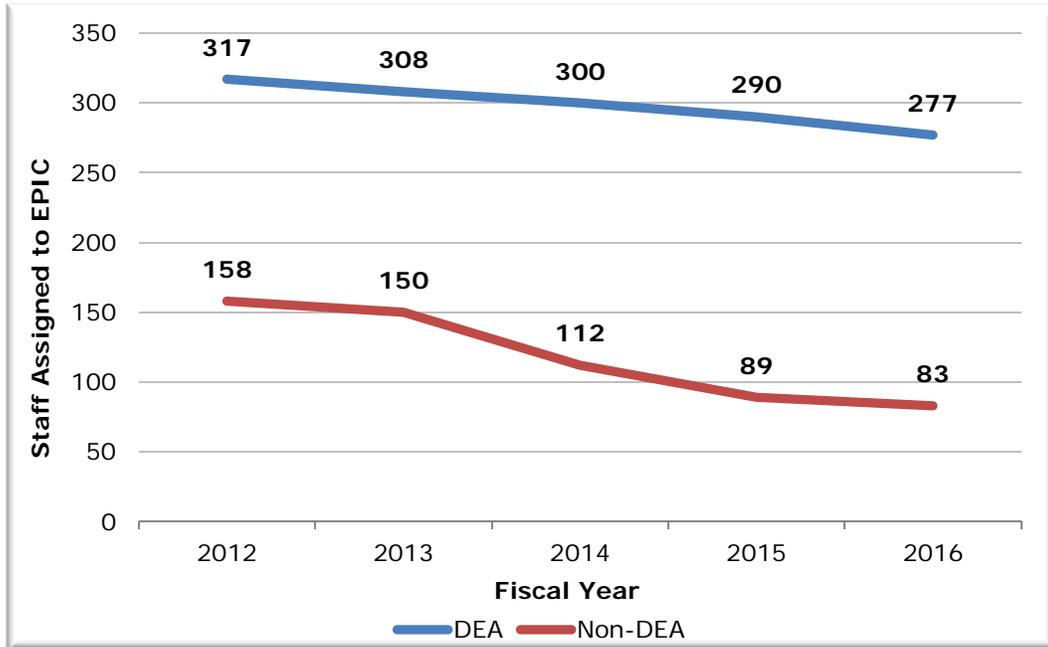
DEA and EPIC officials told us that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed construction and turned the expansion area over to EPIC on October 26, 2016. EPIC's Acting Deputy Director told us that as of November 17, 2016, EPIC is completing minor technological and cosmetic upgrades to the space and considering multiple options for its use. For example, EPIC hopes to use this space to house new partner agency staff, although it does not yet have firm resource commitments from these agencies.

Although it appears as though EPIC had a legitimate need for additional space when it received the expansion funds, it is currently unclear that EPIC has or will have enough need for this space, based on its current operations and plans, for the expansion to have been a necessary use of funds.

Source: Interviews with EPIC and DEA staff and analysis of staffing data

**Figure 3**

**Partner Agency Staffing, DEA and Non-DEA, FY 2012 – FY 2016**

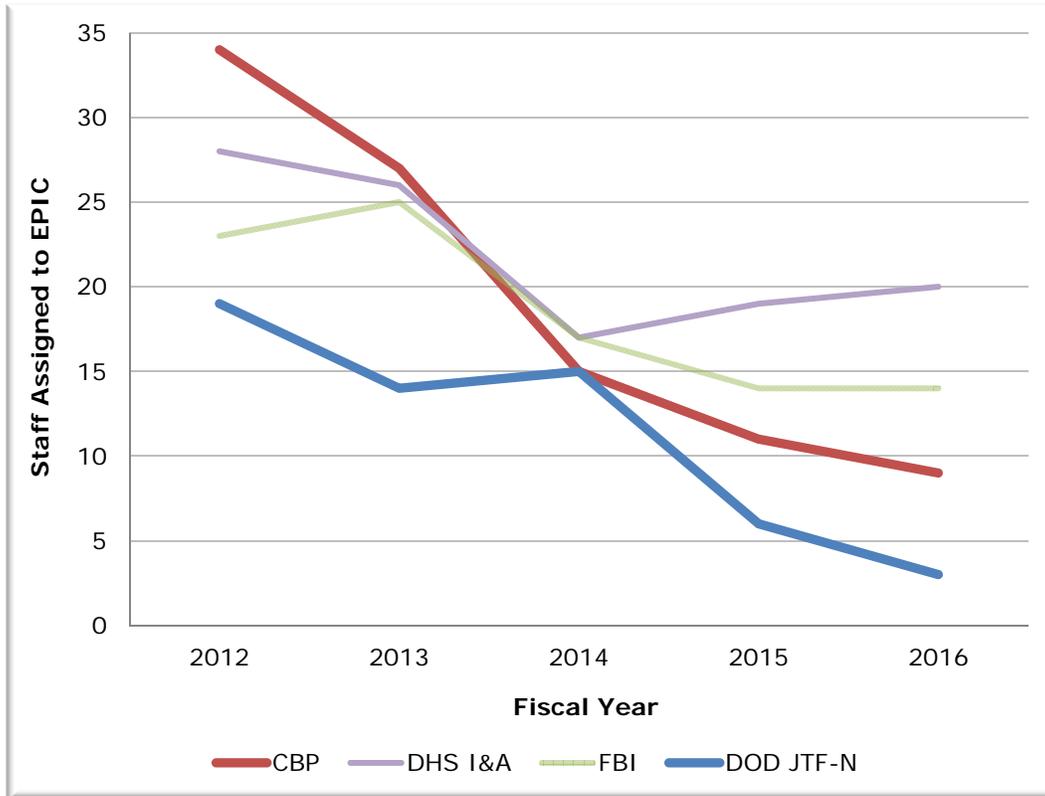


Note: This data incorporates both federal employees and contractors whose services are paid for by DEA and non-DEA agencies.

Source: EPIC data

Further, as shown in Figure 4 below, during this period the non-DEA agencies that contributed the greatest number of staff to EPIC in 2012 — the CBP, the DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis (DHS I&A), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Defense’s Joint Task Force North (DOD JTF-N) — all significantly decreased their staffing commitment to EPIC. DOD JTF-N (down 84 percent) and the CBP (down 74 percent) were responsible for the greatest proportional staffing decreases during this timeframe.

**Figure 4**  
**Staffing by Selected Partner Agencies, FY 2012 – FY 2016**



Note: This data incorporates federal employees and contractors whose services these agencies pay for.

Source: EPIC data

We reviewed EPIC’s Seniors Group meeting summaries and interviewed Seniors Group members and found that partner agency representatives, including representatives from the FBI, DHS I&A, DOD JTF-N, and CBP, cited two main reasons why their agencies withdrew staff from EPIC. First, partner agency representatives frequently cited competing mission demands combined with agency-wide staff shortages as the primary reason for cutbacks.<sup>21</sup> Second, some agency representatives expressed doubt or uncertainty about EPIC’s value to their agencies’ mission. Even the DEA’s Chief of Intelligence, a representative from EPIC’s parent agency, expressed that competing demands for resources affect the DEA’s ability to assign staff to EPIC. In particular, he stated that he prioritizes staffing DEA field offices before increasing staff at EPIC.

As noted above, DOD JTF-N and the CBP were responsible for EPIC’s greatest proportional staffing decreases since October 2012. We found that between

<sup>21</sup> Our review of historical EPIC meeting summaries indicates that partner agency staff reductions were a partial result of a government sequestration that began in FY 2013.

October 2012 and March 2016, both agencies transferred staff from EPIC to CBP locations. In particular, EPIC officials told us that beginning in 2014 DOD JTF-N began to change its staffing priorities and increased its staff complement at CBP locations along the southwest border. This resulted in a reduction of DOD JTF-N staff at EPIC. Similarly, a CBP official told us that the CBP transferred staff from EPIC to CBP locations including the recently established Joint Task Force-West (JTF-W), a Texas-based DHS southwest border intelligence fusion center that supports interdiction operations and seeks to degrade transnational criminal organizations.<sup>22</sup> According to a DHS employee detailed to EPIC, JTF-W provides some intelligence services that are similar to EPIC's. This employee explained that some customers who would have contacted EPIC directly in the past now request information from JTF-W personnel, only to have JTF-W personnel forward the request to EPIC.<sup>23</sup>

Seniors Group meeting summaries revealed that the CBP did not consider incorporating the functions of JTF-W at EPIC, even though EPIC appears to have a very similar interdiction support mission. A CBP Seniors Group representative also confirmed to us that the CBP has had many new staffing requirements including JTF-W, and that these new requirements partially contributed to a reduction of CBP staff at EPIC. It was outside of the scope of this review to assess the development and capabilities of JTF-W. However, we believe that it is important that EPIC communicate with the CBP regarding JTF-W's potential value to the CBP so that these entities may most effectively support the DHS's efforts on the southwest border.

In the Seniors Group meeting summaries, we also found examples of agency representatives directly expressing uncertainty about EPIC's value to their agencies' missions. An ICE representative indicated that EPIC does not adequately explain how its mission relates to ICE's national security responsibilities, a concern we also heard from FBI staff during our interviews. Although ICE's staffing commitments and fluctuations were not as great as the agencies highlighted above, we found it

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<sup>22</sup> According to the DHS, on November 20, 2014, Secretary Jeh Johnson directed the creation of the Southern Border and Approaches Campaign, a unified approach to improve how the DHS protects the homeland across our borders. The campaign is intended to harness and more effectively coordinate the assets and personnel of the CBP, ICE, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the U.S. Coast Guard, and other resources of the DHS. The goal of this campaign is to achieve effective enforcement and interdiction across land, sea, and air; to degrade transnational criminal organizations; and to do these things while still facilitating the flow of lawful trade, travel, and commerce across our borders.

As a part of the Southwest Border and Approaches Campaign, the DHS established three task forces, each with different areas of responsibility. Joint Task Force-East is responsible for southeast maritime approaches; JTF-W is responsible for the southwest land border; and Joint Task Force for Investigations supports the work of the other two task forces and focuses on investigations throughout the nation and with foreign partners.

<sup>23</sup> Given the scope of our review, which was to review EPIC's internal operations, we did not determine the full extent to which the CBP, or any other partner agencies, maintain intelligence support services independent of EPIC. Therefore, we cannot fully determine whether or how the CBP or any other partner agencies offer intelligence support services similar or comparable to EPIC's.

noteworthy that a partner agency representative expressed the need to identify the value EPIC provides when determining how many staff to assign to the Center.

We are concerned that the disproportionate level of the decreases in non-DEA staffing has made EPIC a more DEA-focused facility and has the potential to detract from the Center’s ability to draw from multiple relevant agencies in achieving its mission. In that regard, during our fieldwork we learned of two discrete scenarios that show the importance of CBP and other partner agency staff contributions to EPIC. The first scenario demonstrates how staff contributions enhance inter-agency collaboration, while the second demonstrates how CBP staff reductions have negatively affected EPIC’s ability to provide timely intelligence to its customers. See Table 6 for a description of these scenarios.

**Table 6**  
**Scenarios that Demonstrate the Value of Partner Agency Staff Contributions to EPIC**

Scenario	Description
<b>1</b>	ATF Intelligence Analysts in EPIC’s Firearms and Explosives Intelligence Unit regularly review Mexican newspapers and other open-source information to identify individuals who have been arrested for firearms related crimes in Mexico. These analysts then refer the names of the individuals to a CBP employee also detailed to the Firearms and Explosives Intelligence Unit. If the CBP employee determines that any individual who has been arrested has a visa to legally enter the United States, the CBP employee will refer the name to the State Department to consider potential visa revocation. According to the CBP employee, this work resulted in 405 visa revocations from April 2013 through April 2016.
<b>2</b>	An EPIC supervisor also explained a recent situation in which analysis was delayed because no CBP personnel were available to research the immigration history of four persons of interest who were traveling through Mexico to the United States from a country designated by the U.S. State Department as a “state sponsor of terrorism.” Such instances demonstrate that EPIC may have the information and processes in place to help identify potential threats but, without sufficient resources, may not be able to do so in a timely fashion.

Source: Interviews with EPIC staff

In the section above, we explained that partner agencies have significantly decreased the number of staff they assign to EPIC because of competing resource demands and because partner agencies cannot fully determine how EPIC contributes to their agencies’ missions. We believe that if partner agencies continue to question EPIC’s value, they are unlikely to increase staffing contributions. This is of particular concern because, according to a Seniors Group representative, EPIC’s most pressing challenge is to maintain the coalition among participating agencies. Additionally, the EPIC Director explained that reductions in partner agency staffing levels have the potential to undermine the Center’s capabilities. Based on such sentiments, we believe that a strong coalition is a necessary condition for EPIC to fulfill its mission, the scope of which we discuss further below.

As discussed above with regard to the CBP, we also found that partner agencies have established their own, similar intelligence capabilities, independent of EPIC. Because the scope of our review was limited to EPIC's operations, we did not evaluate the intelligence capabilities of partner agencies and could not identify what partner agency capabilities overlap with EPIC's or what capabilities EPIC alone provides or provides most effectively. Moreover, we do not know the extent to which a lack of understanding of EPIC and its potential to contribute to partner agency missions may have been responsible for the establishment of these separate capabilities. However, we believe such information would be essential for EPIC's Board of Directors when defining EPIC's strategic goals and priorities, and that without this information it may be very difficult to determine how EPIC and other partner agency intelligence capabilities can collectively best address all of the threats identified in EPIC's mission focus.

### **EPIC Is Not Effectively Performing Its "All Threats" Mission Focus; Instead, It Operates Primarily as a Tactical Drug Intelligence Center**

EPIC's mission statement explains that it provides tactical, operational, and strategic intelligence support to address "all threats," such as illegal drugs, weapons trafficking, terrorism, human trafficking, human smuggling, illegal migration, money laundering, and bulk cash smuggling. However, during the period of our review, we found that EPIC fully addressed only a narrow component of its mission, providing customers with tactical intelligence in support of drug investigations. We also found that, as EPIC has become more heavily DEA staffed, its management has prioritized its tactical capabilities by allocating the greatest number of human resources to support its tactical sections and that this prioritization, in concert with other constraints, has hampered the Center's ability to perform more complex strategic analysis that addresses broader criminal threats. Because of these challenges, EPIC is not yet fully able to leverage all of its intelligence resources to support complex strategic analysis. We believe this is a missed opportunity because EPIC's managers and customers told us EPIC's strength lies in its unique access to a broad array of information from numerous agencies.

#### *EPIC Almost Exclusively Provides Tactical Products and Services to Its Customers*

EPIC's Menu of Products and Services (Menu) lists a wide range of tactical, operational, and strategic intelligence products and services available to law enforcement customers. However, we found that the vast majority of the products and services EPIC produced in FY 2015 supported customers' tactical intelligence needs.<sup>24</sup> In Table 7 below, we describe EPIC's FY 2015 products and services, the

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<sup>24</sup> According to EPIC management responsible for data collection, EPIC developed new processes to track Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts (LEIA) query requests and other work products during FY 2014. Because of this and historical data consistency and reliability issues, we present only FY 2015 work data in this analysis.

frequency with which EPIC produced them, and how EPIC categorizes the type of intelligence provided in these products and services.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 7**

**Products and Services by EPIC-Defined Intelligence Category, FY 2015<sup>26</sup>**

EPIC Defined Intelligence Category	Product or Service	Description of Product or Service	Frequency
<b>Tactical</b>	LEIA Query	Results are delivered to internal and remote requesters over the phone or electronically to identify the criminal history of the queried subject or entity. <sup>1</sup> A Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts (LEIA) query simultaneously searches 18 law enforcement information systems, including those of DOJ, the DHS, and the Department of Transportation.	83,863
	Tipplers, Reports, and Bulletins	Conveys raw information directly to requesting law enforcement personnel to support investigations. These products are most often produced by EPIC's real-time intelligence collection program.	11,784
	Entity Lookouts and Detections	Customers contact the Watch Section to initiate "lookouts" on entities such as vehicles, vessels, aircraft, or individuals. If other customers inquire about the entity, EPIC contacts the customer who initiated the lookout.	3,681
	Cases Supported	EPIC monitors surveillance equipment, such as cameras and geo-tracking devices, to support investigators. <sup>2</sup>	136
<b>Operational</b>	Intelligence Note	Targeted research and analysis of current or emerging trends or new developments in criminal activity	28

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that individual tactical functions may require much less time to complete than EPIC's operational and strategic products. Although EPIC tracks staff hours worked to develop certain tactical, operational, and strategic publications, it does not track hours worked for all its tactical functions. Absent this information, we are unable to use comparisons of work hour data to assess EPIC's intelligence support focus. In the absence of work hour allocation data by product type or function, we use the volume of different types of products and functions and EPIC's allocation of staff by section, as shown in Table 4 above, to assess its intelligence support focus.

<sup>26</sup> EPIC also responded to over 6,300 requests for information (RFI) not initiated through the Watch Section. Responses to RFIs can take the form of many of the products described in Table 7; therefore, we include many of these products in the relevant totals of Table 7. In some cases EPIC addresses RFIs with informal emails that communicate relevant information to the customer; Table 7 does not capture this work. We provide further detail about how EPIC responds to RFIs below.

**Table 7 (Cont'd)**

EPIC Defined Intelligence Category	Product or Service	Description of Product or Service	Frequency
<b>Strategic</b>	Intelligence Assessment	Synthesizes different sources of information to provide a broad and thorough analysis that identifies new law enforcement challenges and opportunities. These products are intended to inform law enforcement leaders how best to allocate resources to address criminal threats.	7

Note: EPIC also develops reference guides that aggregate factual or procedural information to detail the current organization and leadership structure of criminal organizations. During FY 2015, EPIC updated or developed 11 reference guides for wide distribution to the law enforcement community.

<sup>1</sup> Watch Section staff made 67,055 LEIA queries during FY 2015 on behalf of EPIC customers and EPIC staff. EPIC customers also made 8,432 LEIA queries through the EPIC Portal during this time frame. According to EPIC, follow-up queries made by EPIC Portal customers to the Watch Section are not recorded as separate queries. EPIC cannot determine whether the remaining 8,376 LEIA queries made during FY 2015 were performed by staff in the Watch Section or by customers using the EPIC Portal because these requests were made by users who are no longer active.

<sup>2</sup> EPIC monitored over 2,300 devices for case support and officer safety during FY 2015.

Source: EPIC program descriptions, LEIA data, and Joint Collection Management Unit data

We found that in addition to the tactical nature of a vast majority of EPIC's products and intelligence work, the primary reason that EPIC customers requested information from EPIC during FY 2015 was to support drug investigations. This was true not only for customer requests for Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts (LEIA) queries directed to the Watch Section, but also for customer requests for information (RFI) made to the Joint Collection Management Unit (JCMU). According to the manager of the JCMU, the RFI process is designed to provide customers with ongoing case support by units in the Operational Intelligence Section, which provides more complex intelligence analysis services than those offered by the tactical sections.

## EPIC Customers Request Primarily Tactical Intelligence

We found that EPIC customers most frequently request EPIC's tactical intelligence from the Watch Section and generally receive this information as a result of a LEIA query. As detailed in Table 7 above, during FY 2015 the Watch Section or remote customers conducted almost 84,000 LEIA queries for tactical information. Although the RFI process is designed to provide customers with ongoing case support from units in the Operational Intelligence Section, our analysis of RFI data demonstrates that EPIC provided customers with tactical information in response to most RFIs. In particular, Table 8 shows that EPIC's tactical sections responded to the greatest number (42 percent) of all RFIs during FY 2015.

**Table 8**  
**RFIs by EPIC Section, FY 2015**

Section(s) that Responded to RFIs	Number of RFIs
Tactical	2,657
Operational	2,241
Strategic	277
Other EPIC Sections*	1,011
Referred to External Agency	160
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,346</b>

\* The majority of the RFIs assigned to other EPIC sections are addressed by either the Information Management Section, which generally provides requestors with drug seizure data, or the Support Section's Trucking Initiative Team, which generally provides customers with more in-depth research of Department of Transportation databases than is available through the Watch Section.

Source: EPIC LEIA data

We also found that at least 31 percent of the 2,241 RFIs the Operational Intelligence Section responded to could have been addressed by staff in the Watch Section. Overall, we estimate that during FY 2015 EPIC provided customers with tactical intelligence for at least half of the RFIs it received.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, we found some EPIC customers preferred to call or email Intelligence Analysts with whom they have a preexisting relationship rather than contacting the Watch Section, which resulted in the Operational Intelligence Section directly receiving and responding to requests for tactical information during FY 2015. We found that at least one Intelligence Analyst in the Operational Intelligence Section spent a disproportionate amount of time responding to RFIs

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<sup>27</sup> Of all RFIs submitted during FY 2015, we found that 24 percent should have been originally directed to the Watch Section because customers either requested information that could be addressed by a LEIA query or wanted to initiate a lookout. Of the 18 percent of all RFIs assigned to the Tactical Operations Section, most were delegated to the Air Investigative Unit, which uses Federal Aviation Administration and other law enforcement databases to provide information on aircraft, pilots, and passengers suspected of having links to criminal activity.

that could have been addressed by the Watch Section. The EPIC Director acknowledged this issue to us and explained that when Intelligence Analysts respond to these tactical requests EPIC is not making the best use of their analytical skills. Therefore, he said that he had emphasized to EPIC staff the importance of directing customer requests for tactical intelligence to the Watch Section and JCMU and he told us that he believed EPIC’s response to this issue was improving.

EPIC Customers Seek Support Primarily for Drug Investigations

We also found that the primary reason that EPIC customers requested both LEIA queries and RFIs during FY 2015 was to support drug investigations. In particular, we estimate that at least 57 percent of all LEIA queries and at least 49 percent of RFIs were made for this purpose.<sup>28</sup> Given the overall volume of LEIA queries, we further analyzed LEIA query data to better understand EPIC’s customer base and the reason why customers requested information from the Center. Our analysis shows that state and local law enforcement and DEA personnel requested approximately 78 percent of all LEIA queries during FY 2015, and that the top reasons these customers submitted LEIA queries related to drug investigations. This was also true for EPIC customers from the FBI, CBP, and ICE. (See Table 9.)

**Table 9**  
**LEIA Queries by Agency, FY 2015**

Agency	Number of LEIA Queries	%	Top Reason for Agency Query <sup>1</sup>
Non-Federal (State and Local) <sup>2</sup>	49,119	59%	Traffic Stop (often drug related)
Drug Enforcement Administration	15,772	19%	Drug Investigation
U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command	6,393	8%	Maritime Check
Immigration and Customs Enforcement	2,691	3%	Drug Investigation
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives	1,609	2%	Firearms Investigation
Customs and Border Protection	709	<1%	Drug Investigation
Federal Bureau of Investigation	381	<1%	Drug Investigation

<sup>28</sup> We analyzed LEIA query purpose data and determined that 57 percent of all FY 2015 LEIA queries were made in support of traffic stops or other drug investigations. While traffic stops can reveal many different types of crime, “EPIC Successes” show that LEIA-assisted traffic stops most often reveal drug-related criminal activity.

EPIC does not track the purpose of an RFI in the same manner it does for LEIA queries. However, we determined that 49 percent of FY 2015 RFIs were made by DEA and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task force customers. Given that the primary mission of the DEA and HIDTA task forces is to investigate drug crimes, we believe it is reasonable to conclude that the purpose of these RFIs was, at least in part, to support drug investigations. Further, our analysis does not include non-HIDTA state and local law enforcement agency, CBP, ICE, and FBI RFIs (632, 447, 267, 130 RFIs, respectively) although some of these RFIs likely relate to drug investigations, given the significant involvement of these agencies in various aspects of drug investigations.

**Table 9 (Cont'd)**

Agency	Number of LEIA Queries	%	Top Reason for Agency Query <sup>1</sup>
U.S. Marshals Service	239	<1%	Fugitive Investigation
Other <sup>3</sup>	6,950	8%	Drug Investigation
<b>Total</b>	<b>83,863</b>	<b>100%</b>	

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the 22 reasons provided for why EPIC customers requested LEIA queries.

<sup>2</sup> EPIC provided us with a collective Non-Federal category, which includes local, state, tribal, and foreign law enforcement agency queries.

<sup>3</sup> The Other category includes users from various federal departments, agencies, and groups. The DHS components are the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Secret Service, and DHS headquarters. This category also captures users who represent the Department of Defense, Department of the Interior, Department of State, Federal Aviation Administration, Internal Revenue Service, and HIDTA task forces. Finally, this category also includes 2,184 queries from undefined agencies.

Source: EPIC LEIA data

**State and Local Law Enforcement Use of LEIA.** We found that the top two reasons state and local law enforcement submitted LEIA queries were related to drug investigations. The most common reason was to support traffic stops. While traffic stops can reveal many different types of crime, “EPIC Successes” reports show that the LEIA-assisted traffic stops EPIC considers to be successful most often reveal drug-related criminal activity. EPIC staff told us that the Watch Section and LEIA can best support a state or local law enforcement officer who pulls someone over as the result of a traffic infraction. After initial questioning, the officer may suspect that the driver is involved in illegal activity such as transporting illicit drugs, firearms, or bulk currency. To corroborate the officer’s suspicion and justify continued questioning or to establish reasonable suspicion to search the vehicle, the officer contacts the Watch Section for additional information on the driver.<sup>29</sup> The text box below describes a real-life case that illustrates how the Watch Section and LEIA assist state and local law enforcement in their identification of drug crimes.

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<sup>29</sup> During the course of a traffic stop, a law enforcement officer may directly call the Watch Section from the scene or may contact his/her agency’s dispatch office to contact the Watch Section. If a law enforcement officer has a remote internet connection, the officer can also make a limited LEIA query through the EPIC Portal. Due to data access restrictions on remote users, Watch Section staff can access a greater amount of LEIA data and provide officers with a more complete result than would be available through the EPIC Portal. Currently, EPIC is expanding EPIC Portal capabilities to better inform remote users when they should contact the Watch Section to obtain more information.

### Case that Illustrates the Intended Use of the Watch Section and LEIA

A local police department conducted a traffic stop on Interstate 40 in Geary County, Kansas. During the course of the stop, the officer contacted Watch personnel who queried LEIA and determined that the driver had an outstanding warrant and a fugitive record. Watch personnel also determined that a prior Watch Section customer had previously placed a lookout on the same vehicle. Based on the information that EPIC provided, the officer searched the vehicle and located 1.36 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine, as well as smaller amounts of other illicit narcotics, and arrested the driver.

Source: EPIC, "EPIC Successes," May 7, 2015

Underscoring the importance of LEIA queries to state and local law enforcement officers who conduct drug enforcement, the second most common reason for state and local law enforcement to request LEIA queries is to support a preexisting drug investigation.

**Federal Law Enforcement Use of LEIA.** Obtaining information to support drug investigations was also the most common reason why users from the DEA, FBI, CBP, and ICE — all agencies with primary or significant involvement in drug enforcement activities — requested LEIA queries during FY 2015. During discussions with DEA Special Agents and Intelligence Analysts in DEA field offices, we learned that these federal customers generally request LEIA queries when performing background research about the criminal history of investigation target(s). In addition, several interviewees explained to us that the DEA requires them to annually request LEIA queries to determine whether any of the confidential informants they handle have committed crimes that have not been reported to the DEA.

CBP and ICE field personnel told us that they request LEIA queries when investigating drug crimes because they generally do not have direct access to DOJ databases, specifically DEA databases, and therefore use LEIA to access additional drug intelligence.<sup>30</sup> However, when investigating other types of crimes, ICE, DHS, and FBI personnel told us that they prefer to use other, non-EPIC databases. For example, an ICE official assigned to EPIC explained that when ICE personnel investigate non-drug crimes, such as alien smuggling or immigration document fraud, they generally prefer to use ICE or other DHS systems because these

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<sup>30</sup> Our analysis of LEIA query data shows that other federal agencies request LEIA queries for reasons related to their agency missions. For example, The U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command uses EPIC almost exclusively to obtain LEIA information for background checks of prospective merchant mariners who provide logistical support to the Department of Defense. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) requests LEIA checks most commonly to support firearms investigations. ATF Agents and Intelligence Analysts explained to us that many of the same criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking are involved in firearms trafficking, which makes EPIC's LEIA system a useful source of information for ATF. The U.S. Marshals Service requests LEIA checks most commonly for information to support fugitive investigations. Capturing fugitives is one the Marshals Service's core missions.

databases have more relevant records to support these types of investigations and they have full access to the data in these systems. Similarly, an FBI Intelligence Analyst in New York explained that FBI employees who conduct drug investigations are the FBI employees most likely to contact the Watch for a LEIA query.

*Most of EPIC's Human Resources Support Its Tactical Operations, and EPIC Faces Constraints in Producing Complex Strategic Analysis*

We previously found that EPIC did not effectively use the sources of information it collects (see the text box). During our current review, we found that EPIC is not yet fully able to leverage all of its available intelligence resources to support complex strategic analysis due to challenges related to staff reductions and inexperience. We believe this may be a significant missed opportunity, because multiple law enforcement officials told us that EPIC is uniquely positioned to provide its partner agencies with valuable strategic analysis given EPIC's access to a wide array of partner agency intelligence resources.

We have identified four reasons that we believe contribute to EPIC's inability to leverage all of its available resources to support complex strategic analysis. First, as reflected by how EPIC allocates its human resources, EPIC management prioritizes its tactical and operational intelligence capabilities over its strategic analysis capabilities. Second, partner agencies have reduced the number of Intelligence Analysts they contribute to EPIC by more than 45 percent since September 2013. We found that specific reductions in the numbers of CBP Intelligence Analysts have negatively affected EPIC's ability to incorporate CBP intelligence into EPIC's complex strategic analysis. Third, Intelligence Analysts responsible for complex strategic analysis lack the proper experience and training necessary to produce complex strategic intelligence products. Fourth, those Intelligence Analysts responsible for complex strategic analysis spend much of their time responding to time-sensitive customer requests to support specific cases, which can take priority over developing strategic intelligence products.

**EPIC Analysis Challenges Identified in Our 2010 Review**

In our 2010 review, we determined that EPIC was not making effective use of several different sources of information it collects. These included real-time intelligence collected at EPIC and information maintained in EPIC's National Seizure System (NSS). We recommended that EPIC produce more substantive products based on this data. In response to this finding, EPIC explained that many of its sections began using NSS data to develop intelligence products to assist southwest border investigations. During our current review, we found that those efforts have continued and recent IT upgrades to the EPIC Portal have enhanced the EPIC staff's and remote users' ability to perform customized intelligence analysis. As detailed in the Introduction to this report, EPIC users can now visualize seizure data through dashboards, maps, and 3-dimensional imaging software.

Source: DOJ OIG, [El Paso Intelligence Center](#) and current review

### EPIC Assigns the Greatest Number of Its Staff Members to Sections that Provide or Support Tactical Intelligence

In the absence of an up-to-date strategic plan, we believe that the distribution of EPIC's resources defines its priorities more than any other factor. Our assessment of EPIC's human resources allocations indicates that EPIC management has prioritized tactical and operational capabilities more than strategic analysis capabilities, despite EPIC's stated intention to enhance its strategic analysis capabilities. As detailed in the Introduction to this report, as of March 2016 management allocated the highest concentration of EPIC's staff (126) to its tactical sections, compared to 35 staff members assigned to the Operational Intelligence Section and only 24 assigned to the Strategic Analysis Section (SAS). According to both the EPIC Director and the DEA's Chief of Intelligence, the Watch Section, which performs LEIA queries on behalf of EPIC customers, is EPIC's most important section. The EPIC Director added that whenever the Watch Section is short staffed he will temporarily detail personnel from other sections there to ensure that it can adequately respond to customer requests.

We also found that EPIC's largest support section — the Information Management Section — has developed and updated systems that enhance the research capabilities of staff in all EPIC sections. However, these systems most significantly enhance EPIC's ability to provide tactical intelligence to customers. Specifically, the 75 staff members in this section develop and maintain EPIC's IT infrastructure, such as the LEIA application, which is the foundation of EPIC's tactical capabilities. The Information Management Section has also been involved in the national effort to merge law enforcement de-confliction systems (see the text box below), which further supports EPIC customers in need of tactical intelligence.

### **The Information Management Section's Support of De-Confliction Systems**

EPIC now hosts the Secure Automated Fast Event Tracking Network (SAFETNet) event de-confliction system on behalf of six HIDTA task forces throughout the country. SAFETNet alerts law enforcement officers when other officers are conducting high-risk enforcement actions nearby. SAFETNet decreases the likelihood of accidental "blue on blue" violence when officers from different agencies conduct high-risk operations in proximity to one another.

Representatives from the Information Management Section have collaborated with the representatives from the nation's two other major event de-confliction systems, the Regional Information Sharing Systems Officer Safety Event De-confliction System and Case Explorer, to increase officer access to information contained in these systems. Historically, when an officer submitted information into one system the officer could search records in only that system. Now, because of recent upgrades, when an officer submits information into one system the officer can search records in all three systems.

Information Management Section staff told us that as of July 2016 EPIC also hosts the National Virtual Pointer System, which consolidates 15 national and regional target de-confliction systems. Similar to event de-confliction, target de-confliction informs law enforcement officers when other officers are investigating a similar individual. EPIC customers can access both SAFETNet and the National Virtual Pointer System through the EPIC Portal.

The Information Management Section is also currently developing a cyber de-confliction system and a national drug overdose tracking system.

Source: EPIC IT documentation and interviews with Information Management Section personnel

### Partner Agencies Have Reduced the Number of Intelligence Analysts Assigned to EPIC

Managers of EPIC units explained that reductions in the number of Intelligence Analysts, the position type uniquely suited to perform complex strategic analysis, have negatively affected EPIC's ability to perform such work. We found that since September 2013, when Intelligence Analyst staffing levels were at their peak, there has been a 45 percent decrease in Intelligence Analysts assigned to EPIC. Specifically, between September 2013 and March 2016, the total number of Intelligence Analysts detailed to EPIC decreased from 83 to 46. Over this same period, the number of DEA Intelligence Analysts decreased from 40 to 25. The DEA's Chief of Intelligence told us that the DEA has reduced the number of Intelligence Analysts detailed to EPIC due to budgetary constraints; but he believes that EPIC needs at least 20 more Intelligence Analysts to enable, for example, more long-range strategic analysis of Mexican transnational criminal organizations. This is especially concerning because no other DEA Intelligence Division-sponsored facility employs Intelligence Analysts who are responsible for this type of analysis.<sup>31</sup>

We also found that overall reductions in partner agency contributions of Intelligence Analysts have limited EPIC's ability to perform complex strategic analysis of all of the criminal threats identified in its current mission. In particular,

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<sup>31</sup> The DEA's Chief of Intelligence told the OIG that he hoped to detail nine more Intelligence Analysts to EPIC by the end of calendar year 2016.

Intelligence Analysts are placed in sections throughout the center to address customer requests. Combined with overall Intelligence Analyst staffing reductions, the need to distribute Intelligence Analysts throughout the Center limits the number of those available to work in EPIC's SAS — the section responsible for complex strategic analysis. In fact, as of March 2016, the majority of EPIC's Intelligence Analysts were assigned outside of the SAS.<sup>32</sup>

Reductions in the number of Intelligence Analysts from partner agencies may further reinforce EPIC's focus as a drug intelligence center at the expense of its ability to provide intelligence analysis of other types of crime. We highlight this concern below by discussing the effects of reductions in the number of CBP Intelligence Analysts detailed to EPIC. We found that as of March 29, 2016, there were only two CBP Intelligence Analysts assigned to EPIC, compared to eight in September 2013. EPIC managers explained that the loss of CBP Intelligence Analysts had particularly degraded the Center's ability to provide complex strategic analysis of criminal threats because, unlike their DOJ counterparts, CBP Intelligence Analysts have full access to CBP and DHS databases and have experience performing in-depth research on immigration and visa status, which can expand the scope of information that is available for analysis. EPIC management explained their concern that the reduction in the number of CBP Intelligence Analysts and access to CBP and DHS intelligence sources has undermined EPIC's efforts to fuse and analyze the intelligence of all of its partner agencies, which they believe is what makes EPIC most valuable to its customers. EPIC's customers also expressed this sentiment — FBI Agents in Los Angeles told us that they value EPIC's strategic products because these products synthesize multi-agency intelligence, which helps to corroborate existing FBI intelligence or demonstrate where FBI intelligence is incomplete.

#### EPIC's Intelligence Analysts Lack Experience in Developing Strategic Analysis Products

According to EPIC management, SAS Intelligence Analysts or equivalent contractor staff have been writing strategic analysis products for just over 2 years and lack the necessary experience and training required to develop this type of product. EPIC management further explained that this lack of experience is not limited just to Intelligence Analysts assigned to the SAS, but it is also shared by many of the senior staff responsible for editing and approving strategic analysis products. As a result, strategic analysis products have required heavy editing, which has slowed down the report production process. We believe these factors could explain, at least in part, why only 7 of the 68 intelligence products EPIC released to the law enforcement community during FY 2015 included what EPIC defines as strategic analysis.

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<sup>32</sup> According to EPIC management, as Intelligence Analyst staffing levels have decreased across the Center, the number of Intelligence Analysts or equivalent contractors assigned to the SAS has remained at approximately 18 people.

These seven strategic analysis intelligence products, known as Intelligence Assessments, contain complex strategic analysis of the activities of transnational criminal organizations or other threats and are written to support law enforcement leaders responsible for strategic planning. The products focus largely on the drug trafficking activity of these organizations; but some products also discuss other, non-drug related criminal activity and one product specifically focused on the migration patterns of unaccompanied children entering the United States via the southwest border. Intelligence Analysts within the SAS told us that the target audience for these reports is Special Agents in Charge and other senior officials who have the authority to determine how investigative resources are allocated. Although we did not conduct a full survey that would allow us to determine the extent to which senior officials found value in EPIC's Intelligence Assessments, a December 2014 "EPIC Successes" report indicates that a CBP Port Director used an EPIC Intelligence Assessment detailing threats to a port of entry to help "with planning and preparedness efforts as well as assisting the port on initiating enforcement actions."

EPIC management acknowledges that the Center has not yet reached its full potential for providing strategic analysis to its partner agencies, but emphasized that in the past 2 ½ years the Center has offered SAS Intelligence Analysts over 300 hours of training to strengthen their analytical and report writing abilities. According to EPIC management, this training, as well as increased experience, has improved the strategic analysis product development process, as demonstrated by faster product development times and increases in the volume of product output following our period of review.

#### EPIC Frequently Requires Intelligence Analysts in the Strategic Analysis Section to Provide Operational Case Support

We found that another reason Intelligence Analysts in the SAS have not performed more complex strategic analysis is because overall staffing decreases have made it difficult for them to complete both long-term strategic analysis and to respond to time-sensitive RFIs assigned to the section. According to a SAS manager, the RFIs assigned to the SAS require more complex analysis than those RFIs assigned to the tactical sections and the Operational Intelligence Section, but they require less complex analysis than is required in a strategic analysis intelligence product. In response to one RFI, for example, the SAS produced a map that detailed drug and currency seizures relevant to customers in Illinois. This manager told us that there has been an increase in RFIs delegated to the SAS and explained that Intelligence Analysts sometimes have to stop researching and writing reports so that they can respond to RFIs. Because most SAS strategic analysis products are self-generated, and not initiated by customer request, we did not find a backlog of strategic analysis reports waiting to be completed. However, a SAS manager told us that the time SAS staff spent responding to 277 RFIs in FY 2015 limited the section's ability to produce more complex strategic analysis reports during that period.

## **EPIC's Customer Outreach Efforts Are Insufficient to Convey the Full Range of Products and Services It Can Provide to the Law Enforcement Community**

We found that customer awareness of EPIC depended largely on personal interaction, often in the form of EPIC-conducted interdiction training or through word of mouth between prospective customers and an EPIC employee or customer who recommends EPIC. EPIC did not have a more systemic or effective method to convey the products and services it provides. We found that these factors reinforced current and potential customers' perception of EPIC as only a tactical center, the use of which, in turn, reinforced EPIC's tactical focus, and that this self-reinforcing impression may even have hindered its ability to develop its non-tactical capabilities.

We found that EPIC had only one method to inform customers and potential customers about its products and services that does not require in-person interaction with an EPIC representative or someone knowledgeable about EPIC. This method was a six-page pamphlet, known as the EPIC Menu, which listed EPIC's products and services under four product lines: tactical, operational, strategic, and reference. Current and former EPIC staff told us that this document is not effective for conveying how EPIC can help law enforcement. For example, one EPIC manager recommended simplifying the pamphlet instead of having it contain a long list of services. Additionally, a former EPIC Director told us that EPIC did not have enough resources to consistently offer everything listed in the EPIC Menu and that EPIC should include in the Menu only the services that it has sufficient resources to provide.

Rather than having a tool that would allow EPIC to reach customers and potential customers on a broader scale, we found that EPIC's marketing focused on interdiction training and word-of-mouth connections. EPIC has shared information about its products and services primarily at the interdiction training it has provided to state and local law enforcement agencies and through other in-person events, such as conferences that have been held at the Center and that EPIC representatives have attended throughout the country.<sup>33</sup> The EPIC Director told us that when EPIC staff attend conferences, they provide briefings on EPIC's services and register conference attendees on the EPIC Portal.

Many of EPIC's frequent customers told us that they became aware of EPIC through a personal connection. Their connections to the Center included being assigned there on a detail, knowing a specific EPIC employee with whom they felt comfortable working, and having a colleague speak highly of EPIC. Further, EPIC has sometimes temporarily assigned staff members to law enforcement field offices to support specific investigations or operations, which EPIC staff told us has provided opportunities to increase awareness of the Center. For example, a DEA Intelligence Analyst in the Laredo, Texas, field office told us that EPIC recently sent

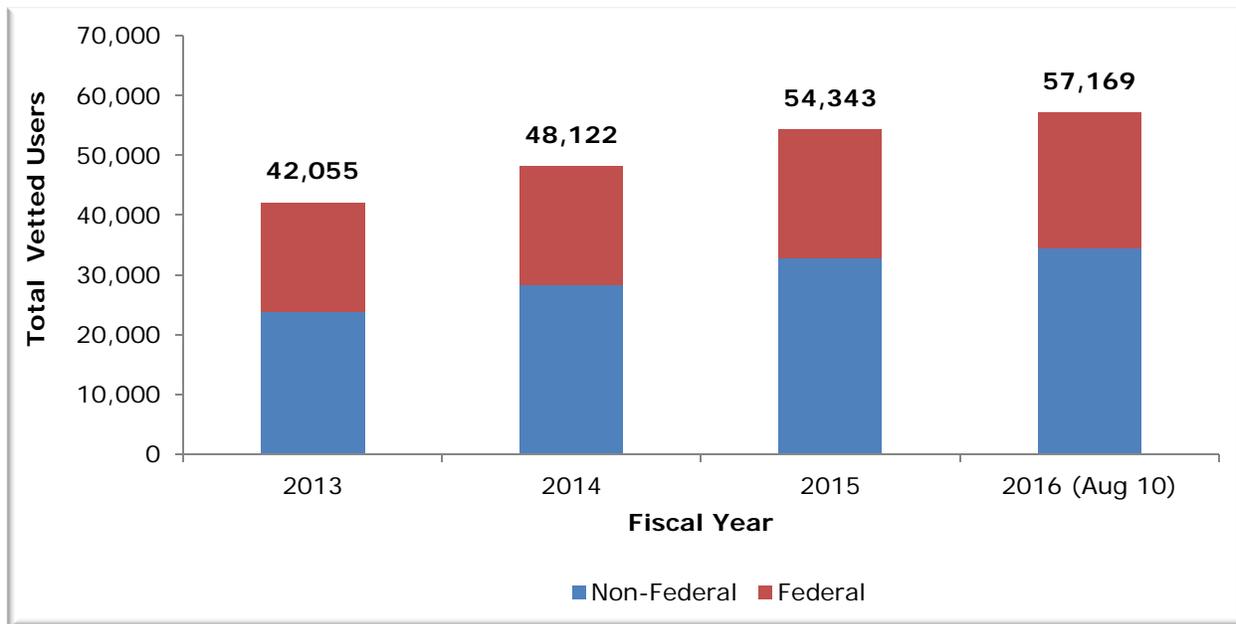
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<sup>33</sup> According to EPIC's data, from FY 2013 to May 2016, EPIC staff provided 80 interdiction training courses for over 6,562 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers.

subject matter experts to his office to help him identify members of a transnational criminal organization, and that this enabled him to learn more about EPIC services.

Although relatively informal and limited in scope, we believe that EPIC's existing outreach efforts have contributed in part to an increase in the number of EPIC's vetted users. As seen in Figure 5, the number of vetted users, both federal and non-federal, has increased 36 percent since FY 2013.

**Figure 5**  
**EPIC Vetted Users, FY 2013 – FY 2016**



Source: EPIC customer data

However, relying heavily on EPIC's interdiction trainings and case-related interactions to raise awareness about EPIC reinforces the perception of EPIC as only a tactical center. And since most customers know the Center primarily for the Watch Section, they tend to make requests of that nature and are unlikely to make requests that would call on EPIC's other capabilities. For example, representatives from state and local police departments told us that although officers regularly use EPIC's Watch for LEIA queries, they lack awareness of EPIC's other capabilities.

In our 2010 report, we recommended that EPIC expand its outreach efforts to disseminate information to its existing customers and increase its customer base. EPIC concurred with our recommendation and said that it would explore new opportunities to expand the marketing of EPIC. However, EPIC leadership told us that, due to sequestration constraints on the DEA budget in FY 2013, it was unable to significantly expand its outreach programs at the time. As a result, EPIC has continued to rely on in-person interactions or direct connections rather than establishing methods that could inform customers and potential customers of its full

range of actual capabilities on a broad scale.<sup>34</sup> We believe this has prevented EPIC from fully marketing its services and capabilities to both existing and potential customers, which may well have hindered broadening its customer base as well as the range of intelligence support it provides.

### **The DEA Has Not Consolidated Intelligence from Two Similar Data Collection Programs**

During the course of our review, we learned that the DEA has supported two similar intelligence collection and dissemination programs, one at EPIC and one at the DEA Houston Field Division (DEA Houston). Even though these programs collect the same type of real-time tactical intelligence along the southwest border, the DEA has operated them independently, without consolidating the intelligence they collect.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the DEA and EPIC may not have realized the full value of the intelligence to identify trends and patterns of criminal activity along the southwest border and the DEA may not have realized the potential cost savings of managing one instead of two similar programs.

Both EPIC's and DEA Houston's programs collect the same type of intelligence and use it in generally the same way. Through interviewees at EPIC, DEA Houston, and DEA headquarters we learned that both programs collect real-time, time-sensitive information that can be the basis for immediate law enforcement action. For example, both programs collect information on the activities of drug traffickers and alien smugglers along the southwest border. Both programs provide the information to federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies for their immediate use in interdiction and sometimes in other criminal investigative activities. Personnel assigned to EPIC's program explained that they collect information both to report tactical intelligence to law enforcement and to potentially identify broader trends and patterns in criminal activity when possible. Personnel assigned to DEA Houston's program described the functions of their program similarly but explained that they believe that their program places a greater emphasis on interdiction support and less emphasis on identifying trends and patterns in criminal activity. We found the biggest difference between these programs is that they collect intelligence along adjacent but not overlapping portions of the southwest border.

While it was beyond the scope of our review to assess the DEA Houston program's effectiveness, efficiency, and potential, we believe that the DEA's separate management of EPIC and DEA Houston raises at least two concerns. First, the DEA does not have a single location that can access or analyze the full scope of its real-time intelligence collected across the southwest border, which may limit the

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<sup>34</sup> During the course of our review, EPIC drafted a new marketing plan; however, this document has not been finalized, and EPIC's Acting Deputy Director told us that EPIC has not yet collected data that would allow management to assess the effectiveness of the goals outlined in the draft marketing plan.

<sup>35</sup> The intelligence collection methods we refer to in this section are law enforcement sensitive. Therefore, we do not identify them more specifically in this report.

DEA's ability to identify trends and patterns in criminal activity. During our previous review of EPIC, we found that it was not fully analyzing its real-time intelligence to identify drug trafficking patterns and trends and was therefore missing opportunities to assist law enforcement agencies conducting interdiction operations along the southwest border.<sup>36</sup> During our current review, an EPIC staff member indicated that making use of this information beyond the immediate need was an ongoing effort. Additionally, we learned that DEA Houston collects intelligence focused on part of the southwest border but EPIC has not had access to that information. We believe that the DEA needs to ensure that the intelligence it collects across the southwest border is consolidated or shared so that it can analyze it most effectively in support of law enforcement efforts in that critical region.

The second concern with the DEA's separate management of these two programs is that the DEA may not be managing its southwest border real-time intelligence collection capabilities cost-effectively. The Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Office of Investigative Technology — the DEA office responsible for managing and acquiring the DEA's technical surveillance equipment and for supporting EPIC's real-time intelligence collection program — told us that the DEA should consider combining the programs. He explained that doing so could save money because EPIC and DEA Houston use different types of equipment and it would be more cost-effective for the DEA to manage and maintain only one type of equipment. Although a detailed cost estimate has not been prepared for integrating these systems, the Deputy Assistant Administrator believes it is an opportune time to consolidate these programs because DEA Houston's equipment is reaching the end of its useful life and will soon need to be replaced. Further, he does not believe that DEA Houston's program is financially sustainable and sees the program as an "unfunded requirement" that relies on year-to-year, discretionary funding made available to the Houston Division by the DEA's Operations Division.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, EPIC's program receives regular funding from both the DEA Intelligence Division and the Office of Investigative Technology.

We interviewed a variety of officials from DEA headquarters, DEA Houston, and EPIC to determine why the DEA had not consolidated these efforts. We received differing and at times contradictory explanations. The main concerns relate to their respective overarching purposes: EPIC's program is seen as an intelligence collection program, whereas DEA Houston's program is an operational program. EPIC and DEA Houston have not been able to agree about whether and how DEA Houston should relay the information it collects to EPIC, which may leave

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<sup>36</sup> At the time of the fieldwork for our previous review, in 2009, DEA Houston had not fully developed its program. DEA Houston initially developed the intelligence collection capabilities for its program to support specific investigations conducted by agents in that office.

<sup>37</sup> After we completed our fieldwork, the DEA informed us that as of January 1, 2017, DEA Houston would no longer fund or operate this intelligence collection program and that an EPIC partner agency may assume responsibility for it. In the event that an EPIC partner agency assumes this responsibility, EPIC should work to ensure that it is able to share appropriately in the intelligence collected in order to maximize the services EPIC offers.

significant gaps in the information provided to EPIC and thus limit EPIC's ability to identify trends and patterns in criminal activity.

As a result, we are concerned that the DEA may not be realizing the full value of the real-time intelligence it collects along the southwest border or managing its collection efforts cost-effectively because EPIC and DEA Houston operate their own, standalone programs. Without considering the potential intelligence benefits and cost savings of consolidating these programs or, at least, ensuring the full and timely sharing of information between them, the DEA may be missing important opportunities to maximize the intelligence benefits of this information as well as cost efficiencies in providing this critical information to assist law enforcement efforts in the region.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

As in our 2010 review of EPIC, we found that partner agencies and customers value EPIC's products and services, particularly its tactical services such as those offered by the Watch Section. However, during the current review we also found that partner agencies have increasingly questioned how EPIC contributes to their agencies' missions and have become disengaged from the Center. We found that since October 2012 the total number of staff detailed to EPIC has decreased by 24 percent — a significant decrease to which most of the agencies with personnel assigned to EPIC contributed. We believe that the inability of partner agency leaders to determine EPIC's value has, in part, contributed to their decisions to reduce the number of staff they contribute to the Center. These decreases have reduced EPIC's diversity in partner agency representation and have resulted in the share of EPIC staff who are DEA or DEA-contracted employees increasing from 67 percent in 2012 to 77 percent in 2016. This growing DEA-centric focus is of particular concern because EPIC depends on its partner agencies to contribute staff with the subject matter expertise, training, and experience it needs to collectively fulfill its mission. We are concerned that a continuing lack of partner agency engagement may limit EPIC's ability to assist all levels of law enforcement that are addressing the threat posed by transnational criminal organizations along the southwest border.

In light of these concerns, we believe that EPIC and its partner agencies must determine how best to govern and strategically manage the Center so EPIC can fully use its unique access to multi-agency intelligence resources to support the missions of its partner agencies. We found that the EPIC Charter has established a structure consistent with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security's joint Fusion Center Guidelines for ensuring effective governance; however, EPIC's governing bodies have not created mechanisms to implement the high-level strategic management requirements outlined in the EPIC Charter. Specifically, the Board of Directors has delegated most of its strategic management responsibilities to an informal Seniors Group that does not have the same authorities or perspective as the Board of Directors. Additionally, the Board of Directors has not engaged with EPIC management to update EPIC's strategic plan to define goals, priorities, and metrics to evaluate performance. Due to these factors, EPIC partner agency leaders expressed concern that they cannot determine the value EPIC provides to their agencies or how EPIC supports their agencies' missions.

Another concern we identified through our analysis of EPIC's most recent, FY 2015, work products and services is that EPIC fully addresses only a narrow component of its current all threats mission focus because it provides primarily tactical intelligence to customers who conduct drug investigations. Given the demand for EPIC's tactical services, the EPIC Director has prioritized staffing EPIC's tactical sections; however, EPIC may not be adequately staffed to also provide complex analysis of the wide range of multi-agency intelligence resources to which it has access. As a result, EPIC is not yet fully able to leverage its intelligence

resources to support complex strategic analysis. Given our review's focus on EPIC's operations, we did not identify the complete universe of partner agency intelligence capabilities maintained independent of EPIC. However, we believe that when EPIC's governing bodies define the Center's strategic priorities, they should consider how partner agencies can most effectively leverage EPIC and other existing partner agency resources to further the government-wide effort to address the threats identified in EPIC's mission.

We also found that EPIC has lacked a comprehensive marketing approach and has relied instead on in-person interactions to communicate the Center's products and services. Current and former EPIC staff also told us that they believe EPIC's limited marketing material is uninformative. As a result, EPIC customers are most aware of the Watch Section, which reinforces demand for tactical services such as Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts queries but may limit EPIC's potential customer base and the development and utilization of other important strategic capabilities.

Finally, we also found that the DEA has supported two similar intelligence collection and dissemination programs — one at EPIC in El Paso and one at the DEA Houston Field Division. We found that these programs collected similar tactical intelligence focused on different but adjacent parts of the southwest border; however, each program has operated independently and generally has not shared its intelligence with the other. As a result, the DEA may not have realized the full value of the intelligence it collects to identify trends and patterns of criminal activity along the southwest border, nor the potential cost savings of consolidating similar programs.

## **Recommendations**

To improve the governance and strategic management of EPIC, and to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, we recommend that the DEA and EPIC management work with partner agency leaders to:

1. Establish procedures to ensure full implementation of EPIC's governance documents.
2. Assess how EPIC and other partner agencies should best address the threats defined in EPIC's mission in order to better define EPIC's strategic goals and priorities, and collaboratively develop, approve, and implement a strategic plan that includes performance metrics to monitor EPIC's performance and ensure that its operations fulfill partner agencies' needs. This strategic plan and resulting performance metrics should consider EPIC's actual staffing levels and composition, as well as the intelligence capabilities of other partner agencies. The strategic plan and performance metrics should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that they reflect future changes to the Center.

3. Develop and implement a comprehensive approach to communicate the full scope of the products and services EPIC can provide to existing and potential customers.

To improve efficiency and reduce redundancy in southwest border intelligence collection and dissemination, we recommend that the DEA:

4. Assess the feasibility, as well as the potential intelligence benefits, of incorporating intelligence collected along the southwest border, including that collected by partner agencies, with EPIC's intelligence program and/or putting in place procedures to ensure the sharing of intelligence these programs collect along the southwest border.

### EXPANDED METHODOLOGY

This review is a follow-up to the OIG's 2010 review of the DEA's El Paso Intelligence Center. In our current review, we examined EPIC's capabilities and the value it provides to law enforcement. We also evaluated EPIC's products and services, governance documents, partner agency resource allocations, and customer usage patterns. Our fieldwork, conducted from December 2015 through August 2016, included interviews, site visits, data analysis, and policy and document review. The following sections provide additional information about each method we used to collect information.

#### Standards

The OIG conducted this review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (January 2012).

#### Interviews

We conducted over 100 in-person and telephonic interviews with more than 175 individuals familiar with EPIC's products, services, and/or operations. Our interviewees included EPIC personnel and officials from a range of federal and non-federal agencies who have interacted with EPIC. Specifically, we interviewed personnel from DOJ components including the DEA; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). We interviewed personnel from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components including U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (DHS I&A), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We interviewed several senior officials from these agencies, many of whom have represented their offices or agencies to EPIC's Seniors Group.<sup>38</sup> Our interviewees included both frequent customers of EPIC that we identified in data analysis, as well as law enforcement officials who were familiar with the Center. Our interviewees were geographically distributed throughout the United States and included law enforcement officers, agents, and intelligence support staff in New York; Washington, D.C.; Georgia; Florida; Texas; New Mexico; Arizona; and California. Interviews included discussions about EPIC's role within the law enforcement and intelligence communities as well as customer awareness and usage of EPIC's products and services.

#### Site Visits

We visited EPIC twice, in December 2015 and May 2016. During our visits, we interviewed the EPIC Director and personnel from every EPIC section. Our

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<sup>38</sup> We also interviewed non-senior officials representing the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Department of Transportation, High-Intensity Drug Trafficking task forces, and other state and local law enforcement agencies.

interviewees included EPIC staff detailed from ATF, FBI, CBP, ICE, DHS I&A, and the Department of Defense. We also spoke with DOJ and DHS component law enforcement officials detailed to field offices in the El Paso area. These officials represented ATF, DEA, FBI, CBP, and ICE. Further, we interviewed law enforcement personnel representing the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Las Cruces, New Mexico, Police Department.

## Data Analysis

We analyzed both raw data and data reports provided by EPIC to assess staffing levels and funding sources. We reviewed historical staffing and spend plan data, which, according to EPIC officials responsible for financial management, closely align with EPIC's annual expenditures. We also assessed raw request for information data for FY 2015, as well as EPIC-generated reports detailing Law Enforcement Inquiries and Alerts (LEIA) query summary data to evaluate work output and customer usage. Using descriptive statistics, we analyzed this data for trends and patterns, including, but not limited to, the requestor's department, agency, and purpose for request.

LEIA tracks 22 purposes for customer queries, and we used data reports of FY 2015 queries to determine that the purpose of 56 percent of all FY 2015 LEIA queries were defined as "traffic stops" or other "drug investigations."<sup>39</sup> While traffic stops can reveal many different types of crime, "EPIC Successes" show that successful LEIA-assisted traffic stops most often revealed drug-related criminal activity. For this reason we considered LEIA queries with the defined purpose of "traffic stops" and "drug investigations" to support the drug investigation mission of EPIC's customers.

EPIC does not track the purpose of a request for information (RFI) in the same manner it does for LEIA queries. However, we determined that 49 percent of FY 2015 RFIs were made by DEA and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task force customers. Given that the primary mission of the DEA and HIDTA task forces is to investigate drug crimes, we believe it is reasonable to conclude that the purpose of these RFIs was to support drug investigations. Further, our analysis does not include non-HIDTA state and local law enforcement agency, CBP, ICE, and FBI RFIs (632, 447, 267, 130 RFIs, respectively) although some of these RFIs likely relate to drug investigations given the partial drug investigation missions of these agencies.

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<sup>39</sup> Purposes for LEIA queries include Traffic Stops, Drug Investigations, Maritime Checks, Firearms Investigations, Weapons Investigations, Gang Investigations, Fugitive Investigations, Vetting Confidential Informants, Background Checks, Currency Investigations, Border Crossing Checks, Priority Target Activity Resource and Reporting System Checks, License Plate Reader Lookups, International Terrorism Investigations, Domestic Terrorism Investigations, Fraudulent Document Investigations, Alien Smuggling Investigations, Identity Theft Investigations, Arson Investigations, Consolidated Priority Organization Target Investigations, Regional Priority Organization Target Investigations, and Other.

Although EPIC tracks staff hours worked to develop certain tactical, operational, and strategic publications, it does not track hours worked for all its tactical functions. Absent this information, we are unable to use comparisons of work hour data to assess EPIC's intelligence support focus. In the absence of work hour allocation data by product type or function, we use the volume of different types of products and functions and EPIC's allocation of staff by section to assess its intelligence support focus.

According to EPIC management responsible for data collection, EPIC changed its processes to record LEIA query requests and to track other EPIC work products during FY 2014. Due to these changes in data collection methodology and because of historical data consistency and reliability issues, we present only FY 2015 work data in this analysis. Further, because we conducted our fieldwork during FY 2016, we did not assess any of EPIC's FY 2016 performance data.

### **Policy and Document Review**

We reviewed DOJ and DEA documentation on EPIC's operations and governance, including governance documents, governing body meeting summaries, past strategic plans and performance metrics, DEA budget justifications, the EPIC Menu of Products and Services, documentation detailing EPIC's information technology capabilities, EPIC-provided interdiction training, and EPIC's Table of Organization. We also reviewed a selection of EPIC's narrative intelligence products as well as a sample of customer feedback surveys.

## THE DEA'S RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT



U. S. Department of Justice  
Drug Enforcement Administration

JAN 24 2017

www.dea.gov

Washington, D.C. 20537

JAN 24 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Nina S. Pelletier  
Assistant Inspector General  
Evaluation and Inspections Division

FROM: Michael J. Stanfill  
Deputy Chief Inspector  
Office of Inspections

SUBJECT: DEA Response for the OIG Formal Draft Report: *"Follow-up Review of the El Paso Intelligence Center"*

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has reviewed the Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) Evaluation and Inspections Report entitled, *"Follow-up Review of the El Paso Intelligence Center"*. DEA acknowledges and appreciates OIG's efforts in conducting the follow-up review of the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC).

EPIC managers and customers throughout this review have indicated that EPIC's strength lies in its access to a broad array of information from numerous agencies. EPIC is a service provider geared to deliver products and services based on customer requests. Although OIG reported EPIC has difficulty leveraging all of its intelligence resources to fully support complex analysis, EPIC has never failed or refused to produce a complex assessment or to answer a strategic analysis request due to staff reductions or the continuing development of its analytic staff.

DEA provides the following responses to the four recommendations made by OIG in its report:

**Recommendation 1: Establish procedures to ensure full implementation of EPIC's governance documents.**

DEA RESPONSE

DEA concurs with the recommendation. The EPIC Director has taken steps to coordinate with DEA Headquarters and EPIC partners to schedule bi-annual Board of Directors meetings and quarterly Seniors Group meetings to address governance issues identified in the OIG review. A

special Seniors Group meeting is being scheduled for February 2017 to discuss reorganization efforts. This meeting will be followed by a regularly scheduled quarterly Seniors Group meeting in March 2017.

**Recommendation 2: Assess how EPIC and other partner agencies should best address the threats defined in EPIC's mission in order to better define EPIC's strategic goals and priorities, and collaboratively develop, approve, and implement a strategic plan and resulting performance metrics should consider EPIC's actual staffing levels and composition, as well as the intelligence capabilities of other partner agencies. The strategic plan and performance metrics should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that they reflect future changes to the Center.**

**DEA RESPONSE**

DEA concurs with the recommendation. EPIC has developed draft strategic goals and priorities, a strategic plan, and performance metrics to help guide discussions with EPIC's governance and partners over the next two months. These documents will be the baseline for future discussions. Once a final, coordinated version is discussed and approved at the Seniors Group meeting, it will be offered for vote of approval by the Board of Directors. After approval, the strategic guidance will be fully implemented within EPIC. The strategic guidance will be reviewed on a semi-annual basis to account for changes to the organization.

**Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a comprehensive approach to communicate the full scope of the products and services EPIC can provide to existing and potential customers.**

**DEA RESPONSE**

DEA concurs with the recommendation. EPIC is currently developing a marketing and communications strategy that addresses the full scope of products and services available to EPIC's customers. As with the strategic plan and performance metrics, this strategy will be fully coordinated and submitted through the Seniors Group meeting to the Board of Directors for approval and subsequent implementation.

**Recommendation 4: Assess the feasibility, as well as the potential intelligence benefits, of incorporating intelligence collected along the southwest border, including that collected by partner agencies, with EPIC's intelligence program and/or putting in place procedures to ensure the sharing of intelligence these programs collect along the southwest border.**

**DEA RESPONSE**

DEA concurs with the recommendation. EPIC is currently reaching out to federal partner agencies along the Southwest border and is in discussions to establish collection initiatives and programs to share information.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond and address the OIG's concerns. If you have any

questions regarding this response, please contact DEA's Audit Liaison Team at 202-307-8200.

### OIG ANALYSIS OF THE DEA'S RESPONSE

The OIG provided a draft of this report to the DEA for its comment. The DEA's response is in Appendix 2 to this report. We discuss the OIG analysis of DEA's response and actions necessary to close the recommendations below.

**Recommendation 1:** Establish procedures to ensure full implementation of EPIC's governance documents.

**Status:** Resolved.

**DEA Response:** The DEA concurred with the recommendation and stated that to address governance issues the EPIC Director has taken steps to coordinate with DEA headquarters and EPIC partners to schedule bi-annual Board of Directors meetings and quarterly Seniors Group meetings. The DEA also stated that a special Seniors Group meeting is being scheduled for February 2017 to discuss reorganization efforts and that this meeting will be followed by a regularly scheduled, quarterly Seniors Group meeting in March 2017.

**OIG Analysis:** The DEA's actions are responsive to the recommendation. By May 31, 2017, please provide the meeting minutes of the Seniors Group meetings in February and March 2017 and, when scheduled, the date of the next Board of Directors meeting. In addition, please provide documentation of any changes or procedures made as a result of these meetings that ensure full implementation of EPIC's governance documents.

**Recommendation 2:** Assess how EPIC and other partner agencies should best address the threats defined in EPIC's mission in order to better define EPIC's strategic goals and priorities, and collaboratively develop, approve, and implement a strategic plan that includes performance metrics to monitor EPIC's performance and ensure that its operations fulfill partner agencies' needs. This strategic plan and resulting performance metrics should consider EPIC's actual staffing levels and composition, as well as the intelligence capabilities of other partner agencies. The strategic plan and performance metrics should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that they reflect future changes to the Center.

**Status:** Resolved.

**DEA Response:** The DEA concurred with the recommendation and stated that EPIC has developed draft strategic goals and priorities, a strategic plan, and performance metrics to help guide discussions with EPIC's governance and partners over the next 2 months. These documents will be the baseline for future discussions and, once a final version is discussed and approved at the Seniors Group meeting, it will be sent to the Board of Directors for a vote of approval. The DEA also stated that after approval the strategic guidance will be fully implemented within EPIC and will be reviewed on a semiannual basis to account for changes to the organization.

**OIG Analysis:** The DEA's actions are responsive to the recommendation. By May 31, 2017, please provide copies of the draft strategic goals and priorities, the strategic plan, and performance metrics that EPIC developed to guide the Seniors Group. In addition, please provide the meeting minutes and the results of any discussion by the Seniors Group or Board of Directors. Specifically, please provide documentation that shows the strategic guidance and performance metrics approved by the Board of Directors and any changes made to fully implement the strategic guidance at EPIC.

**Recommendation 3:** Develop and implement a comprehensive approach to communicate the full scope of the products and services EPIC can provide to existing and potential customers.

**Status:** Resolved.

**DEA Response:** The DEA concurred with the recommendation and stated that EPIC is currently developing a marketing and communication strategy that addresses the full scope of products and services available to EPIC's customers. In addition, the DEA stated that this strategy will be fully coordinated and submitted through the Seniors Group meeting and the Board of Directors for final approval and subsequent implementation.

**OIG Analysis:** The DEA's actions are responsive to the recommendation. By May 31, 2017, please provide a copy of the marketing and communication strategy submitted to the Seniors Group and the Board of Directors and the results of these discussions. In addition, please provide documentation that shows that the approved marketing and communication strategy has been implemented at EPIC and that communicates the full scope of products and services EPIC can provide to existing and potential customers.

**Recommendation 4:** Assess the feasibility, as well as the potential intelligence benefits, of incorporating intelligence collected along the southwest border, including that collected by partner agencies, with EPIC's intelligence program and/or putting in place procedures to ensure the sharing of intelligence these programs collect along the southwest border.

**Status:** Resolved.

**DEA Response:** The DEA concurred with the recommendation and stated that EPIC is currently reaching out to federal partner agencies along the southwest border and is in discussions to establish collection initiatives and programs to share information.

**OIG Analysis:** The DEA's actions are responsive to the recommendation. By May 31, 2017, please provide documentation that shows the federal partner agencies EPIC contacted regarding the collection and sharing of intelligence information and the results of those discussions. In addition, please provide assessments that EPIC or DEA conducts on incorporating intelligence collected

along the southwest border, including that collected by other agency collection programs, into EPIC's program, as well as documentation that shows that the DEA Houston Field Division's collection program was transferred to another federal partner agency.

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