

# Supporting the investigation of criminal networks: Developing an effective law enforcement training program for network and group reporting

## Summary

The activities of organized criminal gangs and other criminal networks underpin a significant proportion of violent crime in the US. While sophisticated analytic tools exist to analyze these networks, little attention has been given to systematically eliciting information directly from informants about the structure of these groups. **The Reporting Information about Networks and Groups (RING)** task is designed to gather information directly from informants about individuals in criminal networks and their relationships. This project aims to (i) **develop and implement tailored training for the RING task, in collaboration with practitioners**, and (ii) **produce an eLearning package to ensure broader access to RING training for investigative practitioners across homeland security settings**.

## Problem addressed

Informants often understand social groups like organized crime or terrorist cells in detail, but obtaining this information during interviews is challenging. Memory limitations can lead to incomplete data, creating intelligence gaps. Simple lists or narratives fail to capture the full structure of these networks. Investigators need a technique to elicit complex, multi-faceted information about individuals in these groups. The RING task offers a visual approach to gathering this information. This project will develop accessible training for practitioners to promote the effective and widespread use of the RING task for debriefing criminal groups and networks.

## Approach

This project will upskill investigators and source handlers in eliciting information about networks and groups using the RING task. Recognizing the complex challenges in investigating groups that operate locally and across borders (e.g., organized crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking), and gathering intelligence about terrorist networks, we will deliver a specially developed RING training program across different contexts. After each training session, we will gather practitioner feedback and conduct follow-up interviews to assess progress and identify further challenges. These insights will inform the development of eLearning materials for future training and widespread access to the RING task.

### **Anticipated Impact for DHS**

The RING task is an innovative tool that enhances investigators' abilities to collect data and assess intelligence gaps in criminal investigations. It can be used with informants to explore their knowledge about individuals and relationships within a network, potentially increasing the impact of investigative processes. This project will develop and implement RING task training for five investigative contexts, using both synchronous (face-to-face training and support) and asynchronous (eLearning package) modalities. The training package will be made widely available across DHS components and shared with investigative and security practitioners working with intelligence sources and informants.