



Arizona Criminal Justice Commission

September 2004

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Overview of the Arizona Criminal Justice Records Integration Project

Brief History

Accurate criminal history records represent a fundamental component of a coordinated and effective criminal justice system, allowing for safer communities and increased national security. Criminal history records are accessed to establish non-criminal justice qualifications for individuals who seek employment as care providers, airport security positions, volunteer programs and other positions that put them in care of children and the elderly. This check also includes identifying persons who are ineligible from purchasing firearms.

Each of the 50 states has a centralized criminal record repository that maintains criminal records and identification data and responds to law enforcement inquiries and inquiries for other purposes such as background checks and national security. Criminal records include data provided by all components of the criminal justice system: law enforcement, prosecution, courts and corrections.

Arizona's Computerized Criminal History (ACCH) system, housed with the Arizona Department of Public Safety, functions as a statewide repository for the arrests and dispositions of charges for all persons arrested in the state. The information contained in this system is used for a variety of critical business purposes throughout the criminal justice system. Prosecutors and judges make charging and sentencing decisions based on the information. Law enforcement officers make discretionary arrest and detention decisions based on it. Corrections officials make character assessments and parole and probation decisions based on the information from the system. And the private sector makes important business decisions based on information available to them from the ACCH. The decision to hire or fire a person may be made based upon information contained in the ACCH, the Criminal History Record Information (CHRI).

For many years, much of the recording of criminal justice records was a manual process, and jurisdictions were not connected. (This remains status quo for many jurisdictions in Arizona.) Disposition reports were late getting logged, and in some cases, were never logged. It was clear that communication breakdown among the criminal justice agencies was a problem.

The first Arizona Criminal Justice Records Improvement Task Force was established in 1992 to initiate, with the assistance of Executive Consulting Group (ECG), the long-term planning process necessary to comply with the mandates of the federal legislation authorizing the Byrne Memorial Formula Grant Program. The Byrne program was amended to require that states receiving Byrne funds improve criminal justice information systems to assist law enforcement, prosecution, courts and corrections organizations (including automated fingerprint identification systems).

Our mission is to sustain and enhance the coordination, cohesiveness, productivity and effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System in Arizona

The findings of the initial report confirmed what many state criminal justice professionals already knew: there was a real need for improvement in managing criminal records. The 1992 ECG report found that 57 percent of criminal history records were incomplete; 43 percent did not have complete dispositions. The report noted that Arizona was not in compliance with national standards. Arizona was not in compliance with Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) guidance for the improvement of criminal justice records; Arizona was not in compliance with standards for timeliness of arrest and disposition reporting; and local personnel had a lack of understanding and compliance with arrest and disposition reporting procedures.

Funding a solution

The 1992 ECG report also indicated that existing funding levels were woefully inadequate to address the scope of the problem. Specifically, the report indicated that the Byrne Grant Fund of five percent set-aside for criminal justice records improvement would not cover the costs related to statewide criminal history records integration. In 1992, Byrne money provided as Criminal Justice Records Improvement Program (CJRIP) funding was \$300,000, but the projected costs of the initial Criminal Justice Records Improvement Program were estimated at more than \$1 million.

To move the project forward, ACJC applied for federal funding under the newly established National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP), a Bureau of Justice Statistics program that was initiated in 1995. As of 2003, Arizona has received more than \$7 million in NCHIP funding.

Funding the ongoing initiatives will continue to be a challenge that will require creative problem solving. Short-term funding has included State Identification System program assistance, a collaborative effort between BJA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation; National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) Identification Assistance Program funding provided by the Bureau of Justice Statistics; National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) funding, also provided by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Pilot Project for Integrated Criminal Justice Records: Coconino County

Since the establishment of the first Arizona Criminal Justice Records Improvement Task Force and subsequent ECG report in 1992, the stakeholders of the Arizona Criminal Justice Records Improvement Program have worked to further study and analyze the problem, create a strategic plan, and work to design and implement a pilot records integration project that could be replicated throughout the state. The pilot project is currently underway and scheduled for completion in 2004.

In 1997, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC), the agency responsible for managing the Arizona Criminal Justice Records Improvement Project, and the Administrative Office of the Courts chose Coconino County as the site for the pilot project. As a mid-size county, Coconino's size and population made it an attractive starting point. Local stakeholders included Coconino County Sheriff's Office, Flagstaff Police Department and the Coconino County Attorney's Office. Other stakeholders include ACJC, the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts and the Arizona Department of Public Safety, which houses all of the state's criminal history record information.

Entry into the criminal justice system (as in other jurisdictions) begins when law enforcement arrests an individual for an alleged crime(s). The individual is booked into a system operated by the sheriff/jail. A printed report of this individual is then given to the County Attorney's office and perhaps to the local courts. The County Attorney's office would then re-enter the information into its system. Then the charges that the County Attorney's office decides to bring against the individual would be printed on a complaint and submitted to the local court. The local court would then re-enter the information into its system.

This is a simplistic overview, but this does illustrate that the system is redundant and is fraught with opportunity for mistakes. When the county's law enforcement, court, corrections and information technology personnel met to begin work on the pilot project, they developed a scope of the problem and a plan for solutions. The stated goals of the stakeholders are:

- Elimination of data redundancy among cooperating agencies
- Decrease in manual entry of data
- Decrease in data errors
- Increase accuracy and timeliness of data
- Increase abilities for statistical analysis of criminal justice data
- Creation of a statewide model for integration
- Examine cost effectiveness of integration model.

By 2001, the County Attorney's Office, the Sheriff's Office and the Flagstaff Police Department had the technology needed and the infrastructure in place to allow for records integration. In designing the system, county information technology specialists understood the need for non-proprietary "middleware" that would allow the system to be replicated throughout the state. The infrastructure for the records integration pilot project was built using this technology.

Once the infrastructure was in place, Coconino County had to obtain security clearance from DPS for electronic transmission of information. Coconino County criminal justice agencies were allowed vertical integration: the Coconino agencies were able to electronically file case dispositions and no-file and decline reports with DPS. Vertical integration allows local courts to send dispositions electronically to the AOC, which sends them on to the DPS's Central State Repository. The County Attorney's Office also electronically sends dispositions to the DPS's Central State Repository. The process allows for more accurate, timely and complete criminal history records.

By 2003, county IT professionals completed the design and implementation of necessary infrastructure for the horizontal integration. This allows county agencies to electronically "talk" to one another. The system went live in March 2004. In less than six months, more than 5,000 e-citations were submitted to the municipal court. Fewer than two percent of the e-citations had errors that required manual data entry, giving the new system a 98 percent success rate.

By the end of summer 2004, the new system allowed for:

- e-bookings from law enforcement to the county attorney and case number reporting from the county attorney to law enforcement
- e-court filings from the county attorney to local courts
- e-initial appearances from law enforcement to local courts.

Coconino County information technology professionals are working to have the entire process documented by the end of September. At this point, the process will be ready to replicate in other jurisdictions.

Future of the Arizona Criminal Justice Records Integration Program

ACJC already has begun implementing the Coconino model in Pinal County. Information technology professionals from Pinal County have been attending meetings with Coconino County stakeholders. Coconino County has scheduled strategic planning sessions to take place once a week over three consecutive weeks in September. This will allow for short-term as well as long-term goal setting.

The toughest challenge facing the Arizona Criminal Justice Records Improvement Program is continued funding. ACJC will continue to work with stakeholders and with funding sources to secure the necessary capital to implement a criminal justice records program statewide.

Coconino County Pilot Project Steering Committee

The following individuals are members of the Coconino County Criminal Records Integration Pilot Project:

ACJC Criminal Justice Systems Improvement Program Manager Jerry Hardt, 602/364-1158

Coconino County Sheriff Joe Richards, 928/226-5017

Coconino County Attorney Terry Hance, 928/779-6518

Coconino County I.T. Department Larry Danenfeldt, 928/779-6795

Coconino County I.T. Department Kevin LeBranche, 928/779-6795

About ACJC

The Arizona Criminal Justice Commission is a statutorily authorized entity mandated to carry out various coordinating, monitoring and reporting functions regarding the administration and management of criminal justice programs in Arizona. In accordance with statutory guidelines, the Commission is comprised of 19 Commissioners who represent various elements of the criminal justice system in Arizona. Five of the 19 Commission members are agency heads, while the other 14 are appointed by the Governor to serve for two-year terms. ACJC was created in 1982 to serve as a resource and service organization for Arizona's 480 criminal justice agencies on a myriad of issues ranging from drugs, gangs, victim compensation and assistance to criminal record improvement initiatives. The ACJC works on behalf of the criminal justice agencies in Arizona to facilitate information and data exchange among statewide agencies by: establishing and maintaining criminal justice information archives; monitoring new and continuing legislation relating to criminal justice issues; and gathering information and research on existing criminal justice programs.