

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



A Unified Texas Information Management System



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



**By
Tyler Grossman**

**El Paso Police Department
El Paso, Texas
July 2013**

ABSTRACT

Currently there is no Records Management System (RMS) in the state of Texas. Most modern police departments have a RMS databases but do not share this information with cities throughout Texas. Criminals are afforded the ability to move throughout Texas with anonymity to their crimes committed in different counties of Texas. An informed officer creates opportunities to capture and prosecute criminals while providing safety to officers through information especially when criminals move from city to city.

Criminals would no longer be able to jump from community to community without their criminal pasts following them. Officers would be able to link criminals located in different jurisdictions by the fact-based information found in criminals' past histories. Criminals have used law enforcement's lack of communication to further their enterprises. A statewide information system would also open up dialog for creating a better communication network between police departments. Communication is the key element in having a shared information management system.

The need for a shared RMS database can be found in law enforcement periodicals, federal research papers, and internet periodicals. The information located in these documents indicated the need for a community database shared by all state law enforcement under strict guidelines to limit any abuses. Research has progressed rapidly over the years and technology is available to mesh current record management systems into one searchable master database.

The ability to search this master database would give law enforcement an extra edge for catching criminals. State law enforcement agencies must progress with the

current technology. Law enforcement has always been slow to change, but times have changed, and law enforcement must move forward as criminals do. Sharing information is one of those major hurdles law enforcement must jump to progress with time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	2
Counter Position	5
Recommendation	9
References	11

INTRODUCTION

A law enforcement internet based information exchange system is possible and could give officers an advantage over criminals in the state of Texas. This system would allow officers the ability to search a database, giving them access to every Records Management System (RMS) in the state. Most modern police departments have an RMS database. These RMS databases hold large amounts of fact based information. This information can be combined from every department around the state into one database to allow officers to see a criminal's past history. This information would be different from a criminal history check because it would include cases where a person was a suspect, victim, or witness. Informed officers can create opportunities to capture and prosecute criminals while providing safety to officers through information, especially when criminals move from city to city.

Criminals would no longer be able to jump from community to community without their criminal pasts following them. Officers would be able to link criminals located in different jurisdictions by the fact-based information found in their past histories. Criminals have used law enforcement's lack of communication to further their enterprises. A statewide information system would also open dialog between officers to create a better communication network between police departments. Communication is the key element in having a shared information management system.

The need to obtain and share information has been around as long as man (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). The Romans needed it, and, arguably, World War II was won because of knowledge gained about its enemies through information gathering (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). A growing option to address this interest is an organized regional law

enforcement information-sharing program; through this program, local law enforcement agencies could access a state information management system (Noblis, 2007b). Since September 11, 2001, many reports have been written that emphasize the need to share information. These reports repeatedly state the same information: “officers are safer on the streets not only because queries for identification are done in real time, but also because the information provided is more accurate and complete when delivered” (Center for Technology Commercialization, 1999, p. 4).

Texas should establish a statewide searchable information management system. Technology has come far to provide law enforcement with tools not seen as few as ten years ago. The technology exists now to provide such a system to Texas (Carter, 2004). With a searchable information management system, law enforcement could gain the ability to solve more crimes through communication and increase officer safety with information obtained from a fact based database.

POSITION

Crimes could be solved at a higher rate with more information shared and limited difficulty in obtaining that information. With statewide jurisdictions’ electronic information downloaded into one database, the information could be quickly gathered for cases, and this would enable the ability to gather additional leads (Noblis, 2007b). The information gathered from each jurisdiction would come from their records management system. This information is different from what is currently available in the Texas Criminal History database.

Department record management systems hold information on persons who have been victims, witnesses, and, most importantly, suspects of crimes. An officer who

develops a lead on a suspect who has never been arrested may not have the ability to link that individual to the crime. However, if the officer can see a person was a suspect in another jurisdiction with the same modus operandi, they may be able to link that person to the crime. This type of tool would allow law enforcement to devote more time to combating and preventing criminal activity (Noblis, 2007a). This type of information sharing could also lead to better communication amongst law enforcement agencies.

Communication is the key factor in setting up such a statewide database. The information sharing process is paramount in any agency (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). The hope is to broaden the information sharing process across multiple agencies (Saupp, 2010). Communication between officers is vital, and a database that fosters that kind of communication is paramount (Kelley & Abrials, 2003).

Since September 11, 2001, numerous publications have been written on the need for law enforcement entities to share more information (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). The government has spent large amounts of money trying to solve this problem on a national level, but like any business, sometimes starting off small is much easier (Saupp, 2010). Communicating on a state level is within reason and can be done (McLeod, 2006). The research has been conducted and is available (Public Technology, 2002). One hurdle in communication is not on the human level but on a network level (Public Technology, 2002).

The fact that most police departments do not share the same records management system creates a need to simplify the compiling of the information (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). The information obtained would be limited and basic. The contributing agency would be listed, so the officer seeking the information can contact

that agency in order to gain the details of any given case. This, in turn, provides an avenue for communication amongst agencies (McLeod, 2006). The Law Enforcement Information Exchange (LInx) is such a system that exists today. LInx already brings multiple law enforcement agencies together; the agencies' RMS data is combined, so the sharing agencies can then mine the data for leads in their areas of operation (Joch, 2005). This system has been successful and can be used as a model on how to develop a Texas based system (McLeod, 2006).

Another important note is that these RMS databases, held by police departments, are fact-based systems that do not include intelligence information (LEITSC, 2003). The information police officers place inside RMS databases is from contacts they make, and a report is made to document an incident that has occurred (Carter, 2004). This is opposed to gathering intelligence on a person or group who is suspected of doing wrong and creating an opinion about the incident (Carter, 2004). Though a slight difference, the information placed in an RMS database are documented incidents that have occurred (LEITSC, 2003).

The governance of RMS databases verses intelligence databases is extremely different. Intelligence databases are much more subjective and are subject to numerous government guidelines on what information can be placed in such a system and how long that information can be held (Carter, 2004). "Critics of law enforcement intelligence cite the history of police organizations collecting and retaining information on citizens based on their affiliations, beliefs, pronouncements, and other noncriminal attributes"; however, this will not be the case with a records management system (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). This is why the proposal is not an intelligence database but

a fact based system. Though guidelines and governance must be maintained on a fact-based database, these rules do not apply since the information documents actual contacts made with an officer and their findings during that contact (LEITSC, 2003). Since the information obtained and maintained is RMS driven, the barriers to entry are limited. With a greater sharing network, officer safety will also be enhanced.

The sharing of information has always been an obstacle for law enforcement (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). Information shared between agencies has saved numerous officers lives by as little as radio traffic (Kelley & Abrials, 2003). More information dispersed to officers on the streets leads to a higher awareness of the criminal element around them (Noblis, 2007b). So many officers have been saved because they were given a small piece of information that saved their life, and too many have died for not knowing what they were walking into. Officers would be able to find information on subjects they normally would not be able to know (Noblis, 2007b). The ability to check a person's history and find out what kind of violent tendencies they may have could be invaluable.

COUNTER POSITION

However, as with anything, no matter the benefit, there is opposition that must be addressed when starting a new type of database. One consideration is that the decision to integrate to an RMS database should be a city or county choice and should not be dictated by the state. Another is that the cost to convert statewide RMS databases to one single database is too expensive and too daunting of a task. It is also believed that a combination of all RMS databases together will be a breeding ground for corruption or misuse. Additionally, there is concern about who will protect the privacy of

such information and who will have access to this system. These arguments can be addressed and managed with proper education and policies in place. One of the first points of concern is the integration of multiple RMS databases.

Integration of multiple RMS databases is extremely complicated because not all RMS databases are of the same maker or network system. Nor can the state force a city or county to choose a certain RMS database over another. There are rules and regulations against such a strategy because it limits competitiveness between companies and allows the existence of a monopoly. The expense would not only be for the software but the training to teach each information technology (IT) person the new system would be extensive.

However, this training does not have to take place. The creation of a web-based system would allow all cities to download the information from the RMS databases into a single portal. The cost would be minimized because the state would not be changing the RMS databases for any city; instead, the city would be sending the information to be downloaded. This information is minimized since the state would not be taking actual reports but peoples' information, which is then stored in the system. This type of operation already exists within the LInx regional group's throughout the nation. LInx already has nine regional areas using this type of system. Texas would be able to use this same technology. Since the technology has been used, the cost to set up and make the same system better is conceivable. Protecting that information would fall on the state once the information is given to them.

Privacy of information, trust of who is viewing the information, and how that information is accessed are areas of concern for most civil liberty organizations (Public

Technology, 2002). In the past, this type of activity was common and is how distrust occurred between citizens and law enforcement agencies (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). Privacy and how the information is accessed can be made possible by secure web portals and making the sites password access only, such as LInx. Without a password controlled by the individual agencies, officers would not be granted access (LEITSC, 2003). This would create a barrier so unauthorized personnel could not gain access to personal information located in the system (LEITSC, 2003). Standardized training on how to use the portal would be mandatory for its use (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). This way information can be collected and retained with protections for privacy.

Having an explicit privacy policy in place is also vital for success (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). This privacy policy must be published and explain the state's position on why the need for such a system, who will have access, and how it will be used in the normal course of business (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). A transparent policy that every individual can read will ensure less fear is created by such a database (Public Technology, 2002). Having a policy to properly collect and retain this information constitutes one form of civil-rights protection (Carter & Martinelli, 2007).

This kind of governance structure is possible and can be established through cooperative agreements or memorandums of understanding between state and local jurisdictions (Public Technology, 2002). These agreements would be necessary for state and local governments to operate together in such a program. As part of the agreement, all agencies would have to follow certain steps to ensure protection of citizens' civil rights. A seven-step approach would be able to ensure this safety. These steps are policy, training, supervision, public education, transparent processes,

accountability audits, and assistance of legal counsel (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). Four of these steps have just been explained but three touch on the last argument of corruption or misuse.

Corruption or misuse is an issue that all police department try to limit by proper training and selection of ethically and morally just persons. In order to ensure databases are not being misused, police departments must put measures in place so all citizens are protected from the few corrupt law enforcement individuals who find their way into an agency. Without proper measures in place, citizens may feel the information placed in an information management system could be used to harm ordinary citizens who have committed no crime. The placement of proper supervision, accountability audits, and assistance of legal counsel will satisfy these concerns.

Proper supervision is essential in any organization. Supervisors are in place to ensure the policies and procedures are followed by the officers (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). An officer using the information for improper use or in a noble cause situation is unacceptable and would be dealt with swiftly (Martinelli, 2009). This has to come from the top down so that all supervisors stay vigilant in protecting everyone's constitutional rights (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). One way to handle this issue is by having accountability audits.

Accountability audits are already in place for RMS databases and can easily be installed in an information management system. LInx has such a system where monthly audits are performed by a security officer for each department. These audits look for unauthorized users, unauthorized queries, and proper use of the system. Periodical internal audits could be completed on a monthly basis and be privy to an open records

request (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). These types of audits could also be reviewed by legal counsel as well to ensure an outside entity could pose questions as to the importance or validity of certain queries (Carter & Martinelli, 2007). Though concerns and questions may develop on why a statewide system is not wanted, the evidence is clear that such a system is possible without concern to civil rights violations.

RECOMMENDATION

The need for a Texas based information management system is there and, more than ever, viable to achieve. The state of Texas is the best entity to take charge of this project in order for it to work. The Department of Public Safety already runs the Texas Data Exchange (TDEx), which houses arrest records. The existence of the TDEx system proves a statewide information management system is obtainable. The TDEx system could be enhanced to hold all RMS entries in order to broaden the spectrum of non-intelligence information management system.

By using this type of system, Texas would be allowing its law enforcement communities to solve more crimes by providing a searchable database of agencies record outside the jurisdiction of where a crime was committed. By providing this searchable database, agencies would be forced to communicate more effectively in an effort to solve crimes and develop trends. An information management system would also provide factual information as opposed to intelligence information, which is far less cumbersome and problematic in governance. In the end, Texas would be providing a safer environment for officers and better access to information, so officers can be aware of their surroundings.

The arguments against this system are valid concerns, such as the cost of creating a system, privacy issues, and corruption, but these problems can all be addressed. A statewide information management system can be effectively handled through established measures. The concept is not new, so guidelines and norms are already in place across the nation. Now is the time for Texas to take a lead role and commit to helping local law enforcement agencies solve crime and protect its citizens.

REFERENCES

- Carter, D.L., & Martinelli, T.J. (2007, June). Civil rights and law enforcement intelligence. *The Police Chief*, 74(6). Retrieved from http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=print_display&article_id=1206&issue_id=62007
- Carter, D.L. (2004, November). *Law enforcement intelligence: A guide for state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies*. (2003-CK-WX-0455). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Center for Technology Commercialization. (1999). *Law enforcement/criminal justice multi-jurisdictional information systems study, phase II final report*. (97-LB-VX-K012). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Joch, A. (2005, August 29). Long arm of the law. *Federal Computer Week*. Retrieved from http://fcw.com/Articles/2005/08/29/Long-arm-of-the-law.aspx?sc_lang=en&Page=2&p=1
- Kelley, J., & Abrials, D. (2003, November). Overcoming information sharing obstacles and complexity. *The Police Chief*, 70(11). Retrieved from http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=143&issue_id=112003
- Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council (LEITSC). (2003). *Standard functional specifications for: law enforcement records management systems (RMS) (2003-MU-BX-0068)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

- Martinelli, T.J. (2009, October). Dodging the pitfalls of noble cause corruption and the intelligence unit. *The Police Chief*, 76(10). Retrieved from http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=print_display&article_id=1917&issue_id=102009
- McLeod, M.G. (2006, April 21). 'LInx' has them all talking. *The Daily Record*, 97(176). Retrieved from http://www.jaxdailyrecord.com/showstory.php?Story_id=44977
- Noblis, M.B. (2007a). *Comprehensive regional information system project volume 1: Metrics for the evaluation of regional law enforcement information-sharing systems* (MTR-2006-035). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Noblis, M.B. (2007b). *Comprehensive regional information system project volume 3: A practitioner's handbook for regional law enforcement information-sharing systems: Preliminary requirements* (MTR-2006-037). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Public Technology. (2002). *Mission possible: Strong governance structures for the integration of justice information systems* (NCJ 192278). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Saupp, K. (2010, February). Fusion liaison officer programs: Effective sharing of information to prevent crime and terrorism. *The Police Chief*, 77(2), 46, 50, 52-54. Retrieved from http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=print_display&article_id=2013&issue_id=22010