

FEDERAL/STATE COLLABORATION PROMOTES BIG “WINS” IN JUSTICE INFORMATION SHARING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY¹

No crime stirs a greater public outcry than the abduction of a child. The fear and alarm generated by such an incident is only exacerbated within the community when residents learn that the perpetrator of that crime is a paroled sex offender whose whereabouts was unknown to law enforcement and corrections officials.

With funding made available by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in conjunction with the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices' *State Leadership in Criminal Justice Information Technology Integration* project, Kansas officials took on the challenge of tracking the movements of parolees. Their hope is to increase law enforcement officials' ability to intervene before a high-risk parolee's actions pose a threat within the community. The Kansas Bureau of Investigation used a portion of its \$239,000 award under the NGA Center/BJA justice IT integration implementation program to create a web-based link between the Kansas Department of Corrections' (KDOC) offender supervision data base and criminal history records information maintained by the Kansas Criminal Justice Information System (KCJIS). That means that now, when a police officer conducts a criminal history check, the KCJIS' name-search capabilities automatically will provide electronic access to a photograph and description of the offender, and that offender's address, criminal history record, and term of parole. A police officer conducting a criminal history check during a routine traffic stop in the vicinity of an elementary school, for example, would be alerted if the subject of that stop was a convicted sex-offender and parolee.

Highlighting State Initiatives

Kansas is one of 26 states that have shared in a total of \$16.4 million in grant funds awarded by the BJA, an agency of the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, under the collaborative NGA Center/BJA justice IT integration implementation grant program. The grants were awarded in December 2001, and states began work on their projects in late spring 2002. All states were invited to apply for the grants, which were capped at no more than \$1 million per state. The grant recipients were selected competitively based upon the recommendations of a review panel convened to develop funding recommendations that then were forwarded to the BJA for final action. States were allowed to include one or multiple projects in their proposals, but were required to show a direct link between the proposal and their jurisdictions justice information systems integration plans. Most states will have completed their grant-funded projects by the end of calendar 2004.

Kansas' efforts to track parolees is one component of a three-pronged work effort to apply internet technologies to the exchange of corrections confinement and supervision data between KDOC and KCJIS. That state's NGA Center/BJA initiative also has included projects to provide an electronic interface between community corrections

¹ This article was authored by Gwen A. Holden. Ms Holden is a consultant to the National Governors Association, Center for Best Practices' *State Leadership in Criminal Justice Information Technology Integration* project.

agencies and the state department of corrections and between KDOC and KCJIS for purposes of electronically exchanging offender confinement data. Each of these projects is an integral component of that state's multi-year justice IT integration strategy, adopted in 1996. The strategy is focused upon achieving improvements and efficiencies in information sharing by "web-enabling" the collection and dissemination of justice information between the KCJIS and state criminal justice agencies.

Arizona has applied a portion of its \$230,000 award under the joint NGA Center/BJA program to provide police officers electronic access to information that could help them protect victims of domestic violence from further injury at the hands of their abusers. Arizona's protective order program is designed to improve the enforcement of protection orders by automating the transfer of information about those orders from the courts to Sheriffs' departments. When the protection orders program is fully implemented, a police officer conducting a routine traffic stop will have immediate access to information that will let that officer know whether a protective order has been issued against the subject of that stop, and whether that individual has violated the terms and conditions of that order and may pose a possible threat to the victim or the officer.

The protection order program, administered by the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), is one of three initiatives for which the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission received funding under the NGA Center/BJA program. The Commission also directed funds to the AOC for a project to automate the exchange of juvenile probation information among criminal justice agencies, which became operational in December of 2002, and an initiative to provide criminal justice agencies electronic access to adult probation and parole information, which is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2004.

Arizona criminal justice officials believe that the protection order program will enhance substantially law enforcement agencies' enforcement of protection orders. Already these officials, point out, the program has promoted improvements in data quality and expedited the service of protective orders issued by the courts. When final testing of the program is completed, Arizona protection order information will be automatically formatted for, and transmitted to, the National Crime Information Center's Protection Order File, thereby eliminating redundant data entry by sheriffs' department employees.

Other NGA Center/BJA justice IT implementation program initiatives underway across the country include projects in Nebraska to automate the transfer of data between that state's automated fingerprint identification system's livescan capability and its jail management system; standardizing local case management and data sharing; and devising an internet-based approach for sharing criminal justice information with other states. Utah and Massachusetts officials have used their BJA grant funds to adopt extensible markup language (XML) standards as the platform for facilitating the exchange of information among criminal justice agencies. North Carolina has developed an electronic citations system, and in Connecticut officials are completing work on the automation of inmate sentencing data and, like their colleagues in Arizona, the implementation of a web-based protective order registry.

Helping States Improve Justice Information Sharing

The NGA/BJA justice IT integration implementation grant program, administered by the NGA Center's Homeland Security and Technology Division, is a central component of a larger initiative that the NGA Center has undertaken to help states move forward with initiatives to improve the sharing of justice information across agencies, disciplines, and levels of government. Since its inception in the summer of 2000, the NGA Center's justice IT integration project has been a collaborative effort between the NGA Center and the BJA to leverage funds and a variety of technical assistance resources to assist states in addressing implementation issues. These are issues that can undermine efforts to apply advances in communication and data exchange technologies to the sharing of justice information. To that end, the NGA Center has:

- Administered two rounds of \$25,000 grants to provide states with financial resources to develop and update justice information sharing plans and strategies;
- Conducted three series of regional technical assistance workshops that have explored key justice IT integration leadership issues, including:
 - Securing executive-level buy-in for information sharing improvement initiatives;
 - Developing justice IT integration governance structures;
 - Measuring the performance of information sharing improvement initiatives; and
 - Overcoming interagency and intergovernmental turf issues.

In addition, the NGA Center project staff has produced a series of white papers directed to educating governors and their policy advisors on the importance of justice IT integration and ways in which states' chief executives can support efforts to advance justice information sharing improvement initiatives. These papers have explored such topics as meeting local information sharing needs in the context of state justice IT integration plans and developing long-term strategies to finance information sharing improvement initiatives.

Leveraging Inter-Organizational Cooperation

Technical assistance resources available to states under the NGA Center's justice IT integration project have been further enhanced by the NGA Center's extensive collaboration with other justice IT integration technical assistance providers to help these organizations ensure that their products reflect the needs of the states and will be useful to, and used by, that constituency. The NGA Center provided funding to the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) to examine the use of performance measures in tracking the progress of state information technology initiatives. Information gathered by NASCIO by means of a survey of state CIO's and through interviews with selected state CIO's and justice IT officials was forward to the University of New Orleans Center for Society Law and Justice (CSLJ) for its consideration in carrying out a BJA-funded project to develop performance measures for justice IT integration. NGA Center project staff advised and served as a resource to the CSLJ

project, and a State University of New York at Albany, Center for Technology (CTG) in Government project to develop a justice IT integration capability assessment toolkit.

In addition, NGA Center project staff worked closely with SEARCH, The National Consortium of Justice Information and Statistics, on the development of a white paper that identifies and defines the key milestones of justice information system integration. This paper encourages public policymakers and justice IT integration program managers to approach justice IT integration as an on-going process. These officials in effect are provided a template for taking a broad-view look at where their respective states are in relationship to the various stages of that process. Presentations on the NASCIO, CSLJ, CTG and SEARCH technical assistance project were incorporated into the agendas for various workshops hosted by the NGA Center during 2003 and 2004.

The NGA Center also maintains a website that provides access to information about the NGA/BJA grant program as well as publications and activities of the broader NGA justice IT integration project. The website also provides links to other national organizations that offer technical assistance in support of justice information sharing improvement initiatives.

Achieving an “Early Win”

For states that have received NGA/BJA justice IT integration implementation grants, the availability of these resources as most states are coping with budget shortfalls has permitted these jurisdictions to break out of a planning mode and put into operation one or more elements of their justice IT integration strategies. The ability to produce a tangible “win” through the implementation of an operational improvement in the sharing of justice information, in turn, has given “validity” to the integration process, an Arkansas official reported during a January 2003 project states meeting. A Maryland official observed during that same meeting that, in his state, the NGA/BJA grant has been “a catalyst” for encouraging state justice officials to pursue a strategic approach to improving justice information sharing, and to “move away from just putting out fires.”

Other grant recipients say that work on their respective jurisdictions’ projects has excited and energized state justice officials whose enthusiasm for justice IT integration had flagged as resources for information technology improvements has declined or evaporated. Moreover, interagency collaboration on NGA/BJA funded projects has:

- Provided impetus for justice system-wide inventories and analyses of workflow, data needs and requirements, and information sharing capabilities;
- Helped to promote “buy-in” to, and a common vision of, integration goals and objectives;
- Improved communication and working relationships among agencies whose support of justice IT integration is vital; and,
- Produced policies, protocols, and standards that collectively will serve as a template for integration implementation initiatives into the future.

Further information about the NGA Center's justice IT integration project, including project publications and an overview of the BJA-funded state initiatives, can be accessed on the NGA Center's website at http://www.nga.org/center/topics/1,1188,D_2462,00.html.