

Feasibility Study for an Integrated Criminal Justice Information System Final Report

Prepared for:
The Metropolitan Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
Albuquerque New Mexico

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Introduction

In November 1998 the Metropolitan Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (MCJCC) contracted with the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of New Mexico (UNM) to perform a variety of tasks. One of these tasks was to study the feasibility for an integrated criminal justice information system. This report concludes that part of our contract dealing with the feasibility study.

As with other portions of our contract the genesis of this work and report originates in a report published in November 1989 entitled: *Recommendations Regarding the Composition and Role of a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council in Albuquerque/Bernalillo County in New Mexico* which was prepared under Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Cooperative Agreement No. 89-DD-CX-K013. The focus of this report was to:

(a) provided concrete suggestions regarding the composition, authority and role of the Coordinating Council as well as certain aspects of the detention and caseload problems which are readily apparent;

(b) identify areas where information would be needed in order to assist the Council in developing a coordinated and comprehensive plan for addressing the detention/caseload problems;

and

(c) determine whether specialized assistance (e.g., in pretrial service programs, differentiated case management, deferred prosecution, etc.) might be appropriate to provide in a subsequent phase. (Pages 3-4)

As a result of the observations and findings a recommendations section was included with the report. Nine specific recommendations were provided with the report and included the following:

1. Recommendation One: Formation, Composition and Role of the MCJCC
2. Recommendation Two: Provide the MCJCC with Necessary Staff
3. Recommendation Three: The MCJCC should develop a strategy for developing an integrated criminal justice information system.
4. Recommendation Four: Consider developing a data base using a random sample as soon as possible.
5. Recommendation Five: The MCJCC should draw upon the experiences of other jurisdictions.
6. Recommendation Six: Prepare a flow chart of the criminal justice system.
7. Recommendation Seven: Consider the development of a county-wide uniform citation release program.
8. Recommendation Eight: Assess the adequacy of available volunteer services.

9. Recommendation Nine: Assess procedures and staffing requirements of the DA and Public Defender Offices.

In early conversations with Ms. Barri Roberts, the Administrative Coordinator for the MCJCC, a copy of this report was provided to our office in the hope it might be useful in furthering the work of the MCJCC. Upon reviewing this report with Ms. Roberts it was decided to incorporate a number of the recommendations into our contractual scope of services. Those recommendations or portions of recommendations included in our scope of services are recommendations three, four, and six. This report specifically addresses recommendation three.

As noted in the report:

“At present, criminal justice and other officials are unable to track individual cases as they move from the operational areas of responsibility of one agency to the next in the course of their arrest, detention, prosecution, adjudication and correction. As a result there is a considerable amount of duplication of fact finding and recording effort. Exchange of information is time consuming, incomplete and awkward.

Of greater consequence is the fact that in the event there were a demand for it, there is currently no way of generating information on the flow of all or segments of the total criminal justice workload being arrested, detained, prosecuted and disposed of. As a result information being collected and stored cannot be readily retrieved to provide answers to any questions which individual officials or bodies of officials might wish to pose for management purposes. For example, no official body such as the MCJCC can at present routinely monitor the relationship between citation release or release on recognizance and failure-to-appear, processing time and sentences imposed on persons whose pretrial diversion status is revoked by the District Attorney and the degree of correlation which exists between the length of pretrial detention and the likelihood of receiving probation upon conviction. In short, present record keeping practices do not allow for the identification, description and quantification of practices which in the aggregate contribute to the dimensions of the detention center's population.” (Page 26-27)

This is for the most part still true today. This recommendation and the rationale for its completion led to its inclusion in our scope of services. To complete this point within our scope of service we closely followed the rationale outlined in the report.

Within our contracted scope of services the goal of the *Feasibility Study for an Integrated Criminal Justice Information System* is:

This study would be limited to the feasibility of an automated and integrated criminal justice information system for Bernalillo County. Under this scope of services tasks included:

- ▶ Meet with MCJCC staff and members to determine best approach for gaining access to agencies who are part of the criminal justice system.
- ▶ Meet with selected agencies to collect information about their current management information system.
- ▶ Briefly survey selected agencies regarding their MIS.
- ▶ Feasibility report.

For a variety of reasons, all of which were beyond our control, we did not complete all the tasks listed above. Very early on we discovered we could not complete this portion of contract. This occurred because data necessary to complete the snap shot study was not automated and we needed to devote more resources to collecting data and so it was decided by the MCJCC to limit the work on this task. This change was approved by the MCJCC.

Despite not completing this task we have learned some very important things. First, we soon discovered that though some attempts have been made to integrate criminal justice systems in the county there has been little progress that is of practical value in tracking individuals in the county criminal justice system. Much of the limited progress made to date has been by the Criminal Justice Network (CJNET). This group is discussed in the next section. Second, we also discovered, in the course of completing other parts of our contract, that there are individual criminal justice agencies in the county which have problems tracking clients within their own system. We suspect that other agencies which we did not access have similar problems. Finally, and most importantly, there has never been a funded mandate to design, implement, and maintain a county criminal justice information system. A county-wide criminal justice information system would perform a wide variety of tasks. One of the most important goals of such a system would be the ability to track an individual from arrest through final disposition from the county criminal justice system.

The remainder of this report provides a discussion and recommendations towards the creation of a county-wide criminal justice information system which would allow an individual to be tracked from point of entry into the system (arrest) through final disposition.

CJNET

The Albuquerque Criminal Justice Network (CJNET) is a collaborative of Albuquerque area criminal justice agencies which provide mutual assistance in the exchange of information. The CJNET webpage is located at <http://www.cabq.gov/cjnet/> and can be accessed for a more complete description of the organization. Founding principals of the CJNET include the Albuquerque Fire Department (AFD), the Albuquerque Police Department (APD), the Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), the Bernalillo County Detention Center (BCDC), the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office (BCSO), the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court, the Second Judicial District Court (SJDC), the District Attorney, the New Mexico Corrections

Department (NMCD), the New Mexico Department of Public Safety (NMDPS), and the State Public Defender.

In March 1990 in response to the 1989 report (*Recommendations Regarding the Composition and Role of a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council in Albuquerque/Bernalillo County in New Mexico*) the City of Albuquerque Information Services Division (ISD) was asked to assist in developing a communication network between criminal justice agencies at the City, County, and State levels to address the recommendations noted in the report. From initial meetings facilitated by the ISD the CJNET was formed and in 1993 a Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies mentioned above was signed.

To date CJNET has developed Vision, Mission, and Goal statements. Additionally, four subcommittees have been created and are charged with the development of how to fulfill the mission and goals.

CJNET Vision, Mission, and Goals and Objectives

The vision of CJNET is "to have an integrated criminal justice network that increases the effectiveness of agencies involved in the criminal justice process." Their mission is "to interconnect computer systems by establishing common goals and objectives, providing mutual assistance and establishing communications standards for the exchange of information while maintaining and respecting each agency's autonomy." The vision and mission of the group closely follows the recommendation included in the 1989 report of developing an integrated criminal justice information system.

The established goals of the CJNET are as follows:

1. To exchange agency administrative information to establish more efficient and effective utilization of resources.
2. Reduce operational redundancy where feasible.
3. Exchange information for more efficient communication.

In order to meet these goals the following objectives have been developed:

1. Establish common and unique offense and defendant ID's so that a case can be followed through the entire criminal justice system.
2. Establish standard data definitions for data exchange.
3. Establish communication standard protocols.
4. CJNET members should continually assess needs to determine change and updates.
5. Establish what information will be shared. Each agency should list what information they need and what they can and will share and what access standards are required.
6. Recommend a common user interface for data inquiry, acquisition, and reporting where feasible.

7. Principals not automated should make an identifiable good faith effort to obtain automated systems within three years.
8. Grants and funding to meet CJNET's goals and objectives will be sought.

The CJNET webpage also contains a list of sixteen accomplishments which include:

- DA's office is connected with Metro and District Courts, APD, City of Albuquerque-ACOPS.
- Public Defender connects with Metro Court, District Court, and the Bernalillo County Detention Center to look up court schedules and case information.
- Bernalillo County Sheriff's Dept. daily looks up warrants at Metro and District Court.

While there has been some progress towards the CJNET vision the accomplishments have been limited. In our review and understanding of this issue we believe it occurs for two main reasons. First, there is not a funded mandate which would allow the CJNET or some other group to more actively pursue the established vision. Second, and related to the first, individual agencies have not bought into the concept of a unified system. To date each agency remains fairly autonomous and this philosophy does not lend itself to the creation of an integrated system.

Preliminary Discussion of the Existing System

As noted earlier we did not formally survey agencies regarding their information systems and the extent of their collaboration with other agencies in exchanging information and so what is written here is simply a broad overview. Despite this limitation we have been able to gain a general sense of the state of the current county wide criminal justice information system. It is our opinion that an integrated system does not exist and that such a system could not be implemented and operational for several years. Agencies currently have independent systems in which they attempt to share information with other agencies but which are not designed to work interdependently and share information. Many of these systems are obsolete both in terms of their software, hardware, the way information is collected and managed, and the way data can be reported.

During the time we have been completing our other contractual obligations we accessed parts of several agencies information systems. More broadly we attempted during our snap shot study to track a sample of BCDC clients from their entry into BCDC (booking) to Metro Court and District Court. Additionally, we requested and received local criminal histories from APD on the entire sample. We quickly discovered the only way to track inmates was through the use of their names, DOB, and social security. This created problems as there were numerous errors in each of the agency databases regarding the spelling of names, the use of aliases, different individuals having the same docket number, incorrect social security numbers, incorrect birth dates, etc. For these reasons it was not possible to track all cases from booking into the Bernalillo County Detention Center to the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court to the Second Judicial District Court and then match each case with their respective local arrest histories supplied by the

Albuquerque Police Department. In addition, it was at times difficult to read what was happening at each agency because of the lack of consistency in the method of collection and incorrect and duplicated information. At times we requested and received assistance from agency staff. It was not unusual for these individuals to have difficulty or to even find it not possible to interpret their own systems data. A system designed to track cases from arrest to final disposition in a consistent and systematic way would limit these problems.

Recommendations

This section contains recommendations that will further and more completely determine the status of individual agency systems, the extent to which these systems adequately collect information, the extent to which they are able to share data and interface, and the current county-wide criminal justice information system. For reasons noted earlier it is not possible to provide specific recommendations towards the creation of a county wide criminal justice information system. At this juncture this is not possible and it is very preliminary to begin discussing such a system as very important pieces of information are missing. For this reason we have included the following recommendations

- A complete survey of all existing agencies regarding their current information systems. This would collect information regarding the status of the current system, types of information collected, types of software in use, reporting abilities, their level of collaboration with other agencies, and variables and values collected. The survey should be constructed in collaboration with CJNET members and reviewed by interested parties prior to its implementation.
- A thorough review of existing systems in use by other jurisdictions. We are hopeful that jurisdictions elsewhere have tackled this issue and could provide valuable information and expertise. We would caution against quickly deciding to adopt another jurisdictions system without first completely reviewing its capability and adaptability to our unique circumstances.
- A funded mandate should be proposed and sources of funding secured. Without a funded mandate it will be difficult to create and maintain a viable system.
- A complete long-term plan should be constructed. In our view a common problem is the desire for quick fixes when in fact the problem developed over a long period of time and the required solutions are long-term.
- The full and complete participation of county and state officials ~~who play a function~~ should be assured. It is our opinion that the lack of cooperation has not been helpful in the current situation. Even if funding was gathered a lack of cooperation and collaboration would limit the usefulness of any system.

Conclusion

During the course of completing our contractual obligations we were surprised at how difficult it was to track individual cases among the agencies from whom we required information. At the outset of the project we had been assured that we would be able to collect the necessary information and that we would encounter few problems. As we complete this report we are still not positive who was in the jail on December 2, 1998. Even with the assistance of agency staff certain pieces of information could not be understood in the context of the county-wide criminal justice system. For example, when we reviewed Second Judicial District Court cases with a District Court staff member there were several cases where it could not be determined why they were in District Court and still in the Jail. We also found that very few of the individuals who are responsible for the day to day operation of agencies were aware of the extent to which their own information systems are inadequate. We would encourage the MCJCC to seriously and completely discuss the virtues of an integrated information system and begin considering a fully integrated system.