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The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics

# Enterprise Strategic Planning for Justice Information Sharing: Why It's Important

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## Introduction

Criminal justice organizations that need help with strategic planning have a wide range of publications, training seminars, and consultants to choose from. However, strategic planning for *justice information sharing* programs requires a different approach than that used in traditional strategic planning methodologies. This is because justice information sharing involves the broader concept of the justice *enterprise*.

In criminal justice and public safety, reliable information is essential to make informed, appropriate, and effective decisions—whether it's an officer in a patrol car, a judge in a courtroom, or a supervisor at a 911 center. Much of this information comes from other agencies or organizations within the broader justice community. When developing technology solutions to obtain and share justice information, organizations should carefully plan their efforts—particularly when information will be shared across agency and jurisdictional boundaries.

In criminal justice information sharing, the enterprise is complex and involves multiple participants and governing processes, rules, and resources. There are multiple stakeholders for any given information exchange, and each has different business needs, perspectives, and concerns that the plan should address. In addition to operational improvements, the justice enterprise is being pushed to improve information sharing to maximize the return on investment through cost-effective, shared solutions. In some cases, these initiatives compete for scarce resources and information technology (IT) support. Effective strategic planning is essential to achieving success in this environment.

Ultimately, the process of creating a strategic plan for justice information sharing must focus on building a *shared vision* among all stakeholders in the greater information sharing enterprise.

This *Technical Brief* explores the benefits of following an *Enterprise Strategic Planning* (ESP) methodology when initiating an information sharing program with local, regional, state, and/or federal partners. SEARCH developed this ESP methodology based on the principles of Enterprise Architecture (EA).

Enterprise Architecture is a well-established method of planning for IT projects that focuses on aligning technology investments with business requirements. Nick Malik, an Enterprise Architect for Microsoft, divides EA into three functions:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Planning and Alignment** focuses on the strategic alignment of business needs and IT efforts. This function creates a vision of the future and a plan to fund projects to achieve that vision.
2. **Innovation** provides research and development resources to improve technologies, allows investment in shared infrastructure and new technologies, and provides input into corporate strategies.
3. **Standards** interact directly with the project-level work in the form of direct contributions to the practices of a team. Best practices are shared, and the teams produce higher quality and more consistent results.

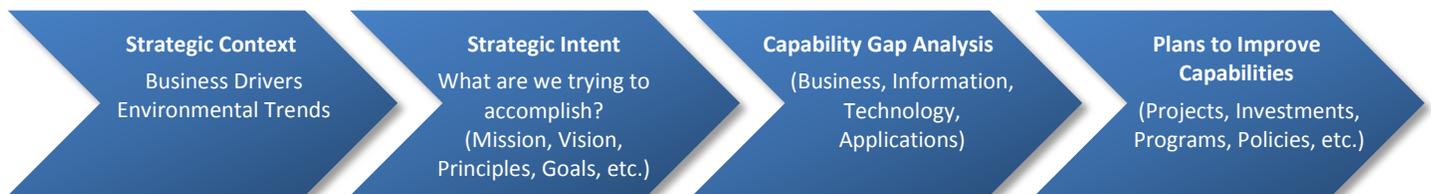
Successful justice information sharing programs take these core EA functions into account. A strategic plan based on innovation and standards provides a solid foundation for future success. For example, new information exchanges developed by one jurisdiction provide a foundation for exchanges in other jurisdictions. Developing information sharing capabilities based upon standards is an approach relied upon throughout the IT industry.

## What is an Enterprise Strategic Plan?

An *Enterprise Strategic Plan* is a planning document that establishes the shared mission and vision of stakeholders within the enterprise. It directs the allocation of an enterprise's resources and funds, and clarifies how it will accomplish its goals and objectives. In the criminal justice domain, the "justice information sharing enterprise" can include all justice and allied agencies and organizations. The ESP methodology follows a systematic approach to develop a governance and planning document that guides the decision-making process for information sharing. These are critical decisions that a justice enterprise must get right in order to thrive in the coming years. This process results in a formal Enterprise Strategic Plan.

The ESP methodology is comprised of four distinct sections that build upon each other to produce a comprehensive information sharing plan for the enterprise (Figure 1):

**Figure 1**



<sup>1</sup> Microsoft Developer Network Blogs, Inside Architecture, "One EA Team, Three EA Functions," June 2008: <http://blogs.msdn.com/b/nickmalik/archive/2008/06/11/one-ea-team-three-ea-functions.aspx>

- **Strategic Context:** Documents the factors (*business drivers* and *environmental trends*) that will inform and constrain what the enterprise can accomplish. It provides the context in which the plan must function and operate.
- **Strategic Intent:** Identifies what the enterprise is to accomplish during the time period covered by the plan. It includes:
  - *Mission* – a description of the enterprise’s business purpose and primary objectives in terms of its key measure of success
  - *Vision* – an aspirational description of what the enterprise would like to achieve by the end of the planning horizon in terms of its values
  - *Guiding Principles* – statements of value that help the enterprise make decisions to fulfill the plan
  - *Goals and Objectives* – specific, measurable, business-oriented accomplishments that collectively lead to the vision
- **Capability Gap Analysis:** Identifies current and future capabilities necessary to fulfill the goals and objectives. The gap between current and future capabilities identifies what work the enterprise must do in order to achieve the vision.
- **Capability Improvement Plan:** Describes the investments, projects, programs, and/or policies necessary to build or enable the future capabilities. The capability improvement plan begins the tactical planning process where actions occur and resources are allocated.

Key to the success of any justice information sharing program is to establish clear guidance and direction through a strong governance structure and leadership. The strategic planning process and resulting plan helps to do this.

## Why is Enterprise Strategic Planning Important?

Information is the lifeblood of effective justice, public safety, emergency services, disaster management, and homeland security efforts. It transcends the operational needs and priorities of individual justice agencies. Enterprisewide information sharing is needed to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from critical incidents. Having the capability to share information helps—

- address terrorist and criminal activities
- respond to natural disasters
- provide effective major incident response and management
- support the critical day-to-day operations of justice and public safety officials at all levels and across all branches of government.

***Effective enterprisewide strategic planning provides partners with a blueprint for information sharing.*** It is the guide they will use to build an information sharing infrastructure to expand and enhance capabilities that, in turn, improve business operations for the enterprise.

Jurisdictions use the ESP process—and the written strategic plan itself—to build consensus among partners to improve public safety by enhancing operational efficiency. The strategic planning process provides these benefits:

- It promotes **interagency cooperation and collaboration** to identify and achieve goals of mutual benefit, rather than competing against one another for scarce resources and funds.
- It provides the opportunity to strategically identify and allocate both agency and shared resource requirements as part of the **budgeting process**.
- It helps **build consensus** among the participants to improve information sharing and increase operational efficiencies between data sharing partners.
- It **facilitates sharing of resources and expenses** in a deliberate way to address the most pressing needs of the enterprise.
- It creates a sense of **ownership and commitment** among the participants for the information sharing program.
- It provides a baseline of **accountability** against which stakeholders can measure progress and success.
- It provides a mechanism to **communicate goals and objectives** internally and externally to policy and funding bodies, and to constituents.
- It helps build **strong interagency** teams that can resolve issues that may not have been addressed in the past.

The benefits gained from a well-crafted, comprehensive strategic plan are worth the significant investment of stakeholder and planning staff time and effort. An effective plan can be completed in a relatively short—although intense—period of time.

Strategic planning is an excellent way to engage all stakeholders in “active governance.” An effective strategic planning process captures the challenges that jurisdictions face by clearly identifying internal and external factors affecting their IT environments. The resulting plan helps identify and prioritize information sharing needs and helps position jurisdictional leaders to advocate for future information sharing improvements. Consequently, strategic planning requires stakeholders to define:

- The **information and services** to share among stakeholders.
- The **organizational design and roles** needed by the program.
- The **performance goals** established throughout the program.
- The **resources** needed to reach those goals and, consequently, how much money is needed to procure those resources.

In the end, the goals determine the content of various budgets and funding requests.

### **Barriers to and Success Factors for Effective Enterprise Strategic Planning**

Potential barriers to developing a successful information sharing program include a lack of time, resources, or commitment to the program. Jurisdictions can use the strategic planning process to break down these barriers. During the strategic planning process, stakeholders should identify and address the following success factors to help lessen the risks from these barriers:

- **Leadership** – strong champions are invaluable to moving the program forward and to achieving continued success.

- **Decision-making Structure** – formally engage stakeholders to ensure they have a say in how the enterprise is defined and managed so the resulting plan is comprehensive and credible.
- **Common Goals** – articulate key issues driving the information sharing program and develop a common understanding of the problem(s) to solve or a shared sense of urgency to solve the problem(s).
- **Commitment** – dedicate sufficient time and effort to complete the strategic planning process and develop the plan.
- **Scope** – create a common understanding of the boundaries of the information sharing program.

Let’s take a closer look at these success factors.

### ***Leadership***

Throughout the strategic planning process, strong leadership ensures that the process is focused, cooperative, and meets the business needs of all participants. Successful leadership builds consensus among competing interests and balances the needs of multiple independent lines of business.

Effective leadership can help overcome many of the challenges that may occur during the strategic planning process. Often, participants may not perceive the goals of the information sharing program as a “core” mission of their particular organization. Their first responsibility is to their organizational mission—not the information sharing mission. This can be particularly challenging when the goals of the program do not align or may even conflict with the organizational mission of stakeholders. Effective leadership can motivate and persuade these participants to commit to the mission of the enterprise information sharing program.

For example, consider a scenario in which the Administrative Office of the Courts needs to finance an upgrade of its database servers, but the State Computerized Criminal History Repository needs electronic dispositions. This competition for resources, funding, and time is the type of challenge that information sharing program leaders should address in an enterprise strategic planning process. Effective leaders must identify ways in which the jurisdiction—the county, state, tribe, or municipality—is better off overall as an enterprise with improved information sharing, even if each of the partners has to give up something in the near term to achieve it.

### ***Decision-making Structure***

Successful information sharing programs establish *formally organized governance structures* to provide effective, clear authority for and leadership of program activities. A governance structure assigns authority and creates consensus among stakeholders by establishing the governing board’s composition, documenting its scope of authority, and outlining its roles and responsibilities in making decisions to guide the program in achieving its goals. It also establishes mechanisms to share costs to develop and maintain information sharing infrastructure.

Jurisdictions can use different approaches to charter a governance structure:

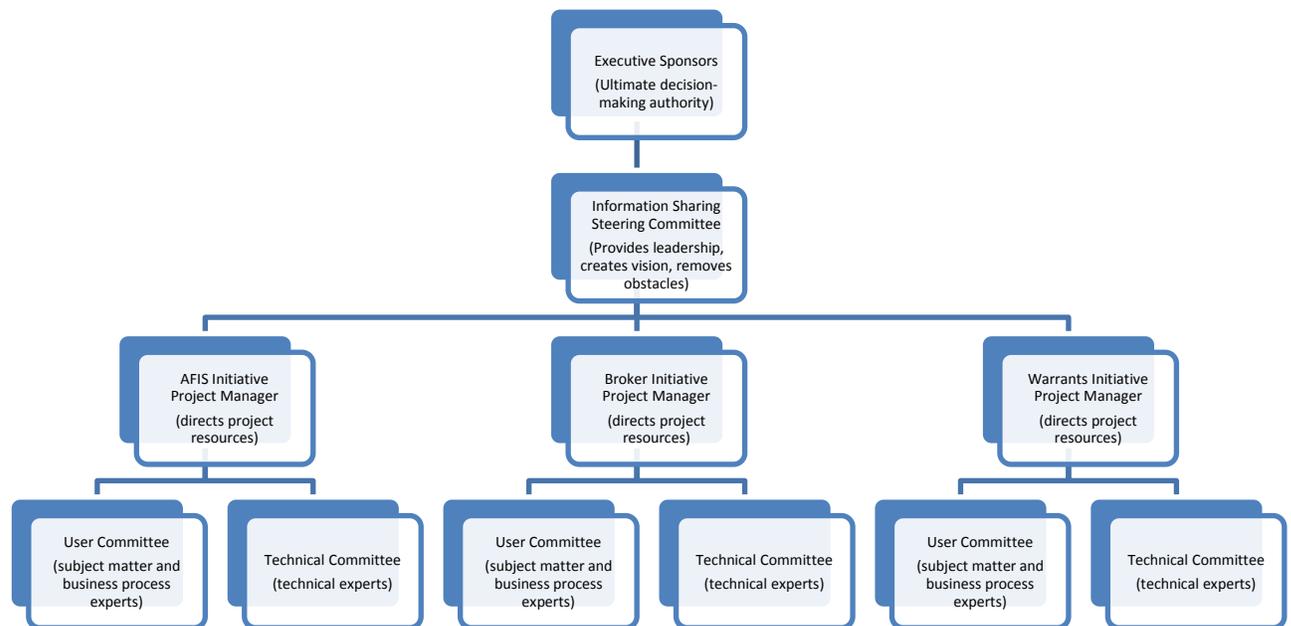
- Executive order
- Statute or ordinance
- Memorandum of understanding
- Joint powers agreement

A formal decision-making structure—complete with appropriate policy, operational, and technology-level decision-making capabilities—fulfills these needs:

- It provides a mechanism by which policy, business unit leaders, and technology managers are able to develop IT strategy.
- It provides a forum for stakeholders to identify, debate, and resolve priorities.
- It creates a sense of joint accountability for the strategic direction of information sharing as a partnership between the business units.
- It focuses the program leadership on how they collectively use technology and resources, and how they could use them more efficiently.
- It improves trust, accountability, and transparency in making significant information sharing investment and policy decisions.<sup>2</sup>

Information sharing programs are not the responsibility of a single partner. Rather, they rely on the commitment and cooperation of *all* stakeholders. Thus, they require a coordinated effort to manage the various stakeholder initiatives, activities, and resources. Creating a formal governance structure helps build the foundation of a successful information sharing program. Figure 2 is an example of a governance structure for a criminal justice information sharing program that supports multiple initiatives.

**Figure 2**



<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *Governance Structures, Roles, and Responsibilities* (Sacramento, CA: SEARCH) November 2004.

## ***Common Goals, Commitment, and Scope***

To ensure consensus among stakeholders and articulate the common goals, commitment to, and scope of the effort, information sharing programs must establish a *program charter*. The governance body creates the program charter, in consultation with all the stakeholders. Its purpose is to formally recognize the existence of the information sharing program and its governance structure, and to communicate the common program mission, vision, and goals.

The program charter demonstrates commitment—in it, each justice partner formally recognizes the need for enterprisewide information sharing improvements. The program charter represents the willingness of the partners to adopt and implement changes in support of the information sharing program. If applicable, the program charter should include provisions for supporting appropriate staff and dedicating resources to coordinate activities among agencies.

Another requirement of an information sharing program is to establish a common understanding of program scope and expectations. The charter should list the program’s common business needs and define its scope. It should include a definition of information sharing upon which all members of the governance structure can agree. The definition should be general enough that it will not constrain or restrict future activities, but not so vague that it is not helpful in educating readers.

The governance group should provide stakeholders with a clear picture of the overall program—its organization, authority, responsibilities, and expectations. The program charter, along with the agreement, order, or statute that established the formal governance structure, are foundational documents that should serve as references for all program activities. It is critical to the enterprise strategic planning process to ensure that all stakeholders are working toward common ends.

“Information sharing” means different things to different people, so it may be helpful to illustrate the differences between definitions used in various situations. Examples of information sharing definitions used in the justice domain include:

- Information sharing is the ability to access and share critical information electronically at key decision points throughout the justice enterprise.
- Information sharing is the automation of information exchange between justice and justice-related organizations.
- Information sharing is providing complete, accurate, and timely information to justice system decision makers, when and where they need the information.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, developing a strategic plan will enable stakeholders to:

- Clearly articulate their goals and objectives.
- Assess current and needed capabilities.
- Define capability gaps that prevent goals and objectives from being achieved.
- Create consensus and support among diverse stakeholders.
- Clarify the scope of priority activities.
- Provide guidance for budget planning.
- Provide a project management mechanism to assess progress and accountability.

Once the governance group adopts an Enterprise Strategic Plan, stakeholders can use the plan to establish project priorities, and request appropriate funding and other resources as part of the budgeting process. Because information sharing projects cross agency boundaries, stakeholders need to share costs and resources to successfully complete projects, and to maintain and support the information sharing enterprise.

Strategic plans are “living” documents—stakeholders must use, review, refine, and update the plan on a periodic basis. This helps the leadership group and its customers and stakeholders to assess the status of program progress, identify and adopt new priorities, reprioritize existing priorities, and plan for the next phase of activities. By reviewing project progress periodically, plan revisions can be minor “course corrections,” rather than major changes in direction.

Strategic plan development may be viewed as a *pro forma* exercise and result in an ineffective and often unused document. However, **when properly developed, a strategic plan serves as an effective communication, project management, and governance tool.** The strategic plan should describe the information at an appropriate level so that a wide audience (e.g., funding sources, elected officials, and nonjustice stakeholders) can easily understand the correlation between policy and technology. It can be difficult to convey this relationship. Therefore, we recommend following the ESP methodology presented by SEARCH in the companion *Technical Brief*, “Enterprise Strategic Planning: A Methodology to Build a Shared Vision for Justice Information Sharing.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <http://www.search.org/resources/publications/technical-briefs/>