



## SEARCH—The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics

### OUR HISTORY

SEARCH—an acronym for *System for the Electronic Analysis and Retrieval of Criminal Histories*—began as a project in 1969 funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). The project brought together a consortium of six states (Arizona, California, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, and New York) with a groundbreaking mandate:

- Develop automated criminal history records, and
- Demonstrate the feasibility of exchanging criminal history data *interstate* by means of a computerized system.

LEAA's initial grant was provided to the California Crime Technological Research Foundation (CCTRF), which worked with the six-state consortium to carry out the research. Over several years, and with continued LEAA funding, SEARCH successfully demonstrated the interstate exchange of criminal history data via computerization—transmitting criminal fingerprints through “an experimental satellite system from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office to the California Department of Justice and from there to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement” using both facsimile and video images.

As the number of states participating in Project SEARCH grew to more than 30, the consortium organized in 1974 as a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation—SEARCH Group, Incorporated—with governor-appointed members from all states, the District of Columbia, and the territories, augmented with at-large subject matter experts and thought leaders. SEARCH was established as a national organization with headquarters in Sacramento, California, and a professional staff—many of whom worked on Project SEARCH from CCTRF—was hired. Today SEARCH staff are broadly distributed throughout the nation.

### OUR FOCUS

SEARCH understands that the criminal history record—a biometrically based longitudinal history created by harvesting information from operational records and case management systems of justice agencies—is the most significant and consequential information at virtually every decision point through the whole of the justice enterprise.

Supporting this information, and the systems used to create, maintain, and manage it, is at the core of the goals which have driven SEARCH's efforts throughout its more than 50-year history:

- a) Improve the administration of justice through the *effective application and responsible deployment of information and identification technologies*;
- b) Develop and promote *constitutionally balanced and effective law and policy* governing the use and management of justice information, systems, and technologies;
- c) Enhance the *efficiency, effectiveness, and the quality of decision-making and information management* through policy analysis, training, technical assistance, and systems development; and
- d) Inform and improve *policy and practice in the administration of justice* through evidence-based research and data.

### OUR NATIONAL ROLE

SEARCH has played a critical and enduring leadership role in building and supporting criminal history record information (CHRI) systems and information sharing capabilities throughout the nation. SEARCH has tackled this mission through partnerships with the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, State agencies, and allied organizations. For example:

**Repositories and Systems.** SEARCH modeled and helped develop the first state criminal history records repositories. As fingerprint technology

evolved, SEARCH helped guide and develop standards for Automated Fingerprint Identification Systems (AFIS) and live-scan devices, and worked with agencies to plan and implement their Computerized Criminal History (CCH) and AFIS systems.

Recognizing the fundamental and interrelated nature of justice information sharing, early SEARCH efforts built standards and recommended systems not just for criminal history records repositories, but also for Comprehensive Data Systems (CDS) and Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) in 1972, and Offender-Based State Corrections Information System (OBSCIS), and Crime Classifications Using Attribute-Based Crime Reporting (ABCR) in 1976. In 1980, the FBI implemented the Interstate Identification Index (III), based on the SEARCH model for a decentralized, automated exchange of criminal history records.

**National Leadership.** SEARCH Members played a crucial role in developing the National Crime Prevention and Privacy Compact, which governs noncriminal justice use of the III, and have provided enduring leadership on the Compact Council since its creation. SEARCH has also played critical roles in creating and supporting the III, the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) 2000, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

Because CCH is built from the operational records and case management systems of justice agencies at state and local levels, SEARCH also plays a significant leadership role in developing national standards, technical architectures, and operational best practices to plan and implement integrated justice information systems. SEARCH was a leader in creating many of the national technical standards and systems, including:

- The Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative,
- Justice Information Exchange Model (JIEM),
- Global Justice XML Data Model (GJXDM),
- National Information Exchange Model (NIEM),
- Global Justice Reference Architecture (GRA),

- Global Federated Identity and Privilege Management (GFIPM), and
- The Open Justice Broker Consortium (OJBC).

**Expanding Noncriminal Justice Demand.** SEARCH has played a fundamental role in crafting legislation; developing regulations, policies, and auditing and data quality improvement strategies; and advocating on behalf of State Criminal History Records Repositories as technology evolved and public demand for access to criminal history records expanded. Over the past two decades we have witnessed massive growth in demand for CHRI for noncriminal justice purposes, including licensing, employment, volunteer screening for those who serve vulnerable populations, and for firearms transactions. SEARCH has helped states create and maintain sex offender registration and community notification programs, and actively supports NICS reporting and data quality improvement initiatives.

**Research.** SEARCH has played an important role in conducting research on a broad spectrum of topics related to criminal history records use and management, firearms-related background checks, data quality improvement and disposition reporting strategies, and biennial surveys of state criminal history information systems. SEARCH has also conducted research to assess the impact and business value of integrated justice information sharing, to analyze incident-based crime reporting, and to explore the extraordinary research potential of the criminal history record.

SEARCH has empaneled a CCH Metrics Working Group to create data quality metrics and dashboards to support repositories in measuring and monitoring criminal history records data quality, and to develop criminological research priorities and methodologies to address such critical topics as risk assessment, recidivism, redemption, and criminal careers.

## OUR SERVICES

The [SEARCH Policy Statements](#), which were adopted July 29, 2014, articulate profound and enduring values that collectively establish not only strategic vision and foundation for the organization, but also provide guidance in operationalizing those values and establishing a context for ongoing program support and business development. These

statements are currently undergoing Member review to ensure they reflect current topical issues, such as criminal justice reform and sealing/expungement practices.

Today we are the leading resource for best practices, expert services, and innovative solutions for justice information sharing. SEARCH is *the* national venue through which the states articulate their justice information management needs and priorities, and provide thought leadership on justice information sharing issues. Through Member participation and development, SEARCH offers a variety of services:

**Membership Interaction.** We bring states together to address the nation's information sharing challenges. Members engage in a common dialog, drive national changes, and establish a community of interest and expertise. Member collaboration results in information and idea generation, sharing and consensus-building.

**Research and Information Sharing.** We research and analyze emerging issues to understand evolving needs, gaps, and solutions—and to determine opportunities for growth and advancement of the field.

**Best Practices and Tools.** We develop operational, cost-effective solutions, services, resources, and tools to facilitate effective justice information.

**Education and Outreach.** We share ideas, research, services, resources, and lessons learned with Members and the justice community at large. We provide a singular voice for the Membership Group's collective knowledge with advice, perspectives, and consensus statements on critical justice information sharing issues.

## WHO BENEFITS?

SEARCH Members and their offices benefit directly from these services and collective insight, as do peers and partners in the justice information sharing community, decision-makers at the local, state, and federal levels (including elected officials, agency directors, and regulatory agencies), private industry, other national associations, and the public. The active participation of SEARCH Members from across the nation keeps us focused on key needs and priorities in justice information management.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, SEARCH Members participated in regular roundtable discussions, sharing common concerns and their experiences with such topics as:

- Expanding record sealing and expungement initiatives, including the impact on research and background checks
- Improving data quality, disposition reporting, and data sharing between courts, prosecutors, and justice stakeholders
- Firearms background checks
- Navigating the national transition from Summary UCR to NIBRS reporting
- Upgrading and replacing outdated CCH, AFIS, and message switch systems
- Implementing rap back functionality
- Criminal justice reform efforts, including use-of-force collection
- Strategies for dealing with the impact and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

## SUPPORT THROUGH ANNUAL DUES

To continue our long tradition of leadership and cooperation in this area, the support and participation of each Member State and territory through the Annual State Dues Program is critically important. Investment in the Dues Program supports SEARCH operations and enables us to:

- a) Monitor and quickly address emerging legislative proposals and policy initiatives;
- b) Educate leading legislative and policy decision-makers and funding agencies on behalf of our Members and their agencies and jurisdictions;
- c) Organize and host biannual Membership Group meetings to share common experiences, discuss universal challenges and needs, learn about funding and policy initiatives of interest, and provide guidance and direction to the organization and its staff on programs, policies, and legislation of interest; and
- d) Continue our efforts to pursue grants and contract-funded projects.

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