Measuring Progress:
A Summary of Key Milestones
In Support of Justice Integration

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Introduction

Justice agencies and organizations throughout the U.S. are busy reinventing the way they do business through automated information sharing and integration.[1] State justice entities are realizing that to effectively administer justice, enhance efficiency in process, and leverage scarce resources, they must work as an enterprise and conduct business electronically in ways they may not have in the past. The term "integrated justice information systems" generally refers to the ability to electronically share critical information at key decisionpoints throughout the justice enterprise[2] and symbolizes a new way of doing business in the justice arena. Integration is a *process*, not merely a project and, thereby, is characterized by many years of planning, implementing, supporting, managing, enhancing, and evaluating the variety of systems that comprise the justice enterprise. Many states have made great strides toward implementing integrated justice, while others are in the early stages. But what are those stages? How do we better understand and

characterize just where in the "process" of integrating justice information systems a jurisdiction may find itself?

Measuring the Progress of Integration Initiatives: Nine Milestones

The status of integration initiatives can be measured by: 1) evaluating the degree to which justice system officials have complete, accurate, and timely information to support decision-making; and 2) evaluating which steps in the integration process have been completed. The second approach is the easiest and least costly metric. The following nine milestones are a simplified version of a planning process that SEARCH has developed and documented. They are derived from our observations of a variety of integrated justice and other systems development initiatives across the country.[3] These milestones can be used to show how far down the path of integration a jurisdiction has traveled.

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[1] This document is an excerpt of a larger report, "Integrated Justice: A Planning Guide," to be published by SEARCH in Fall 2003.

[2] David J. Roberts, *Integration in the Context of Justice Information Systems: A Common Understanding*. A SEARCH Special Report, October 2001.

[3] SEARCH produced this report at the request of and in conjunction with the National Governors Association (**www.nga.org**), which is working to help states to better inform governors and other public policymakers about the need for, and status of, initiatives to achieve improvements in justice information sharing.

Initiate the Process and Institutionalize a Governance Structure

Key justice system stakeholders demonstrate a common vision and commitment to integration by creating a governance body that institutionalizes a shared decisionmaking structure and process. The charter for this organization can take the form of legislation, a memorandum of understanding, or an executive/judicial order. The governance structure ensures that the integration initiative will survive changes in leadership and staff. It also is helpful to create permanent staff support and a budget line.

A governance or decisionmaking structure for integrated justice initiatives that is comprised of leaders of the key stakeholder agencies or organizations is vital to provide leadership and accountability. Members of the governance structure must adopt a shared vision to guide the project, as well as dedicate staff and financial resources, remove barriers to project success, and render decisions that impact the initiative's scope and direction.

Continue Planning

Once there is consensus among justice system leaders to pursue an integration initiative, it is necessary to chart a course. Planning includes articulating a shared mission, vision, and guiding principles, and developing specific goals and objectives. The plan also contains an assessment of existing infrastructure, applications, and electronic interfaces. It encompasses an evaluation of available technology and best practices in other jurisdictions. It embraces the systems development lifecycle. The plan addresses operational systems specifications, hardware and software standards, and the environment in which the automated system will work. Planning also includes a complete business process review to find better, more effective, and more efficient ways of doing business.

A good plan contemplates the "human side" of successful technology implementation by documenting the range of user needs both now and in the future, and focuses on the human resources necessary for proper systems support.

Develop and Use Performance Measures

Performance measures help ensure the success of an integration initiative by providing intermediate indicators of progress. They also create accountability within the justice enterprise, with funding and policy oversight bodies, and with the public. The development of performance measures parallels the establishment of goals in the planning process, and the use of these measures is a key indicator of successful project management.

Analyze Information Exchange

A thorough analysis of information exchange between justice organizations is essential to a successful integration initiative. It is impossible to automate information exchange without first identifying and analyzing critical dimensions of the information exchanges through the documentation of business processes and workflow. By bringing agency staff together to review information processing, many jurisdictions have been able to make dramatic improvements in working relationships and data flow. Although most employees generally understand how information is passed between

justice organizations, few grasp the fine details beyond the boundaries of their own domain.

The information exchange analysis is conducted by identifying and documenting each relevant instance of information passing between justice organizations. SEARCH, with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, has developed the Justice Information Exchange Model (JIEM)[4] as a tool to assist with this review.

■ Adopt or Develop Standards

The development of data and procedural standards is another key indicator of progress in an integration effort. When information crosses the boundaries of justice organizations, it must be in a recognized and interpretable format to be useful—otherwise, there is little benefit to the automation of information exchange. Before electronic interfaces can be developed between justice system applications, the respective organizations must forge agreements among themselves about what information will be transferred, when it will be transferred, and how it will be transferred. Because of the size and complexity of the justice community, the best way to establish these agreements is to have all of the participating organizations jointly develop and adopt business rules and standards for data to govern information exchange. Fortunately, a great deal of work is being done at the national level to standardize justice data, documents, and business processes. These standards can be adapted for use in any state or local integration initiative.

■ Create a Sound Integration Architecture

Architecture is the blueprint for construction of the integrated system. It includes *infrastructure* (the development, processing, data, and communications environment in which applications run), *applications* (software packages that assist justice agencies in doing their work), and *interfaces* (connections between systems that allow access to and exchange of data between applications). A sound architecture is the foundation of a successful integrated system.

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[4] For details on the JIEM project, visit: **www.search.org/ integration/info_exchange.asp**.

Many factors determine the nature of the integration architecture. Existing technology and integration should be considered, including the maturity, functionality, and operating environment of the systems. The size and complexity of the network will dictate certain approaches, in conjunction with the geography and population distribution of the state. Volume of information flow and cost also are factors.

Developing an integration architecture is a key indicator of progress. This milestone must be completed before the actual work of building or modifying infrastructure, applications, and interfaces begins. The National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) is doing a great deal of work in this area to develop enterprise architectural models that will help states in developing integration architecture.

■ Develop the Infrastructure

Before information can be passed electronically between organizations, there must be a highway upon which it can travel. Each justice organization must have appropriate access to that highway in order for integration to succeed.

With respect to infrastructure for integration initiatives, the most important elements are communications bandwidth and available protocols, which will be essential to establishing linkages through which information can flow. The internal computing environment of justice organizations is also relevant, particularly if they are saddled with antiquated hardware and software that pose a barrier to integration.

■ Improve Agency and Organization Applications

Justice organizations cannot exchange information electronically if they are not automated. Justice system applications, such as case and records management systems, must be compliant with integration standards adopted by the jurisdiction. They must have the capacity to import and export information. Clearly, integration will require the creation or modification of existing systems. This work must be completed before interfaces between the applications can be implemented.

Many architectures require the development of separate applications that reside *between* justice organizations to support the integration initiative. Often these applications will translate data into a standard format or determine the correct recipient agency to which a transaction should be routed. These *middleware* applications are equally important to the internal applications used by justice organizations. The specifics of application development priorities should be laid out in the integration plan for the state.

■ Establish Interfaces

Interfaces are connections between justice system applications that operate on the infrastructure that has been developed. Electronic interfaces already exist in most justice enterprises, but often are not compatible with each other or with the architecture that has been adopted for the integration initiative. As with applications, interfaces must be developed or modified to fit the integration roadmap. Business rules also are needed to govern how and when the interfaces are used—which is done during the information exchange analysis. As the interfaces are implemented, integration becomes a reality.

Conclusion

As the justice enterprise works through each of these key milestones in support of justice integration, it ensures that the initiative has the proper backing of key stakeholders; follows a well-charted course with a singular, agreed-upon vision; enhances business process through analysis of agency and organizational exchanges; and conforms to industry accepted standards for information sharing. Each milestone is a thoughtful building block that enhances work done in the preceding milestone and develops a solid operational, technical, and policy foundation for a successful integrated justice initiative. Of course, once integration in the justice enterprise commences, the process continues and so does the need for proper planning, enhancement, staffing, and funding.

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Resources

- For information on the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, including the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative, visit: **www.it.usdoj.gov**

- For information on the National Governors Association, visit: **www.nga.org**

- For information on integrated justice information systems (including state and local profiles of integrated justice information systems efforts and the Integration Planning Guide), the Justice Information Exchange Model Modeling Tool©, and standards efforts such as XML, visit SEARCH, The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics: **www.search.org**

- For information on Enterprise Architecture Development, visit the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO): **www.nascio.org**