Specialized System Databases

How the Technology Works
Systems databases are unique in that they build upon the basic database architecture, but in order to be effective, require collaboration from multiple partners in the community. Examples include Criminal Justice Information Systems (CJIS), offender management systems, and victim notification systems. *(See the Databases Tipsheet for more information about the basic operation of databases.)*

How are Grantees (Agencies and Partnerships) Using It?
“CJIS” is a category of criminal justice system databases that link with the FBI’s National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Typically, a CJIS is a state-level database under the oversight of the state’s Department of Justice. CJIS allows both export of data to NCIC and searching of NCIC. A state CJIS generally contains more information than NCIC and allows more specific searches and queries. Some CJIS automatically send regular updates to NCIC while others require NCIC to “pull” updates.

Offender management systems are used by specialized courts to keep track of incarcerated offenders and to monitor offender compliance with release/probation conditions. These systems may include a jail management system, a court case management system, an active and inactive arrest warrant list, a sex offender registry, a database of state statutes, and more. Offender management systems are generally accessible by relevant community agencies like probation, prosecution, etc. In some cases, a nonprofit agency providing drug and alcohol counseling, abuser intervention, etc. may access and update the data.

Victim notification systems (VNS) are systems designed to notify crime victims about the release of the perpetrator. Typically, victims register for this service with their phone number and/or email address. The victim is automatically contacted every time a change in the offender’s custody status occurs. Some VNS also provide information on upcoming court hearings, scheduled court events,
and their outcomes. The VNS will continue to try to contact the victim until the victim enters her/his personally selected 4-digit code to verify that she/he has received the message.

Benefits and Risks

- **CJIS:** Systems that regularly push updates to NCIC ensure that NCIC is updated more regularly than systems that require NCIC to pull updates. Additionally, some CJIS are setup to actually query the source databases that feed into NCIC, thus ensuring that the most recent versions are queried. If the CJIS contains an offender registry component, it is important to assess what information is being included in publicly searchable database, since the agency does not want to include information that would identify the victims. (For example, instead of saying that a sexual offender was charged with child molestation of twin six-year-old girls, it is less identifying to saying that the offender was charged with second degree sexual offense against minor children.) In some communities, detailed information may be too identifiable, and the victims’ identities may be revealed.

- **Offender Management:** Since the purpose of this database is offender accountability, it is important to ensure that it is not used to share victim information.

- **Victim Notification Systems:** If the database is not regularly updated, this can create a false sense of security for the victim. With victim notification systems, data must be input almost immediately to avoid the victim believing the offender is still in custody when he was actually released a day or two earlier.

Things to Consider

- Specialized databases require all partners to regularly input and update data so that the database can be relied on as the most up-to-date source of information. Is the community prepared (have adequate resources,
staffing, and training) to ensure that the database is updated regularly and audited for accuracy?

- How many different users will have access to the database and what security measures will be implemented to protect the database from unauthorized access, viruses, etc.?

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