Minnesota’s Transition to NIBRS

The Advisory Group welcomed a presentation by BCA product manager Patti Zafke on Minnesota’s nearly completed transition from Summary crime reporting to National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) crime reporting. Zafke’s presentation detailed the differences between the systems and how the transition to NIBRS will benefit law enforcement and criminal justice in Minnesota.

The primary difference between Summary and NIBRS crime reporting is that in the former, only the most serious crime is reported from an incident, whereas in the latter, every crime (up to 10) is reported, as well as more details about the incident. NIBRS allows enriched data on incidents, such as the elements of the offense (e.g., what was stolen, type/amount of drugs, entry point of a burglary) and the characteristics and relationships of victims and offenders. Given this, NIBRS provides a far better understanding of what occurred during an incident. Increasing data quality and quantity improves crime analysis and reduces workload and costs. It also helps agencies and advocacy organizations identify trends and be more strategic about staffing, funding and response.

The FBI announced in 2016 that it would sunset Summary crime reporting in favor of NIBRS reporting in January 2021. The BCA prioritized Minnesota’s transition, with a goal of 100 percent of Minnesota law enforcement agencies submitting NIBRS data by the end of this year. Currently, 391 out of 420 (93 percent) agencies have transitioned.

Minnesota agencies submit data directly from their records management systems to the BCA’s Crime Reporting System (CRS). The BCA submits the data to the FBI along with investigative and citation data. Submitting through CRS provides a streamlined process and enables the BCA to ensure data quality, compile crime data for dashboards, and produce the Minnesota Crime Book publication.

Looking forward, the BCA seeks to expand CRS reporting capabilities and replace the yearly publication of the Minnesota Crime Book with a web portal and supplemental yearly publication. This publicly accessible web portal will allow users to view and filter crime data using visualization tools.

The BCA is meeting with the FBI and officials from other states to discuss the challenges of creating a crime data portal, and engaging with stakeholders and the public via meetings and surveys.

Identification Standards White Paper

The Data & Identification Standards subcommittee provided an overview of its white paper analyzing the problem of misidentified offenders—both offenders using someone else’s name and offenders with changed names. Accurate identification ensures that the right person is held accountable for an offense, and that an innocent person is not wrongly identified. Being misidentified for an offense causes problems for victims and offenders—for example, in finding employment or renting an apartment. And while biometrics would allow for more accurate identification, collecting that data could create privacy concerns.

The subcommittee looked at many aspects of this problem, including how other states and countries handle identity on a societal level.

The subcommittee’s white paper concludes that correctly identifying someone at the beginning of the criminal justice process would solve many current issues. However, the group needs help from the legislature and the public to understand how to best make that happen while balancing justice and privacy.
The white paper details short-term actions that criminal justice groups are taking in Minnesota to address the problem:

- The Department of Corrections is planning to change their policy on allowing offenders to change their names on file to their legal names.
- The BCA is developing a marker for the criminal history database to indicate the most recently known legal name.
- The Minnesota County Attorneys Association is pushing legislation to ensure more automatic expungement of records for dismissed charges.

Looking ahead, the report recommends more state guidance or statutory changes encouraging the use of an offender’s known legal name, and state agencies and associations could provide training on ensuring the use of the legal names.

Expungements Process

The Attorney General’s office recently began an initiative to increase public awareness of the process to expunge criminal records. The Advisory Group briefly discussed the implications of this process and how this may impact criminal justice. The Attorney General’s office will provide an overview of how it handles expungements during the Advisory Group February meeting.

Updates and Announcements

- The Data Practices subcommittee will begin working on a release of information “cheat sheet” for probation agencies, summarizing issues and linking to relevant statutes.
- The Advisory Group discussed its current vacancies, and also how to increase the group’s diversity, especially from underrepresented communities. Members agreed to reach out to relevant organizations to fill open positions as defined by the group’s bylaws. Members discussed leveraging existing organizations to increase the diversity of the Advisory Group. Send your ideas or proposals regarding diversity on the Advisory Group to Dana Gotz. The group will continue its discussion of diversifying its ranks at the next meeting.

Next Advisory Group Meeting

Friday, February 12, 2021
9 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Location TBD