

LAW ENFORCEMENT INFORMATION SHARING: A Florida Case Study

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ABSTRACT: *Many attempts have been made over the last several decades to improve communication among law enforcement agencies. This article is a case study of a "low-level" data sharing project in Florida that could serve as a national model. The Florida Law Enforcement Data Sharing Consortium is a partnership between the University of Central Florida and more than one hundred law enforcement agencies. It offers an inexpensive, yet technically advanced alternative to the proprietary data sharing model. Its distributed architecture was endorsed by the Markle Foundation, the 9/11 Commission, and the 2004 National Security Act. Civil liberties concerns raised by this and other types of data sharing projects are discussed.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1953, when Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson asked the American Bar Association (ABA) to conduct a thorough study of the criminal justice system, the prevailing wisdom oversimplified policing. Three years later, the ABA's Survey of the Administration of Criminal Justice began the first systematic field observations of criminal justice officials at work. Rather than seeing police as simply politically influenced, corrupt, or untrained and under funded, the ABA researchers, led by Frank Remington, stressed that police departments were administrative, bureaucratic agencies exercising enormous discretion (Walker, 1993). The discretionary decisions of each official influenced, and were influenced by, discretionary decisions of officials in other agencies. Yet, there was little coordination and interaction among agencies within a

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single jurisdiction (Kelling, 1999). Multi-jurisdictional coordination was rarer still, and the concept of automated sharing of low-level police data was not yet technologically feasible.

The pioneering work of the ABA, followed in 1967 by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967), led to several attempts to improve communication and cooperation among criminal justice agencies. Yet, despite decades of efforts aimed at integration, the criminal justice system remains largely uncoordinated and unconnected.

This article focuses on one form of coordination—automated sharing of low-level police information. It presents a case study of a data integration project in Florida that could serve as a model for automated sharing of law enforcement record management systems (RMS). The Florida Law Enforcement Data Sharing Consortium (LEDSC) is viewed in this article from several perspectives, including program origins, organizational structure, technological design, funding mechanisms, and expansion plans. The analysis is based on interviews, project memoranda, media commentary, state and federal legislative activities, advocacy group statements, and observations of the Consortium's committee meetings.

The article begins with an overview of the political, organizational, and technological context of automated low-level law enforcement data sharing. It then presents a brief review of the current data sharing landscape in the United States. Following the presentation of the Florida case study, a discussion section addresses the civil rights concerns raised by different types of data sharing projects.

BACKGROUND

Policies and practices of the criminal justice system can only be understood in their social and political context (Friedman, 1993). It has been frequently argued that the lack of coordination noted by the ABA researchers stemmed from a Cold War model whereby secrecy and security of information were the norm, and a "need to know" mentality blocked communications among justice system agencies (Markle Foundation, 2003). Thus, the political mindset was not conducive to sharing information among local agencies. This view is somewhat misleading, however, because there is no evidence of good coordination between law enforcement agencies prior to the initiation of the Cold War. The reluctance of federal law enforcement agencies, particularly the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to share information with other law enforcement agencies is legendary.

Organizational issues also hindered cooperation among agencies. Generally, local agencies collected and stored their data in a format that served their individual record keeping needs. Standardization of information systems among agencies was uncommon. Sharing information with other agencies within the jurisdiction was generally done in an unsystematic and ad hoc fashion, if at all. Multi-jurisdictional information sharing was rarer still.

Political and organizational impediments to integration were exacerbated by technological limitations. Early data integration projects used computer programs that were cumbersome and slow compared to the high-speed technology available today. Thus, much of law enforcement entered the digital age without a background of electronic collaboration.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and subsequent revelations about the failures of communication, underscored the continued fragmentation of criminal justice. Two months before the attacks, Mohammed Atta, the alleged ringleader of the terrorist group, had been stopped in Delray Beach, Florida for speeding. The officer was unaware that a warrant for Atta's arrest had previously been issued in Broward County after Atta failed to appear in court for driving without a license. If information from nearby counties had been available on the Delray Beach's patrol car computer, Atta might have been sitting in a jail cell on September 11 instead of the cockpit of an American Airlines jet.

The September 11 attacks vividly displayed the dangers of applying a Cold War paradigm to information sharing in the 21st century. In the aftermath of the attack, the Markle Foundation, a private philanthropy founded to strengthen national security through information technology, formed the Task Force on National Security in the Information Age. Their subsequent reports stressed the importance of preventing terrorist attacks by creating a decentralized network of information sharing and analysis (Markle Foundation, 2002, 2003). The Markle Task Force's recommendations were echoed by the 2004 report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (also known as the 9-11 Commission). The recommendations of both groups were adopted by the federal government in the National Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. Specifically, Section 1016 of this Act calls for an automated information sharing approach to national security based on connecting existing systems through a distributed, rather than a central warehouse, architecture.

Advances in technological procedures, such as the Global Justice XML standards, have the potential to resolve many of the problems that have plagued law enforcement data sharing. Of particular impor-

tance, newer technologies allow integration of dissimilar record management systems, easing the long standing difficulties caused by incompatible software systems. Thus, political concerns about terrorism have combined with technological innovations to produce a potential shift in many criminal justice organizations' attitudes toward sharing data. The climate may be ripe for change.

Paradigm shifts in the hard sciences occur when an "anomaly subverts the existing tradition of scientific practice" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 6). Transposing this observation to law enforcement data sharing, hoarding of information for internal purposes represents "normal science." Traditional practices will only be challenged when a revolution of ideas "requires the reconstruction of prior assumptions and the reevaluation of prior facts" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 7).

It is too soon to say whether new assumptions will emerge among law enforcement in regard to electronically sharing data. While several of the technical impediments have been removed, the economic and organizational hurdles to widespread data sharing have yet to be surmounted in most jurisdictions. The data sharing project discussed in this article employs an economic, organizational, and technological approach designed to overcome many of these barriers.

INFORMATION SHARING LANDSCAPE

No exhaustive list of data sharing projects exists. Scott (2004) identified over 200 automated criminal justice information sharing programs that were mentioned in the scholarly, trade, and professional literature. Of the initial 200 programs, about half were presented as sharing "low-level" data such as that routinely found in police RMS. When he contacted many of these programs, however, Scott found that few were currently operating, and many had never been implemented. Often, the only written material about the projects was found on the websites of commercial vendors. It is thus important that specific case studies appear in the scholarly literature.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Center for Program Evaluation encourages research on low-level data sharing projects, and it notes the lack of scholarly work in this area. Most of the work that has been published focuses on implementation and usability issues (see for example Hauck, 1999; Hauck et al., 2001, 2002; Lin et al., 2004; Schroeder, 2001; Chen et al., 2002). Very few outcome evaluations have been conducted (Benedetti et al., 2001; Zeng et al., n.d). The BJA attributes the lack of research to the "newness of work in this area" (BJA, 2005).

From the few existing scholarly products, the BJA concluded that data sharing projects are more likely to succeed if they have commit-

ment from agency leaders, facilitate active participation by users, focus on training and planning, and continually monitor implementation (BJA, 2005). These criteria may be necessary, but they are not sufficient to address the underlying issue of how the raw data contained in police databases can be converted into intelligence for crime control and counterterrorism.

The main findings from the usability studies are that police need and want information sharing. This is suggested by a data sharing initiative that began in the late 1990s in San Diego County, California. ARJIS, which stands for Automated Regional Justice Information System, connects 38 regional law enforcement agencies. Using for comparison a similar sized agency that did not participate in information sharing, Zaworski (2005) conducted a usability survey and found that information sharing contributed positively to the San Diego officers' perceptions about their productivity and ability to clear cases. Information sharing also contributed to officers' perceptions of their safety.

Fifty percent of the officers in the comparison group reported that they did not get information from other law enforcement agencies, while none of the survey respondents from San Diego made a similar claim. Less than 5% of the comparison group reported being happy with the information received from other law enforcement agencies; 56% of the San Diego officers were satisfied. Officers in both groups noted that information is very important to street cops (85% in the control group and 94% in the San Diego user group) (Zaworski, 2005). The San Diego data underscore the importance of electronic information sharing. This public policy issue remains a critical need for most law enforcement officers in the nation.

LAW ENFORCEMENT RECORD MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (RMS)

Automated law enforcement data sharing programs can be broadly divided into three categories:

1. National or regional programs, most of which focus on intelligence gathering or organized crime,
2. Statewide projects that parallel the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) in the automated sharing of high-level law enforcement data, and
3. Automated low-level police information sharing projects, such as the LEDSC discussed in this article.

High-level data are routinely shared by local law enforcement agencies with national and state databases. For instance, the NCIC contains vital information on fingerprints, criminal histories, mug shots,

foreign fugitives, and federal prisoners. In Florida, the site of the case study reported in this article, high-level data are normally shared among authorized agencies through the Florida Crime Information Center (FCIC) or the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's (FDLE) Criminal Justice Network (CJNet). This secure statewide intranet is designed exclusively for criminal justice agencies. It includes statewide fingerprint and criminal history databases, as well as information on felony and misdemeanor warrants, sex offenders, missing persons, stolen vehicles, and other stolen property.

Low-level data, which are ineligible for submission to NCIC and most state data centers, represent the vast bulk of information collected by law enforcement and are generally stored in automated record management systems. These may include information on suspects, witnesses, pawn shop transactions, vehicle stops, field interviews, suspicious vehicles, towed vehicles, criminal incident reports, noncriminal incident reports, calls for service, property, evidence, and other types of police notes or records. A study by the Orange County Sheriff's Office revealed that about 97% of its record management system was low-level information not routinely shared with other agencies (Scott, 2004).

Immediate electronic access to low-level data could improve the efficiency of investigative processes. An investigator might spend hours locating witnesses and telephoning other agencies for investigative leads, but the probability of finding someone helpful or knowledgeable at the other end of the line is a hit or miss proposition. Investigators are forced to spend valuable time developing critical information (e.g., where suspects live and who they associate with, background on victims and witnesses, and other relevant details that may only be available outside the investigator's jurisdiction).

Many property offenses are not vigorously pursued because of workload priorities. Electronic sharing of low-level data across jurisdictions speeds up and expands the reach of investigators, and consequently it may help police solve routine crimes, such as thefts, that have not been vigorously pursued in the past. With an efficient low-level data sharing system, this information could be obtained by the click of a mouse.

FLORIDA LAW ENFORCEMENT DATA SHARING CONSORTIUM (LEDSC)

Origins

Some of the key partnerships that ultimately produced the Florida LEDSC were formed in 2000 when the Sheriffs of Hillsborough

(Tampa) and Orange (Orlando) counties attempted to investigate property offenders traveling along central Florida's I-4 corridor, which connects Tampa and Orlando. The sheriffs wanted to electronically link stolen property reports to pawn shop transactions and share the results.

Staff from the Orange County Sheriff's office had for several years been working with faculty from the University of Central Florida's (UCF) criminal justice, computer, and engineering departments to develop crime mapping and other analytical investigative tools. With start up financial assistance from UCF and the Orange County Sheriff's office, the UCF team developed a distributed architectural system called FINDER (Florida Information Network for Data Exchange and Retrieval).

Seminole County and Orange County sheriffs were the first two agencies to connect to FINDER. They were followed quickly by sheriffs in Osceola, Polk, and Hillsborough counties. Although work on data sharing had begun in 2000, the terrorist attacks of 2001 accelerated the development and expansion of the project.

FINDER became operational in 2002. Police chiefs and sheriffs around the central Florida region and beyond joined in quick succession. Soon, FINDER was expanded beyond pawn shop data, and by the end of 2003 it included person and vehicle information. As of mid-2005, 122 agencies were participating in the consortium—29 sheriffs' offices, 89 municipal police departments, and 4 state agencies. The consortium's members are responsible for the public safety of about 80% of Florida's population. The consortium's goal is to link all of the state's law enforcement agencies by 2006.

Millions of police records, heretofore inaccessible, are now available through FINDER. The Hillsborough County (Tampa) Sheriff, for instance, has over 14,000,000 records of persons. The Orange County (Orlando) Sheriff has another 8,000,000 such records.

These records represent the vast bulk of information collected by local law enforcement and stored in RMS. They include, among other things, information on suspects, witnesses, pawn shop transactions, vehicle stops, field interviews, suspicious vehicles, towed vehicles, criminal incident reports, noncriminal incident reports, calls for service, property, and other types of evidence.

Reducing Organizational Resistance Through Distributed Networks

Many past data sharing projects ultimately failed because of bureaucratic resistance to change, the unwillingness of agencies' to relinquish control over information, and technological roadblocks, including

incompatibility among different information systems in different agencies (Harbitter, 2004; Homburg, 2000). The LEDSC sought to mitigate these traditional organizational obstacles by adopting a distributed technological architecture.

The traditional model of data sharing required agencies to send their information to a single remote server where it might remain indefinitely. The LEDSC does not use a central warehouse; instead, participating agencies retain control of their own data. When a request for information is made to the FINDER system, the records remain secure within each agency. Data are not co-mingled into one file. Further, each participating agency decides which of their data elements they wish to share.

FINDER, built on Microsoft's .Net and SQL Server technology, uses the Global Justice XML Data Model to ensure that all agencies will easily be able to share their data. The various record management systems are linked to a data sharing server located within each agency, which in turn, upon a request by an authorized user, sends the information via the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's CJNet in real time in response to the query. The shared data is thereby retained and controlled at the participating agency, and the requestor is accessing data that already exists in various agencies' record management systems.

Not only do participating agencies retain control of their own data, but they can also stop sharing at any time by simply shutting off their data sharing servers. When one agency's systems are down, the others are not affected. There is no central point for a virus attack or hardware failure that would shut down the entire system.

A distributed data approach also addresses the problems created by different agencies using different types of record management systems. The LEDSC approach electronically translates different systems into a format suitable for automated sharing regardless of software used.

Distributed architecture thus allows law enforcement agencies to maintain their autonomy and independence and at the same time enhance their criminal investigatory capabilities. The LEDSC is consistent with the recommendations of the Markle Foundation, the 9-11 Commission, and the National Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

Organizational Approach

The LEDSC is a grassroots, self governing organization. A steering committee, composed of designated personnel from agencies that

have joined the project, oversees policy, finances, and future development efforts. The steering committee, which includes criminal investigators, crime analysts, administrators, and information technologists, directs the UCF staff in refining and expanding the analytical tools used by FINDER, as well as providing general policy direction for the project. The officials working closest to the information are thus able to participate in devising methods for sharing it. Focus groups of consortium members are formed regularly to address refinements and extensions of FINDER. This governance structure is congruent with the goal of connectivity through collaboration.

The steering committee meets monthly. This meeting is followed by a general meeting, which is open to members, potential members, and anyone interested in learning more about the data sharing project. These meetings provide a forum for discussing mutual problems, linking technological developments to agency needs, and directing ongoing expansion efforts.

The UCF team provides organizational and technical support to the steering committee. Faculty and graduate students from several academic disciplines work to implement the organizational and technical suggestions of the steering committee. The UCF team also provides technical support to the participating agencies.

The team approach means that all members can benefit—at no additional cost—from improvements made to the system to accommodate new members. Because the LEDSC does not use private sector vendors, all software it develops is the property of the group. This nonproprietary approach is one of the biggest distinctions between the LEDSC and most other data sharing projects across the country.

Funding: Merging Low Cost and High Tech Solutions

Law enforcement agencies typically work within the constraints of tight budgets and shifting priorities. The public to public structure of the LEDSC, whereby a state university partners with local law enforcement agencies, offers a modestly priced alternative to the traditional private-public partnerships. The university affiliation provides a neutral setting capable of developing cutting edge technological solutions.

Members pay a relatively small annual fee based on the number of sworn officers, thus making it possible for smaller agencies to participate. The fees are \$10,000 for 500 or more officers; \$7,500 for 250-499 officers, \$5,000 for 100-249 officers; and \$2,500 for 99 or fewer officers.

UCF has obtained grant funding for the project from local, state, and federal sources. Further, the LEDSC will be part of a planned Public Safety and Technology Center at UCF. The center designation will

bring an extra layer of permanency to the data sharing project and increase funding opportunities.

Much of the work on FINDER is done by UCF doctoral students with close oversight from faculty advisors. Students get valuable training by working on cutting edge, "real world" projects. The advantages to the LEDSC are also impressive. Graduate students who are experienced in "state of the art" technology contribute directly to the development and enhancement of the project and provide a community service through the public-public partnership. Such an arrangement allows local governments to receive technologically sophisticated tools that may be otherwise unavailable due to scarce resources.

Outcomes: Research Problems in Distributed Systems

It is difficult empirically to show the impact of this project because of the type of distributed architecture used by FINDER. While the distributed system resolves critical organizational and privacy issues, it complicates evaluative research.

Because there is no central warehouse where data is stored, it is impossible to know how often FINDER is used without first downloading the daily log information from each participating agency and counting the number of times officers have logged on to the system. As of the end of September 2005, over 600,000 queries had been made to FINDER. In Hillsborough County, the sheriff's office has logged over 51,000 queries, while the Tampa Police Department has entered over 47,000 queries. An estimated 400 arrests statewide are attributable to FINDER, and over \$1,000,000 in stolen property has been recovered.

Further, empirical inquiry as to the effectiveness of this project is complicated by a lack of data on how useful the system is in producing investigative leads. FINDER includes a "success tag" that users have been urged to click when their search produced a positive result. Users have been asked to fill out a short form that describes the type of investigative lead developed through FINDER. While the success tag has been clicked over 200 times, this figure is relatively meaningless. It is likely that most officers who develop investigative leads through FINDER do not report them, either because they do not know when they log off the system whether the information will produce a positive result, or because they simply do not take the time to fill out the forms.

The project is expanding the information that will be captured in the success tag forms, but the larger question of the unreported successes remains unresolved. Further study is needed to estimate the proportion of uses that result in a reported success. Incentives to

encourage officers to report successes have been discussed by the LEDSC, but at this point in the development of the project, anecdotal examples must suffice.

Anecdotally, the response to FINDER has been exceedingly positive. One experienced investigator commented that he had "been waiting for this all his life." Focus groups of LEDSC members have noted that the system is exceedingly "user friendly" and that UCF's technological support smoothed the transition to data sharing.

The following examples illustrate the types of successes that have so far been attributable to the LEDSC:

1. A check cashing store was robbed, and the cashier was terrorized and locked in a closet. Weeks later, the victim, who by then had changed jobs and was working as a bank teller, recognized the perpetrator in her teller line. When she pushed the panic alarm, the suspect left the bank, but she noticed that he met a woman outside whom she remembered as a former employee of the check cashing store. Using the woman's name, the detective searched FINDER and obtained the name of a possible suspect from a prior domestic violence report. After further investigation, the suspect was arrested.
2. Detectives used FINDER to uncover a multicounty burglary ring. They recovered \$120,000 in stolen property taken from Verizon and BellSouth stores around the state. Four suspects were arrested and are facing 47 felony charges.
3. FINDER helped an officer identify a career criminal wanted by the police in New York and suspected of several armed robberies in Florida. The detective working the case had first tried conventional investigative techniques; without data sharing, the suspect might still be at large.
4. Detectives received a report of audio equipment stolen from a car. Four days later, the property was recovered in an Orange County pawn shop using FINDER. Orange County is in Central Florida, three counties and two hours drive east of Hillsborough County. Without FINDER it would be unlikely that the property would have been recovered and a suspect so easily identified.
5. One sheriff's office used FINDER to locate pawn transactions made by people who were under house arrest. The investigators then obtained arrest warrants for violations of the conditions of house arrest.

6. A detective received a report that \$11,000 worth of jewelry had been stolen from a hotel room in Osceola County. The investigator logged onto FINDER and immediately discovered the jewelry in an Orange County pawn shop.
7. FINDER was used to locate golf clubs that had been purchased with a counterfeit check and pawned in Polk County, which is in Central Florida, by a suspect living in the panhandle city of Pensacola.

Agenda for the Future

Plans for the future include expanding FINDER to Florida's 355 law enforcement agencies by 2007. This plan is being pursued by two high-level officials from the Orange County Sheriff's Office; they are assigned full time to the project and travel the state demonstrating FINDER and encouraging agencies to join.

The statewide expansion plan has state and national legislative support. A state representative joined with a state senator to secure \$525,000 in state funding. The members of the Florida U.S. Congressional delegation were successful in obtaining an additional \$250,000 in federal funding to finance statewide expansion. Further funding is anticipated as more agencies join the project.

FINDER is undergoing continual technological development, with new versions being planned for release every six months. The revisions reflect the discussions of the focus groups that meet to brain storm improvements in the system. Future plans include adding jail records, which will allow officers to quickly see if a suspect is currently incarcerated or was incarcerated at the time of the suspected offense. Possibilities of connecting with other justice system databases are also being discussed

A regional partnership has been discussed by representatives from states along the Interstate 10 corridor, including Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas (Greenemeier, 2005). Expansion beyond Florida would further the goal of criminal justice integration urged more than a half century ago by the ABA.

DISCUSSION

The impact of technology on law enforcement is complex and controversial. Technology has been lauded for aiding the police in the performance of their crime control function. The police reform movements of the early 20th century stressed the need to remove politi-

cal influences from policing and replace them with rational, modern systems in which technology would help neutralize and standardize decision making (Walker, 1977; Deflem, 2002).

Technological influences on policing have also been criticized, particularly for facilitating intrusions on constitutional privacy rights. Technology has been cast as an evil agent of social control and conformity. Automated information sharing systems could be used to suppress lawful political activities and become tools for spying on the public (Marx, 1995, 2004a, 2004b).

Five interrelated civil liberty concerns about automated exchange of law enforcement records have been raised. These include:

1. The validity of the information shared;
2. The opportunity for judicial oversight of the information shared;
3. The type of information shared (e.g., public records, criminal data, financial information);
4. The technological architecture used for sharing, with special criticism of technologies that use central warehouses for long term data storage; and
5. The professional affiliation of the people allowed access to the automated data sharing system.

Different types of data sharing projects have different potential impacts on civil liberties. For instance, civil rights groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have objected to projects that, unlike the LEDSC, merge public and private data.

Merging Public and Private Information

MATRIX (Multi State Antiterrorism Information Exchange) was launched in Florida in 2002 in response to the September 11 attacks. The project was funded with \$8 million in grants from the Department of Homeland Security and \$4 million from the Justice Department and developed by a Boca Raton company, Seisint (Krouse, 2004).

The pilot project called for the FDLE and a private company, the Institute for Intergovernmental Research, to manage a national database of public records, such as driver licenses and automobile registrations, along with records from law enforcement and private corporations. The proposed database, called FACTS (Factual Analysis Criminal Threat Solution), would have included such records as FAA pilot licenses and aircraft ownership, property ownership, Coast Guard registered vessels, state sexual offender lists, federal terrorist watch lists, corporation filings, bankruptcy filings, state issued professional licenses. Also included would be information on criminal histories, de-

partment of corrections information and photos, sexual offender lists, driver's license and photo images, and motor vehicle registrations.

The Total Information Awareness automated system, a Pentagon project proposed by Admiral John Poindexter, became a lightning rod for civil rights advocacy. Dubbed the "super snoop," the project was scuttled by Congress in 2003, largely based on civil rights objections to data mining, or discovering "previously unknown, valid patterns and relationships in large data sets" (Adriaans & Zantinge, 1996). Some critics argued that MATRIX was an unethical attempt by federal authorities to recreate at the state level a project that had been rejected at the federal level.

At least sixteen states announced that they were interested in joining MATRIX, but ultimately civil liberty concerns, including the use of a central data warehousing architecture, discouraged participation (Krouse, 2004). Alabama, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, New York, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin dropped out, but Michigan, Florida, Ohio, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania were still on board when the ACLU filed a lawsuit in early 2005 against the Michigan State Police.

The Michigan State Police were the only MATRIX participant operating under the constraints of a state statute, the Interstate Law Enforcement Intelligence Organizations Act of 1980, which requires legislative approval or citizen oversight before sharing personal information with out of state agencies. The ACLU argued that by participating in MATRIX, the Michigan State Police had violated the statute. The ACLU arguments may have been influential in the termination of federal funding for the project, although the FDLE's now defunct MATRIX website (www.matrix-at.org, shut down on July 1, 2005), labeled the project a "success" when it announced that it was terminating MATRIX as of April 15, 2005. The ACLU director of the Technology and Liberty Project said that "[a]nother major assault on privacy has been turned back" (United Press International, 2005).

LEDSC and Civil Rights

While automated data sharing projects that combine data from public and private records may remain problematic, other types of projects, including the one discussed in this article, provide a model for addressing some of the primary concerns of civil libertarians.

Only police records are shared in the LEDSC; public records are not combined with law enforcement records. The data shared already exist; technology simply speeds up the process of gathering investigative leads. The distributed architecture uses real time queries that avoid

many of the privacy problems associated with central databanks and permanent record storage. The information is accessed only by law enforcement officials who have been given password access by their departments. The shared information does not establish probable cause, and it is subject to judicial oversight if the police request a search or arrest warrant.

The ACLU has not officially endorsed the LEDSC, but the chairman of the Central Florida chapter said that he did not think it posed civil liberties concerns because of the sharing methodology employed (Douthat, 2004). Further, he said that if “the system is really only a way for law enforcement to more efficiently share data, that’s not something that’s necessarily alarming or that would cause the ACLU any particular concerns” (Guitierrez, 2005, p. 3).

This article describes a growing and evolving automated low-level data sharing project in Florida. The LEDSC is based on collaboration among Florida police chiefs, sheriffs, and several departments at the University of Central Florida. Since the LEDSC does not rely on private commercial vendors, it avoids the expenses usually associated with private sector applications. It uses a grassroots, self governing organizational model. Civil liberties concerns are reduced by the distributed technology used in the project. Projects like Florida’s LEDSC could make the integrated criminal justice system envisioned by the ABA researchers more than a half century ago a reality. They could also add a valuable layer of protection against crime and terrorism.

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