



Federal Bureau of Investigation
Uniform Crime Reporting Program
National Incident-Based Reporting System

30 Questions and Answers About



TRANSITION

Top 10 Questions About NIBRS

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Introduction

Through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is responding to law enforcement's call to upgrade and update the nation's crime statistics. To accomplish this, the UCR Program is transitioning from the Summary Reporting System (SRS) to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) by January 1, 2021. The FBI's transition to a NIBRS-only data collection will improve the nation's crime data through rich details and greater specificity of offenses. Some law enforcement officials, public leaders, researchers, or other people may have questions about why this is happening, how it will affect crime statistics, or other matters of concern. This document provides answers to common questions people may have about the NIBRS transition.

You can use this document in several ways:

- Use the "Find" feature of the Portable Document Format (PDF) to look for keywords like "format" or "UCR." The PDF window will then display a list of places in the document containing that keyword.
- Look at the Top 10 questions on Page 2. If you press "Control" while clicking on a question, the document will jump to the answer.
- Look at the table of contents on Page 3. The Contents lists several major topics, and you can scroll or control-click to the page with a desired topic.
- Read the entire document to gain a broad understanding of the NIBRS transition.

Based on the assumption there is some familiarity with the topic of UCR, the acronyms for FBI, UCR, and NIBRS are only established in this introduction. However, because you may only read the specific questions you are looking for, this document establishes less common acronyms and abbreviations like "SRS" for each relative question.

Plans for the NIBRS Transition

What is the NIBRS transition? Is the FBI retiring the UCR Program with the Summary Reporting System (SRS)?

The FBI is transitioning from the Summary Reporting System (SRS) collection of the UCR Program to focus on the rich details that data collected through NIBRS offers. The FBI is moving to a NIBRS-only UCR data collection at the recommendation of the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Advisory Policy Board:

“The FBI UCR Program will transition to a NIBRS-only data collection by January 1, 2021, and will evaluate the probability of achieving that goal on an annual basis. Federal, state, local, and tribal agencies unable to meet the five year transition and who have committed to transitioning to NIBRS will collaborate with the FBI CJIS to develop a transition plan and timeline for conversion.”

The FBI is working with the law enforcement community to prepare for this transition, and the FBI encourages all law enforcement agencies to participate.

People may be confused about the difference between SRS and UCR because, historically, the two terms have been incorrectly used interchangeably. SRS is the only mechanism of UCR data reporting being phased out. Other UCR datasets such as Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted will continue.

What is driving the NIBRS transition, and what major law enforcement organizations have endorsed it?

The Criminal Justice Information Services Advisory Policy Board passed a recommendation, which was subsequently approved by the FBI Director in February 2016, to transition all local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies from SRS to NIBRS by January 1, 2021. The transition to NIBRS is a top priority because its implementation will improve the nation’s crime statistics for reliability, accuracy, accessibility, and timeliness. The nation’s major law enforcement organizations—the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the Major County Sheriffs of America (formerly known as Major County Sheriffs’ Association), and the National Sheriffs’ Association—support the decision to transition to a NIBRS-only data collection by January 1, 2021. Read the joint statement of support for the NIBRS transition at www.fbi.gov/nibrs.

In addition, the FBI partnered with the Bureau of Justice Statistics on the National Crime Statistics Exchange initiative to fund technology solutions related to building NIBRS capability in

select states and 400 local agencies. Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) monies are also available for agencies working toward the NIBRS transition.

What approaches have some agencies used to transition to NIBRS?

Learn how two states approached their transitions to NIBRS in the FBI's publication from the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division. The *CJIS Link's* two-part series, "Going NIBRS, Two States Share Their Stories," is available on the FBI's website.

- Part 1: The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension stresses the importance of communication and shares valuable lessons that may benefit other agencies planning to transition to NIBRS. Read more at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/cjis-link/going-nibrs-part-1-minnesota-transition>.
- Part 2: The Georgia Bureau of Investigation considers the preparation of local law enforcement agencies to be a key factor in their success in achieving the NIBRS transition. Read more at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/cjis-link/going-nibrs-part-2-georgia-transition>.

More stories about NIBRS agencies are available on the NIBRS in the News archive on the [NIBRS Web page](#). In addition, several states are promoting the NIBRS transition on their respective state UCR Program websites. Three state websites that do a great job of communicating information about the NIBRS transition include those for Texas, Wyoming, and Oregon. Agencies may access those sites as follows:

- <http://www.dps.texas.gov/ucr/indexnibrs.htm>
- <http://wyomingdci.wyo.gov/dci-criminal-justice-information-systems-section/nibrs>
- http://www.oregon.gov/osp/CJIS/Pages/oucr_manual_trngguide.aspx

Note: For the most recent UCR technical specifications, user manuals, and data tools, visit the FBI's Web page at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/data-documentation>.

Benefits of NIBRS participation

What is NIBRS? What does “incident-based” mean?

NIBRS is a system for collecting crime data from across the nation through the FBI’s UCR Program. Its purpose is to provide statistics about crime so law enforcement agencies, communities, citizens, researchers, and public leaders can make well-informed decisions about how to deal with crime. Incident-based data is information about specific details of occurrences of crime including (but not limited to) information about victims, offenders, times, and locations for one or more offenses in the occurrence. This incident-based data helps to provide a more detailed understanding of crime than the Summary Reporting System.

What are the benefits of moving from the Summary Reporting System (SRS) to NIBRS?

NIBRS is a much more detailed, comprehensive system than SRS. NIBRS collects more robust data and details of crime, making it a more effective tool for policy-makers, analysts, and the general public to truly understand crime and make informed decisions about how to address the problem. SRS is limited, collecting aggregated (i.e., totaled) data and omitting some data in accordance with its Hierarchy Rule. (The SRS Hierarchy Rule states only the one most serious offense within a criminal incident is counted. For example, if a robbery and a homicide occur in the same incident, SRS will only count the homicide.) NIBRS collects data on up to 10 offenses per incident, and NIBRS collects data on types of offenses SRS does not count at all. For more information about how NIBRS is superior to SRS, see the article “Questions NIBRS Can Answer in the FBI’s publication from the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division, *CJIS Link*, on the FBI’s website at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/cjis-link/questions-nibrs-can-answer>.

Does NIBRS “aggregate” data?

NIBRS does not lose the component statistics that add up to grand totals like the Summary Reporting System (SRS) does. This means NIBRS can yield subtotals to answer questions about details of crimes about victims, offenders, arrestees, property types, location, and more. SRS provides victim and offender data for only for homicide offenses with limited details for only a few other offenses. For example, SRS can tell us how many rapes occurred and how many arrests there were for rape offenses (by age, sex, race, and ethnicity of arrestee) in a jurisdiction. However, NIBRS can tell us how many rapes occurred; the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of the victims, the offenders, and any persons arrested for rape; the date, time, and locations of those offenses; connections to any other offenses that may have occurred in those incidents; and whether or not the offenses were bias motivated.

What is the Summary Reporting System (SRS) Hierarchy Rule? Why does it matter if NIBRS does not have a Hierarchy Rule?

SRS has a Hierarchy Rule that says only the one most serious crime in a criminal incident will be counted as part of the statistics collection. For example, if a murder and a robbery happen in the same incident, then only the murder will be counted. The Hierarchy Rule was a technical necessity when SRS was created as a paper system in 1930, but it causes SRS to undercount most types of offenses other than homicide. By eliminating the Hierarchy Rule and counting up to 10 offenses per criminal incident, NIBRS is a more accurate measure of crime. This is especially important for capturing accurate counts of the less serious offenses that are commonly undercounted by SRS.

Where can I read more about how NIBRS is a better UCR data collection than SRS?

Read about general comparisons between NIBRS and SRS in the *CJIS Link* article “SRS to NIBRS: The Path to Better UCR Data,” which is available on the FBI’s website at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/cjis-link/srs-to-nibrs-the-path-to-better-ucr-data>.

Why should an agency transition to NIBRS?

There are many reasons why an agency should transition to NIBRS. Here is a link to “[Benefits of NIBRS Participation](#).”

Addressing concerns about the NIBRS transition

After January 1, 2021, will data from the Summary Reporting System (SRS) disappear? Will it become impossible for analysts and the public to use SRS data?

SRS data will not disappear. The FBI will keep the historical data in record, and the data will continue to be publicly available even after 2021. Also, the FBI will continue to publish SRS data converted from NIBRS data (in addition to the publication of NIBRS data) so agencies can continue trend analyses through the transitional years.

What is the legal authority for NIBRS?

The legal authority for NIBRS falls under that given for the UCR Program: Title 28, United States Code (U.S.C.), § 534(a) and (c) requires the FBI to collect and publish UCR data.

What will happen if some agencies do not make the transition to NIBRS?

The FBI is transitioning to a NIBRS-only crime data collection. In addition to the many agencies who have already made the transition, several agencies are committing to the transition and are collaborating with the FBI to develop a transition plan and timeline for conversion. Agencies that choose not to participate in NIBRS will not have their crime statistics included in the FBI's nationwide crime statistics. Also, agencies should be aware if they receive funding assistance based on participation in the UCR Program via the Summary Reporting System, then they might lose this funding.

Will NIBRS force all law enforcement agencies and communities to adhere to the same data standards? What if some agencies or communities want to collect more or different data?

The FBI has a NIBRS certification program to make sure participating agencies are able to maintain the FBI's reporting standards for NIBRS data. However, agencies and communities are free to collect more detailed and comprehensive crime data if they wish. For example, a state might collect drug offense data beyond the required FBI data elements. This will not negatively affect the reporting of NIBRS data or prevent the state's participation in NIBRS if the state removes the additional elements before submitting the data to the UCR Program. Agencies can have their own data standards and still participate in NIBRS as long as their NIBRS submissions meet the [FBI's technical specifications](#).

How does NIBRS affect crime statistics?

In addition to eliminating the Summary Reporting System (SRS) Hierarchy Rule which collects only the most serious offense in an incident, NIBRS captures up to 10 offenses per incident and

specifies more offense categories than SRS. A study of 2014 NIBRS data showed the loss of additional data for 10.6 percent of criminal incidents that involved multiple offenses when the data were converted from NIBRS to SRS. The conversion resulted in a 2.1 percent decrease in figures for crime captured in SRS. Because of its broader accounting of crime, NIBRS establishes a new baseline that more precisely captures the picture of reported crime in a community. The study “Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics” can be found at https://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2014/resource-pages/effects_of_nibrs_on_crime_statistics_final.pdf.

Agencies' questions about NIBRS

Are local and state agencies required by law to participate in NIBRS?

As is the case with the UCR Program in general, federal law does not mandate local and state participation in NIBRS. Local and state agency participation in NIBRS is voluntary. However, states and agencies may be required by state or local law to participate.

Is NIBRS designed only for agencies of a certain size or type? What about unique types of agencies that don't fit the typical categories?

NIBRS is designed for all types and sizes of law enforcement agencies. During the 2016 reporting year, NIBRS included such varied agencies as tribal authorities, universities, liquor commissions, and port authorities. The FBI realizes the size of a community and its law enforcement agencies can present different challenges such as availability of resources and volume of incidents to report. This is why the FBI encourages agencies to work together with solutions such as pooling budgets, sharing technical resources, or coordinating for larger agencies to “cover” (i.e., report on behalf of) smaller agencies. Agencies are also encouraged to contact their respective state UCR Programs. In addition, agencies can seek advice from the FBI's NIBRS staff by email at UCR-NIBRS@fbi.gov or by phone at 304-625-9999.

Does Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funding apply only to agencies who submit NIBRS data? Can an agency submit Summary Reporting System (SRS) data and still qualify for the JAG grant?

Currently, the JAG Program allocates money to states for their agencies based on a combination of the agencies' populations and their violent crime statistics, which can be submitted via SRS or NIBRS. However, after January 1, 2021, the JAG Program will base its funding calculations on agencies' populations and only those violent crime statistics submitted via NIBRS. This means the data of non-NIBRS agencies will not contribute to their state's JAG allocation.

As stated in a previous JAG solicitation released by the Bureau of Justice Assistance,

The transition to NIBRS will provide a more complete and accurate picture of crime at the national, state, and local level. Once this transition is complete, the FBI will no longer collect summary data and will only accept data in the NIBRS format and JAG awards will be based on submitted NIBRS data.

For more information about JAG funding, visit the JAG page of BJA's website at <https://www.bja.gov/Jag/>.

How long does it take for an agency to transition to NIBRS participation?

A typical agency may take about one year to fully transition to participating in NIBRS, and an especially large or complex agency may need two years. The process can involve NIBRS certification, acquisition of Records Management System software, training of personnel, and other challenges. However, since many states have either already transitioned to NIBRS or put a transition plan into motion, the time it takes for local agencies to transition may be less than it previously was. Agencies with questions are encouraged to contact their state UCR Program. In addition, agencies can call the FBI for assistance at 304-625-9999 or email the FBI at ucr-nibrs@fbi.gov.

What is the National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X) initiative?

NCS-X is an initiative of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in partnership with the FBI. BJS has identified 400 strategically selected agencies to participate in NIBRS, combined with existing NIBRS-participating agencies, to produce statistically valid estimates of crime across the nation. NCS-X chose these agencies based on the populations they represent, their numbers of sworn officers, and the characteristics of the agencies in order to represent a statistically valid sample of the nation. BJS has partnered with the FBI to provide funding to the select agencies through NCS-X to facilitate the NIBRS transition. An overview of the NCS-X initiative can be found at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/ncsx.cfm>.

Where is a list of the 400 agencies in the National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X) target group?

The list of NCS-X target agencies can be found at https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/NCSX_sampled_agencies.pdf.

What resources are available to agencies that wish to make the transition to NIBRS but don't have the technical expertise or budget?

The FBI's Data Integration Team offers technical guidance to all agencies committing to participate. But the FBI urges agencies to begin their transition efforts as soon as possible, because the FBI may not have resources to provide technical guidance for agencies delaying their transitions. Also, agencies identified through the National Crime Statistics Exchange and the FBI have limited opportunity to obtain financial assistance for their NIBRS transition efforts through December 2018 with support from the Office of Justice Programs.

Technical questions about NIBRS

What technical resources are available for agencies who wish to make the transition to NIBRS?

The latest technical documentation for file specifications and user manuals are available on the data documentation page of the NIBRS website at www.fbi.gov/nibrs. In addition that page provides links to information for data integration assistance for Extensible Markup Language (XML) formats, as well as precertification testing tools for data (both flat file and XML) to determine how an agency's system is running in accordance with NIBRS business rules.

What data formats will the FBI accept for NIBRS?

The FBI accepts NIBRS data in either flat file or Extensible Markup Language format. More information about NIBRS and the technical requirements for NIBRS submission is available on the data documentation page of the NIBRS website at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/data-documentation>.

Does the Crime Data Explorer (CDE) show NIBRS data or Summary Reporting System (SRS) data?

CDE, which is the FBI's online platform for public access to crime data, offers interactive presentations of UCR data at the national, state, and agency levels. CDE shows NIBRS data where it is available. From agencies that sent only SRS data, CDE shows SRS data.

What can people do with the NIBRS raw dataset?

People can populate the raw NIBRS dataset into commercially available software to create useful databases, heat maps, or data visualizations. The results can potentially be used for strategic policing, public policy, research, and more.

Getting more information or assistance

What NIBRS transition resources does the FBI offer online?

The NIBRS page of the UCR Program's website is available at www.fbi.gov/nibrs. The page includes the following:

- NIBRS interactive data map
- Road to NIBRS Resources for acquiring and implementing a NIBRS-compliant records management system.
- NIBRS 101 video
- Link to the NIBRS 2021 map for projected agency participation
- Toolbox of additional NIBRS resources
- Differences between NIBRS and SRS
- Recent articles about the NIBRS transition on the News and *CJIS Link* pages of the FBI's website

Where is a list of state UCR Program contacts?

The list of state UCR Program contacts can be found at <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/ucr/state-ucr-program-contacts.pdf/view>.

Have the FBI and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) issued any official statements of support for National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X)?

Yes. The FBI and the BJS have issued a joint statement of commitment to NCS-X. The statement can be found on the FBI's NIBRS Web page at <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/ucr/state-ucr-program-contacts.pdf/view> and on the BJS' NCS-X Web page at https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/NCS-X_FBI_BJS%20Joint_Statement.pdf.

Where is the article, "The FBI's NIBRS Transition: Questions and Answers"?

It is at <http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/the-fbis-nibrs-transition-q-a/>. The full version is available only to subscribers to the International Association of Chiefs of Police magazine, *The Police Chief*.

Who can I contact for information or assistance about NIBRS?

NIBRS support staff can be reached by email at UCR-NIBRS@fbi.gov or by phone at 304-625-9999.