Acquiring a NIBRS RMS:

Making the right choice for your agency

When looking for a Records Management System (RMS) that is compliant with the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), your law enforcement agency needs an effective strategy to ensure you do not encounter unnecessary delays or problems. Although the time from making the decision to go NIBRS to implementation commonly averages one to two years, your agency may be able to keep on the lower side of the timetable by considering the best practices and lessons learned by agencies who have already made the transition.

Key considerations

Make initial preparations. Understand the objectives, goals, priorities, benefits, and risks associated with obtaining an RMS capable of submitting crime data according to the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program's standards for NIBRS. Plan, communicate, and coordinate the vision and corresponding effort to impacted entities to obtain their feedback. Establish a project champion and develop appropriate resources, including team members with the necessary skill sets, estimated budgets, and partners with common goals.

Know your current system and the requirements for NIBRS. If you are not already familiar, get to know the system your agency currently owns and operates, its capabilities and strengths, and its shortcomings concerning the submission of NIBRS data. With NIBRS 3.0 as the minimum baseline, the more recent technical specifications available online will help your agency meet and exceed these requirements, whether you plan to submit data in flat file format or extensible markup language.

Choose your best option. Agencies can acquire or gain access to a NIBRS-compatible RMS in several ways:

- **Commercial "off-the-shelf" (COTS) RMS**. For most agencies, this is probably the quickest and easiest option. Most COTS RMS packages produced during the past decade include options for NIBRS reporting, and RMS vendors can provide documentation and guidance for implementation. To follow this option, simply contact an RMS vendor and make sure their product is compatible with NIBRS 3.0 or higher.
- **Agency-created RMS.** Some agencies have opted to create their own NIBRS-compatible systems. This might be the best or only option for agencies that have large technical capabilities or special requirements, but several agencies may find this overly expensive and time-consuming. Some agencies have tried this option unsuccessfully and lost time and resources in the process, so your agency should be careful if you are going to attempt this.
- **Agency-shared solutions**. If acquiring a NIBRS-compatible RMS is too difficult or expensive for your agency, you might be able to use the reporting capabilities of another agency. In other words, the agency might report your agency's data so your agency does not need to have NIBRS technical capabilities. The FBI encourages technically challenged agencies to pursue this option

if possible. To explore this alternative, consider contacting a larger NIBRS-participating agency in your state to find out if they might partner with your agency.
- **State solutions.** Some state UCR Programs provide mechanisms for agencies without a NIBRS-compatible RMS to report NIBRS. For example, some states offer an online portal and others furnish a Web form for agencies to report NIBRS data. To explore this option, contact your state UCR Program.

Prepare for implementation. As your agency prepares to implement its NIBRS solution, develop and update requisite documentation to identify a clear path for execution. Not only is such documentation important for the project itself, but it is also essential if contractual agreements are made as well as to ensure the longevity and success of the system once it is up and running. Some of these documents include plans for staffing, communications, and risk management; a concept of operations; a development contract; and functional and system requirements specifications. Additional factors to keep in mind follow:

- **Training.** Personnel who will use your agency's system and enter NIBRS data will need adequate training for the increased complexity they will encounter.
- **Data inputs.** NIBRS has many more data inputs than the Summary Reporting System, and the data fields must be filled correctly, with offense codes mapped to criminal state statutes. In the early stages of deployment, your agency will need to pay extra attention to finding and correcting data errors.
- **Leadership support.** Transitioning to a NIBRS-compatible RMS or data-sharing solution will require some changes in procedures and realignment of resources. The changes will probably not be drastic ones, but your agency will need cooperation from senior levels of the organization in order for your agency's NIBRS transition to be successful.
- **Getting assistance.** Your agency can potentially get funding, advice, or other support from several sources:
  - **Vendors**. If your agency is having difficulty with a COTS RMS, ask your RMS vendor for assistance.
  - **Other agencies.** If another agency reports your agency's NIBRS data, seek guidance from the other agency. Also, you could seek advice from any NIBRS-participating agencies about how they made the transition.
  - **State UCR Programs.** Your state UCR Program might be able to offer guidance, technical assistance, or funding to help your agency.
  - **Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG).** Visit www.bja.gov/jag/ for information about funds available for NIBRS transition.
  - **The National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X)**. To help make NIBRS a nationwide data collection, NCS-X offers resources to agencies on the Bureau of Justice Statistics' web site at www.bjs.gov/content/ncsx.cfm.
  - **The FBI.** The FBI publishes technical documentation and other helpful materials online for transitioning agencies. Also, the FBI has staff ready to provide guidance for transitioning agencies. For help, email UCR-NIBRS@fbi.gov or call 304-625-9999.