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Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council and Standard Functional Requirements

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Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council

Mission

To foster the growth of strategic planning and implementation of integrated justice systems by

- promoting the merits of information technology standards,
- providing advice to the nation's law enforcement community on technical aspects of IT standards,
- sharing practical solutions, and
- representing the voice of law enforcement in the expansion of justice and public safety information technology standards.

Imagine that your department staff could develop a request for proposals (RFP) for a new records management system without having to start from scratch but with the peace of mind that comes from knowing that the system will have little difficulty exchanging data, based on open standards, with other systems in and beyond your jurisdiction. The use of standardized functional and technical requirements (or standards) is a step in the right direction for moving the justice community toward this goal.

Attention to information technology standardization continues to grow stronger in the justice community. With the justice and public safety community's mounting responsibility and depleting fiscal resources, justice IT practitioners are turning to standards-based systems as the most viable and efficient way to share information electronically.

Another consideration in the push toward standardization is that industry drives the development of technology to support justice business practices. So it is imperative that the law enforcement practitioners have trusted standards available to them that have been developed based on their input. It is also important that chosen vendors are committed to using those trusted standards to develop products that best serve the law enforcement community.

The Business Case for Standards

Using trusted IT standards not only makes the procurement process less costly and daunting but also paves the way for more efficient information sharing. Law enforcement agencies all over the country spend millions of dollars and hours of valuable staff time developing complicated requests for proposals (RFPs) for each

system they need. Yet many of the basic functions of those systems, no matter agency demographics, are essentially the same. The use of standardized functions (or functional standards) to develop a RFP can cut costs by eliminating the need to reinvent the wheel and allowing law enforcement agencies to deploy resources for other policing needs.

Another benefit is that use of standards can help vendors and law enforcement practitioners speak the same language. Often, law enforcement agency staff members are not equipped to communicate with vendors while procuring and implementing technology. They often feel as if they are being out-teched by vendors who may appear to have more technical knowledge. Standards developed with the input of the vendor community foster communication between vendors and practitioners as well as facilitate development of products that more adequately suit the needs of law enforcement.

IT Standardization Landscape

Using standard technical specifications for data transport will enable agencies to share information locally, statewide, and nationally. Technologies like XML have made information sharing possible, and the Global Justice XML Data Model (GJXDM) is further standardizing the way that justice organizations can share data with each other.

A number of initiatives continue to develop standard specifications that affect the justice community. Specifically, the Global Justice XML Standards Task Force (XSTF) has developed and continues to improve the Global Justice XML Data Model (GJXDM), which sets a common data dictionary and model to share information using XML in the justice community. The data model and supporting documentation can be found at (www.it.ojp.gov).

Parallel organizations in other disciplines, such as the National Center for State Courts Joint Technology Committee (www.ncsconline.org), American Probation and Parole Association (APPA); (www.appa-net.org), and the Corrections Technology Association (CTA); (www.mtgmc.com/cta/), are working on functional requirements or standards for their respective constituencies.

The standards set by each of these bodies are considered to be voluntary compliance standards, meaning that it is up to the agency to support, implement, and use them in its information systems. The success of these initiatives and of the standards themselves lies largely with the agency's decision makers. The decision for agencies to develop their systems based on open standards will promote information sharing nation-wide.

LEITSC Role

The U.S. Department of Justice, as well as the IACP Criminal Justice Information Systems Committee, recognized the need for an organized body of law enforcement practitioners that could provide a way for law enforcement to be involved and knowledgeable in the development of IT standards. The LEITSC (pronounced "leets") addressed this by bringing together the IACP (www.theiacp.org), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE); (www.noblenational.org), the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF); (www.policeforum.org), and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA); (www.sheriffs.org) to discuss these issues. Membership and staff representatives from the associations began the project with discussions about respective members' questions and concerns regarding IT standards. They also addressed what the council should do to answer those concerns. The discussions led the council to establish the following project goals:

- Facilitate development of standards by using committees composed primarily of law enforcement practitioners to review and analyze the existence of technology standards, particularly in the areas of functional standards specific to records management systems (RMS) and computer-aided dispatch (CAD), and technical standards for emerging technologies
- Represent law enforcement in the development of standards that affect the integrated justice community
- Provide outreach and education to the nation's law enforcement community

regarding IT standards

LEITSC Partners

- International Association of Chiefs of Police
 - Police Executive Research Forum
 - National Sheriffs' Association
 - National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives
www.leitsc.org
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Standard Functional Requirements Development

Once the council established its primary goals, it began designing a strategy to develop standard functional requirements. LEITSC was able to learn from the experiences of other justice organizations that had undertaken similar development processes. The council's main goal was creating a set of requirements developed for law enforcement practitioners by law enforcement practitioners who know the intricacies of law enforcement functions. Knowing that many state and local law enforcement agencies have already implemented RMS and CAD systems, the process began with an environmental scan, outlining a high-level list of general functions necessary in any CAD or RMS system. This step (phase 1) involved gathering information from law enforcement agencies that use RMS and CAD systems, as well as the vendors who develop the systems.

The council has been on the forefront of partnering with industry to develop functional requirements. With the assistance of the Integrated Justice Information Systems Institute (www.ijisinstitute.org) and its members, the vendor community was brought into the process early to ensure buy-in from those who develop CAD and RMS products. In addition, the vendor community provides technical input that is invaluable during the process of creating standardized functional requirements. Their involvement in the LEITSC will continue through the life of the project.

Once baseline functional requirements are gathered, these requirements will be entered into a computer-aided modeling tool that will allow the functions to be viewed in more a discernable way (phase 2). The expectation is that this modeling tool will enable those validating the functional standards more flexibility. They will be able to view the standards both in diagram form and in text. In addition, they will have the option of working on the standards online using Internet conferencing software.

The most important phase of the project is the validation of the standards (phase 3). Law enforcement representatives from across the country will come together to review the requirements structured in the modeling tool. These subject matter experts will validate the standard set of functions for use in law enforcement agencies across the country. The representatives have been chosen from a number of volunteers who have substantial involvement in the development of their department's CAD or RMS or both. This process will take place in a set of 3-5 meetings each for CAD and RMS, with a number of virtual meetings via conference calls and net conferences in between meetings.

The final phase of the project will use each of the participating association's technology committee and section membership to vet the developed standards (phase 4). The success of this phase depends upon the willingness of the members to review and provide input to the standards. This phase will continue as the standards are released to the law enforcement community and broader public safety community.

Representation in Standards Development Efforts

Another goal of LEITSC is to provide a central body that could ensure that the law enforcement community is represented in other IT standards development efforts that cross into law enforcement domain and communicate information to and from those initiatives—a cross-pollination of sorts. A LEITSC representative, for example, is currently participating in the National Center for State Courts Joint Technology Committee's effort to develop traffic standard functional requirement for courts. This function of the LEITSC continues to work to bridge the gap between law enforcement and other public safety, justice, and related communities working toward the goal of securing the home front.

Outreach and Education

LEITSC continues to act as a trusted resource providing law enforcement executives with information on IT standardization and information exchange as it pertains to what they and their officers do on a daily basis. LEITSC has been able to address this goal by regularly providing outreach to law enforcement executives and their staff. Using the assets of each of the participating associations, LEITSC has been able to provide updates to each association's pertinent committees and sections, through workshops and seminars as well as publications and other written material. In addition, the LEITSC Web site (www.leitsc.org) provides current information on the IT standards issues that concern law enforcement executives and their technical staff.

The LEITSC is working to simplify the procurement and implementation of information technology systems in law enforcement agencies, while focusing on the goal of nation-wide information sharing. Developing common functional requirements is the foundation needed to build other technical specifications that will further simplify the seamless sharing of information in a secure environment. Ultimately, the seamless sharing of information will provide the right information to the right person at the right time.

For more information on the Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council (LEITSC) or any other initiative mentioned in this article, please call Jennifer Hicks, project manager, at 800-THE-IACP, extension 275, or visit the project Web site at (www.leitsc.org).

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