



**Westward Ho! It's time to plan for the next NAJIS conference in Fort Worth on September 18, 19 and 20, 2003.**

Last year's conference in Seattle was a huge success and we hope to build on that this year. We had a record number of attendees and Seattle was a great conference venue.

Over the past few years NAJIS has focused on integrating criminal justice information systems. We now have board members from the courts, law enforcement and criminal justice planning, in addition to our original prosecution membership. We will continue to address IT issues from the broadest perspective ranging from business decision making to "nuts and bolts" issues.

NAJIS is, first and foremost, an association of criminal justice practitioners. The conference is an opportunity to connect with other members to address day-to-day issues and interact with experts. We continue to draw on established national resources as well as individuals who have something valuable to share. This year we will be coordinating our conference with the Justice Information Sharing Professional's (JISP) quarterly meeting.

Fort Worth is where the West begins. We're planning a western-style social event and hope to have an equally spirited conference program. Our tentative agenda includes sessions on the Homeland Security and Integrated Justice, Java vs. "dot" NET, Funding Opportunities, Data

Exchange Points and Architectures, Network Security, XML (beginning and advanced), Quick Wins, Consequences of Data Sharing, Comparing Prosecutor Packages, and GIS Mapping and Analysis. Please check [www.najis.org](http://www.najis.org) for the most current information.

We recognize that many of you face budget and travel cutbacks. With this in mind, we have retained our modest registration fee and have secured a great conference venue at a substantially reduced rate. We are again offering an early registration discount: registration is \$325 if you register before July 31, and \$395 if you register after that date. We also want to encourage groups to attend and offer the same discount for groups of three or more. Last year, more than half of our attendees took advantage of these savings.

Last year, states receiving the National Governor's Association/OJP planning grants were allowed to use these funds to attend the NAJIS conference. Similar funds are being distributed this year. Check with your state's justice planning agency to see if any funds may be available.

We hope that you have found past NAJIS conferences to be worthwhile and will consider attending again this year. Please mark your calendars for September 18- 20. See you in Fort Worth!

*Mark Perbix*

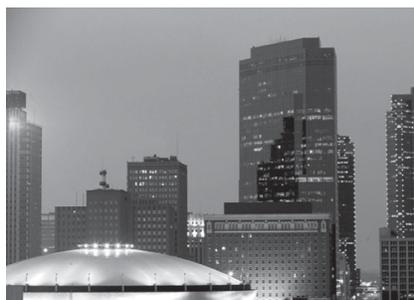
*The conference will be held September 18, 19 and 20, at the Fort Worth Radisson. For hotel reservations call 817-870-2100, or 800-333-3333, toll free. Room rates are \$94.00. When making hotel reservations, please mention that you are registering for NAJIS. Reservations must be made by August 27, 2003. Call Caran Curry, Conference Coordinator, at 405-713-1673, for more information.*

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# Data Exchange Standards

by Steve Prisoc

The essence of justice systems integration is the electronic exchange of information between disparate agency information systems. The primary obstacle to electronic information sharing between justice agencies has been, until now, the lack of standards for electronic information exchange. Without standards, justice agencies with dissimilar systems cannot easily design or adapt those systems to share data.

Because standards for electronic justice information exchanges have recently been developed at the national level, there is no need for states or localities to develop such standards from scratch. These emerging standards can be adopted to facilitate electronic information sharing between disparate justice systems at all levels—federal, state and local—so it is only necessary to actually develop standards for those very limited, unique exchanges that apply solely to a particular jurisdiction, locality or state.

## Work That Must Be Done

What jurisdictions, states and localities must do, however, is precisely map all data elements that are exchanged as a part of normal workflow between their justice agencies. Once these data elements are mapped, appropriate standards can be applied to mapped elements in order to allow for seamless agency-to-agency electronic information transfers in a standards-based justice environment. Not all data elements in use in a particular area need to be mapped: in many cases, only elements that pertain to an offender's status, court events and criminal history need to be mapped. Regardless, all of the elements stored in various agency systems don't need to be mapped—only those that are actually exchanged.

## Custom Interface Deficiencies

Although universal sharing standards aren't absolutely necessary to electronically exchange information, most electronic data exchanges

that have been developed without standards are needlessly cumbersome. Exchanges of this type usually require expensive and time-consuming development of custom data exchange interfaces.

These custom interfaces allow for the translation of data elements from one system to another; but the interfaces, once developed, cannot easily be reused when creating an additional interface with other entities.

As a result, justice agencies that wish to expand their data sharing efforts to include multiple agencies must frequently create a new custom interface for each discrete agency-to-agency data exchange attempted. The cumulative result of this type of custom interface development is a tangled ad hoc data exchange architecture that is undependable and difficult to maintain. Moreover, because of high development costs, this type of data exchange architecture limits the overall value of data exchanges between justice agencies, and perhaps more importantly, limits the use of electronic data exchanges to the few agencies that can afford the required custom programming.

## Voluntary Nature of Standards

While adoption of universal standards for information exchange is desirable, it is probably not possible to impose mandatory rules and regulations regarding information exchanges on independent justice agencies; it

should, however, be possible to provide standards that can be adhered to voluntarily by agencies wishing to exchange data. These standards should not be created for the purpose of regulating justice agencies, rather they should provide agencies with tools they need to develop systems that can seamlessly share information with partner justice agencies. Without universally applicable standards, information sharing must be negotiated on an agency-by-agency basis and each information-sharing interface must be independently programmed. This is obviously inefficient and costly.

Justice agencies that voluntarily adopt data exchange standards will more easily be able to exchange justice information among themselves, but it is not likely that all agencies will adopt data exchange standards immediately. However, once data exchange standards gain wide acceptance, thus increasing the number of potential exchange partners, agencies will adopt these standards in increasing numbers.

## Need for Regulations

In addition to standards to facilitate information exchange, there is a need for regulations that will mandate minimum levels of security. Also needed are regulations to ensure consistent telecommunications protocols for transferring data between agencies. Many regulations of this nature are currently in effect, such as those used to facilitate the transfer of arrest and disposition information between local agencies and central criminal history repositories. Other examples include regulations that dictate proper methods for transmitting fingerprint information from local agencies to the state agencies that classify fingerprints and identify offenders. Also important are data security and user training regulations that must be met before users gain access to state and national criminal history systems.

As noted earlier, much work continues to be accomplished at the national level to develop descriptive

### Standards, Regulations, & XML

The International Standards Organization (ISO) describes the difference between standards and regulations as follows:

**Standard** - A document approved by a recognized body, that provides for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines, or characteristics for products, processes or services for which compliance is not mandatory.

**Regulation** - A document that describes a product, process or service characteristics, including applicable administrative provisions, with which compliance is mandatory.

(rather than prescriptive) standards to facilitate the sharing of justice information between authorized justice entities.

### **XML and Exchange Standards**

Most of this work has centered on the creation of XML (eXtensible Markup Language) conventions that when implemented allow data to be seamlessly transferred and simultaneously translated as they are passed from one justice agency to another.

There are several groups now operating that have already developed working models for such standards and are now in the process of refining and reconciling these standards into a single, uniform justice XML definition that can be used by justice agencies throughout the world.

Organizations at the national level that are making significant progress in this area of XML exchange standards include SEARCH,

the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO), the U.S. Department of Justice, the Industry Working Group (IWG), GLOBAL, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), and the Justice Information Sharing Professionals (JISP). All of these groups are working toward the common goal of creating a uniform set of XML data description tags that will facilitate meaningful data transfers between dissimilar systems. Once documents that result from these efforts are released to justice agencies, they will provide much-needed data exchange standards to the justice community. The ongoing results of this work are posted at [www.it.ojp.gov](http://www.it.ojp.gov).

Several states are now in the process of reviewing and commenting on the emerging XML data standards. The ultimate goal is to apply agreed-upon XML data description tags to the justice data elements most frequently

transferred from one agency to another during the course of the justice process.

### **The Need for Ongoing Work**

Once promulgated, these standards documents will not remain static for long. It is vital that justice exchange standards be constantly reevaluated for appropriateness and relevance to the evolving needs of the justice system.

It is also important that local justice practitioners actively participate in the ongoing development and enhancement of justice data exchange standards by volunteering to serve on national committees and workgroups. In addition, local groups of individual stakeholders must continually evaluate the suitability of emerging national standards.

## **Linking Law Enforcement with the Justice System** *by Jim Parsons*

**I**nformation really does drive our working lives. It evolves from the myriad data pushed and pulled through networks that tie many disparate systems together among the law and justice communities. Data unto itself is often meaningless until a frame of reference, or added elements, are added to make it viable as information. It takes good information to produce good decisions and positive results.

I was inspired by NAJIS members last September at the Seattle conference—particularly by their recognition of the mutual reliance of shared information, and a real thirst to learn from each other on how to better connect beyond their agencies. That is why it is an honor for me to write to you as a newly elected board member with a perspective of what I see developing in the world of law enforcement information sharing.

For the past eight years I've worked to develop and install an electronic police reporting system that populates our prosecutor's case tracking system. These systems started out small, but grew significantly in recent years as we grew from 200 user accounts among three agencies, to well over 950 accounts serving 11 local and state agencies. Efficiencies have been achieved in near real time for events initiated at both the law enforcement and prosecuting attorney levels. Prosecutors now have the ability to communicate directly with the police through these systems to get needed information. On the flip side, tracking such activities can point to weaknesses in the quality of data being collected; however, this is not necessarily a bad thing, since it encourages all parties to communicate more closely.

Today, we are seeing improvements to our local applications through use of browser-based technologies that provide immediate access to data such as booking photos, sex offender files, crime analysis, and evidence tracking. Take for example the recent developments in crime analysis and mapping: we now have prosecutors using visual aids that crime analysts prepare by taking complex data, from multiple disparate systems, and converting it to clear and understandable pictures, graphs and charts. Recently, we put created a pictorial chart on a case of twenty cellular phone fraud accounts. This involved scanning 50,000 individual phone records, performing link analysis with associated police records, and tying in three main suspects with booking photos. This wire-diagramed chart shows the relationship between the fraudulent accounts and the suspects that is clear and easy to follow and is now being provided to the Secret Service to assist them with a federal prosecution.

The ability to produce such products in a short amount of time was unheard of just a few years ago. Emerging technologies have catapulted justice agencies into a new world of timely and meaningful information, this leads to better decision-making, which ultimately leads to better outcomes.

# NAJIS 2003 Meeting Registration: Ft Worth, September 18-20, 2003

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dept./Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee \$325 (post-marked on or before July 31, 2002) or \$395 (postmarked after that date). \$325 for three or more from the same agency who register at the same time. Registration includes NAJIS membership, conference, program, luncheon, and activity. Additional charges for spouses and children to attend luncheons and event will be announced.

*Federal ID # 38-3448014*

For hotel reservations call 817-870-2100 or 800-333-3333, toll free. **Reservations must be made by August 27, 2003.** The conference coordinator is Caran Curry, 405-713-1673. For vendor inquiries please contact Gordon Lansford at 785-291-3725

**Please make checks payable to NAJIS and mail registration to:**

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320 Robert S. Kerr, Suite 502  
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