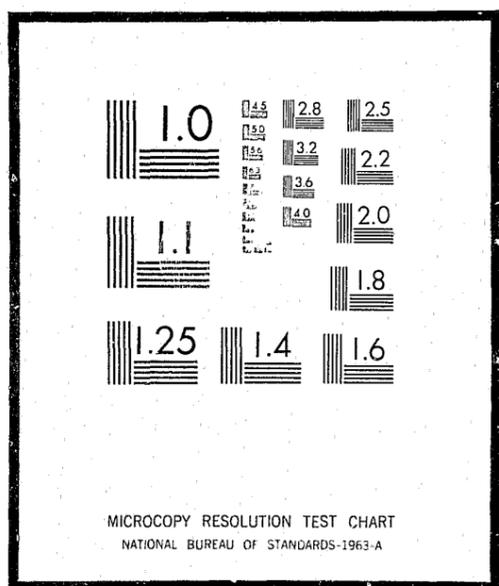


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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFERENCE SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20531

12/6/76

Date filmed

LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION
POLICE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

SUBJECT: Cumberland County and Portland, ^(ME) Maine, Records System Consolidation Feasibility Study

REPORT NUMBER: 75-60

FOR: Cumberland County, Maine, Sheriff's Office
County Population: 190,000
Police Strength (Sworn): 20
Total: 72
County Area: 853 square miles

Portland, Maine, Police Department
City Population: 66,000
Police Strength (Sworn): 167
Total: 200
City Area: 22 square miles

ACTOR: Westinghouse Justice Institute

STANT: Martin Murphy

CT NUMBER: J-LEAA-003-76

April 1976

34656
Final Report

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FOREWORD

This request for Technical Assistance was made by the Cumberland County, Maine, Sheriff's Office. The requested assistance was concerned with conducting a study to determine the feasibility of consolidating the Sheriff's Office records system and the Portland, Maine, Police Department's records system. The Police Department agreed that such a study should be conducted.

Requesting Agency: Cumberland County Sheriff's Office,
Sheriff Richard L. Thayer

Portland Police Department
Deputy Chief Maurice Harvey

State Planning Agency: Maine Criminal Justice Planning and
Assistance Agency, Mr. Ivan LaBree,
Deputy Director

Approving Agency: LEAA Region I (Boston),
Mr. John Keeley, Police Specialist

1. INTRODUCTION

Sheriff Richard Thayer reviewed critically the recordkeeping system of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office and determined that it currently met the agency's needs only marginally. He further determined that without significant modification the system would not fulfill future needs.

Sheriff Thayer considered several available alternatives. The one that appeared to have the greatest merit was the consolidation of the system with the existing records system of the Portland Police Department. Preliminary correspondence indicated that Police Department personnel agreed to a study to determine the advisability of this integration.

The purpose of the assignment was to analyze the recordkeeping functions of the Sheriff's Office and Police Department in order to provide the kind and quality of information needed by the administrators of both agencies to make a sound decision concerning this important matter.

There were several obvious problems to address in considering the interagency agreement: Funding to initiate and maintain the proposed merger; control of the quality of inputs, as well as access to information; changes in various forms for uniformity; training new users of the emerging system; and setting goals that might be attained by the consolidation.

To reach any conclusions, it was necessary to determine preliminarily what each of the records systems under review actually do as presently constructed, and how well each measures up to managerial expectations. This required an understanding of what kinds of records are being kept and what purpose they serve, whether the records are being used optimally by those who might benefit from their collection and storage, how easily they are retrievable, and what kind of support is discernible among contributors and users.

Other problems that needed to be addressed related to considerations such as the space available to house a combined system; whether the proposed changes could be accommodated by the existing system of the Portland Police Department, which is entirely manual, or would some form of automation be necessary or desirable.

To refine and address these problems, interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

- Sheriff Richard L. Thayer, Cumberland County.
- Mr. William Gray, Jail Administrator, Cumberland County Sheriff's Office.
- Mr. Albert Daigle, Cumberland County Sheriff's Office.
- Deputy Chief Maurice Harvey, Portland Police Department.
- Lt. David Marley, Portland Police Department.

2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM

Personnel of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office observed perceptively that their records system was in need of change in order to meet the basic objectives of its operation. The Portland Police Department, located within a few city blocks of the Sheriff's Office, appears to have an effective and efficient recordkeeping system. The primary consideration was whether or not it would be advisable to consolidate the two existing systems and place the new, combined system under the control of the Police Department. Would the gains that could be anticipated to each organization outweigh the difficulties likely to be encountered in the process?

Interagency activities always present certain kinds of predictable problems. In this instance, not unlike similar kinds of enterprises, the problems focused on:

- Funding for the expanded system.
- Provision of personnel to operationalize the expanded system.
- Storage facilities.
- Control of the quality of inputs.
- Whether the present Police Department record-keeping system could accommodate a significant increase.
- The willingness of each agency to initiate changes if a need to change developed.

As stated previously, the request for technical assistance was to determine the feasibility of a records-system merger. At the outset, a clarification of the types of records to be included in the analysis was needed. Law enforcement agency records may be, for the sake of convenience, classified as operational (line) and administrative (non-line). Operational items would include information such as dispatch, incident, and arrest records; investigative and prosecutive reports, as well as other reports that reflect the needs for police services and bear directly on the primary functions of maintaining order and law enforcement. Administrative records would include those related to nonline, internal control functions such as recruiting, selecting, training, and disciplining personnel; budgeting; and maintenance. Records such as those relating to the gathering, evaluating, and disseminating of criminal intelligence, including Field Intelligence and Observation Reports, do not fall precisely into either category.

The Consultant deemed it important that early decisions be made regarding precisely what kinds of records should be considered in

weighing the merits of the proposed consolidation. During a conference with Deputy Chief Harvey and Sheriff Thayer, it was decided that the study should be concerned only with operational records. That is, the current practices relating to the maintenance of records not directly concerned with police operations would not be reviewed.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

The first area addressed directly was the present practices and procedures used by both agencies in their recordkeeping. This necessarily included an examination of the kinds of records and reports generated by practitioners, the routes traveled by these records, as well as their utilitarian values.

The Cumberland County Sheriff's Office provides patrol, investigatory, youth aid, and other services to the non-urban areas of the County. This kind of police activity takes two forms: The first involves providing police protection security and services to the municipalities in a traditional way; the second provides specific contractual arrangements with three communities. The officials who perform these tasks are sworn members of the Sheriff's Office.

The records and reports generated by Sheriff's Office personnel are presently centrally located in the Sheriff's Office at the County Jail. The reports initiated at the central office are customarily dispatched via radio and then a followup card is distributed by the patrol supervisor to the deputy concerned for field completion. Activity initiated by field officers differs slightly, with the central office being contacted for complaint/dispatch number. The paper flow moves through supervisors to the office for data extraction and filing. The Youth Aid Unit maintains its own files for case reports, including followup work, while it continues to contribute to the central files. In a number of observed instances, however, cases were initiated by the Youth Aid Unit that did not enter the main flow of the reporting system. It is obvious that this procedure can tend to grossly distort statistics. The number of these incidents in a given time period is not determinable.

The Sheriff's Office responds to approximately 3,500 calls for service annually. As a result of each call, a dispatch card, a field report, and often a supplemental investigation form and an arrest report are produced. The number of arrests, incidents, and investigations are 1,200 to 1,500 annually, not including approximately 1,000 juvenile cases. In addition, the Sheriff's Office handles dispatch responsibilities for several municipalities that have small police departments when their telephones and radios are unmanned. This activity does not, however, significantly impact the recordkeeping system.

The Portland Police Department records system is considerably more active. The Department handles approximately 50,000 calls annually, which produces 28,000 to 30,000 case reports. The system is highly centralized. The initiating document is the dispatch card, which is numbered sequentially by the dispatcher. The assigned number becomes the controlling factor, and each added related document is assigned the same number. Arrests are given additional numbers, as are identification photographs. The Portland Police Department's records system is presently well-suited to its needs.

A matter closely related to recordkeeping is the problem of evidence and contraband storage. At present, each agency has its own procedures. One section within each agency has this responsibility, and no great problems have been noted or reported. The question arises whether this function should also be centralized. It was agreed that this activity should be included in the review.

4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the recordkeeping practices of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office and the Portland Police Department, the Consultant observed the following:

- The Sheriff's Office records system is inadequate for the future needs of the organization.
- The Police Department records system does meet its organizational expectations, although those expectations might be somewhat less than optimization of its potential.
- The inputs of the Sheriff's Office, in terms of format, report forms and control, and other mechanical considerations could be adjusted to mesh with those of the Police Department without significant difficulty.
- The recordkeeping function of the Sheriff's Office would be improved if it met the standards of the Police Department.
- The proposed merger of the recordkeeping systems could be accomplished without adding to the total number of personnel presently assigned to this function by both agencies, provided that the new system would not be expected to yield information not produced presently.
- The projected costs of the consolidation of the records system would not be prohibitive, provided that no major revision of function was made.
- Space does presently exist at the Police Department for the combined system.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on a number of assumptions about records systems:

- A records system of any kind is simply a repository or storage place for information. Information is put in and information is taken out. In a simple system, information is taken out in the same form it is put in. In a more complex system, information enters in various bits and pieces and exists in quite different forms and combinations. The system not only stores, but recombines, information crucial for management decisionmaking.
- The ideal records system would have all the information that anyone would want out of it put in, but no more. This information would be instantly retrievable.
- A records system does not make decisions; it merely produces reports on which management can base its decisions. It is important, therefore, that records system outputs match program needs. Inadequacy of information will hinder development of programs while superfluous information wastes time and money.

5.1 General Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office and the Portland Police Department consolidate their records systems. The Police Department should become the repository for the combined system.

Prior to consolidation, representatives of both agencies should work mutually toward developing a specific statement of precisely what the consolidated system is expected to produce. This statement of goals and purposes should definitely precede specific considerations of method or equipment.

Certain managerial information needs of either or both agencies should be considered to meet subjective needs:

- Facts -- Relating to a specific past event, such as a commission of a crime, an arrest, a traffic accident, or similar occurrence.
- Descriptions -- Of stolen or abandoned property, of premises, of modus operandi, of persons missing or wanted, and other items and situations.

- Periodical Summaries -- Of events during a specified period and in a given area. This kind of output totals data by categories for grouping of events, such as particular crimes and incidents needing police attention, vehicular accidents, and other information needed by management to allocate resources.
- Special Summaries and Inventories -- Which may be requested by management from time to time. Special reports are often used for research, experimentation, and exploration purposes. They include studies to assess and evaluate program effectiveness, and are useful to planning, research, and administrative personnel.

5.1.1 Special Records Systems Services

A records system can economically and effectively perform other functions than simply taking in, digesting, and giving out data in the way described. Among a records system's special services to programs and management, the more important are:

- Comparisons -- Between various output reports and data obtained from other sources.
 - Rates -- Examples would be number of Part I crimes in a given period, number of traffic fatalities.
 - Trends -- Changes in number or rates from month to month or year to year. Trends include comparisons of crime experience before and after the introduction of new or modified programs. These are used as a basis for future needs.
 - Relative experience -- Of classes of crimes, offenders, by time and area.
- Sounding an alarm -- To call the attention of management to conditions that need correcting.
 - When some standard or guide is not met -- For example, when conviction rates for a particular offense decline significantly.
 - When trends become unusual -- The system should make this known. When, for example, the amount of time spent in preventive patrol diminishes while the number of burglaries increase.

A records system may make authorities aware of unusual situations at a high or low level. This kind of "watch-dog" function is automatically brought to the attention of those who can do something about it.

5.2 Specific Recommendations

- Report forms currently in use by the Sheriff's Office are fewer and somewhat different from those used by the Police Department and need to be revised for uniformity.
- Clerical assistance involved in the record-keeping function of the Sheriff's Office should be placed under the operational control of the Police Department's Records Section Supervisor for coordination of function. It is estimated that two full-time personnel be assigned initially; from careful observation and evaluation of the program, an adjustment in this number might be appropriate.
- The Sheriff's Office and the Police Department should agree mutually on the questions of long-term storage, purging, and destruction of records.
- The feasibility of microfilming or other forms of microminiaturizing should be explored mutually to reduce the space necessary for storage while maintaining retrievability.
- The question of automation of records storage and retrieval should be fully explored to meet future needs.
- The evidence and contraband function should be consolidated. Additional space is available at the Sheriff's Department for this expansion.

5.3 Action Plan

- It is essential that a coordination committee be established to review the aforementioned recommendations and make decisions concerning them.

- The committee should draft a concise statement of goals and objectives of the newly created integrated system.
- The exploration of ways and means for microminuturizing older records for both agencies should be addressed. This activity should necessarily include purging of obsolete records and would provide significant additional storage space.
- Automation should be a primary consideration of the committee. It would appear that automation, limited or complete, would be a definite asset in terms of efficiency and cost.
- Each form and report presently used by both agencies should be reviewed to validate its continued use. The nature of the work of each agency is such that a single set of reports should be adopted.
- A field-test period should be established to provide the system users at all levels an opportunity to identify potential problems.

END

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