FBI National Data Exchange System's On-Line Tool Enhances Dispatching by Law Enforcement Agencies throughout the US

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The traffic stop began like any other. The officer radioed to dispatch with the license plate number and a National Crime Information Center (NCIC) search was conducted. The search turned up negative – showing nothing unusual about the vehicle or its owner – and the officer started a routine approach to the vehicle. The dispatcher then searched the license plate number through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) newest System, the National Data Exchange (N-DEx). for short. Moments before the officer reached the driver's side window, dispatch returned with some relevant information – the vehicle had been associated with weapons charges only two months prior. With this new information, the officer implemented the protocol for a more dangerous situation, ordering the driver out of the vehicle with hands on his head. The subsequent search of the vehicle discovered a loaded, stolen weapon under the driver's seat. A potentially disastrous situation was averted.

This hypothetical scenario demonstrates the potential of information sharing in the 21st Century. No longer do law enforcement and criminal justice professionals have to rely on limited information to do their jobs. Instead, they have a vast array of information on incidents, arrests, booking and incarceration, pre-trial investigations, as well as probation and parole information available to them with an authorized N-DEx account accessible via common web browsers.

The FBI's National Data Exchange

The FBI's N-DEx System contains data from local, tribal, state and federal agencies. It is available 24/7, 365 days a year. The FBI also bears the full cost of development and maintenance of the System. "N-DEx was the FBI's answer to the 911 commission's report calling for greater information sharing between all levels of law enforcement," explains the N-DEx Acting Unit Chief, John Quinlan. Quinlan added that the men and women of the N-DEx Program Office are proactively engaging more and more agencies to further increase participation with N-DEx, both for obtaining more data, as well as increasing usage of the system.

N-DEx data types have evolved from incident reports to include other data types such as probation, parole, and booking reports, providing users with a wider array of investigative information. N-DEx became operational in 2008. Since then, N-DEx has been expanding capabilities incrementally. With these upgrades, version 2 of N-DEx had new features such as full text search, subscription and notification, enhanced link and geo-visualization, and collaboration features. However, version 3 of the system added new features such as the integrated person entity view, batch query, and also enhanced existing features. Subsequent N-DEx builds created roles for the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Systems Officers (CSOs) to manage personnel, audits, and training. Future builds will continue to expand and improve N-DEx capabilities, further meeting the needs of the user community.

Access to N-DEx is brokered through the FBI's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP). Along with other services such as Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) and National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC), LEEP also provides N-DEx as a service. After applying for and receiving access to N-DEx, law enforcement or criminal justice professionals can simply click on the N-DEx icon from LEEP and be taken to the default simple search screen of N-DEx, where they can craft key-word searches. One click away is the Targeted Person search where a name and other

weighted identifiers, such as a date of birth, or Social Security Number, can be used to return all records in the system associated with an individual. In the case above, a license plate number was used to return any information associated with that vehicle.

N-DEx connects the dots between seemingly unrelated people, locations, property, offenses, and more. It correlates data within an agency's own files and between the files of other agencies that contribute data. This powerful feature allows investigators to easily pull all records associated with an entity, and even view the associations in the form of a link diagram. Other site features include Geo-Visualization – placing a record or records on a map – as well as batch query capability, complex filtering options, and collaboration sites where other authorized users can share files of any size or type.

In an actual case in 2012, a Maryland Highway Patrol Officer stopped a truck transporting three storage containers. A search of the vehicle and driver information did not reveal useful information. The officer then took an additional step of searching the names on the bill of lading through the Law Enforcement Information Exchange (LInX). Because of the designed linkages between the two systems, this LlnX search automatically triggered a query of the N-DEx System. Within seconds, the N-DEx returned results indicating an individual associated with one of the containers was the subject of an ongoing federal investigation. In light of this new information, Maryland Highway Patrol Department was able to collaborate immediately with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to track down the suspect. The vehicle was allowed to continue to its destination where the person under investigation was intercepted when he claimed the storage container. The contents included 3,000 cartons of counterfeit cigarettes; the suspect was subsequently charged and convicted of multiple crimes.

As of August 2015 the N-DEx System received files from over 5,300 agencies, containing approximately 500 million searchable records, and returns results for an average of 50,000 searches per week. As new users apply for access and begin incorporating N-DEx in their standard operations and as new agencies realize the value of having their data in the System, N-DEx will continue to grow in both size and usage. Each day new records are added to the N-DEx System, creating new opportunities daily in the fight to solve and prevent crime. This is why the N-DEx Program Office will continue to actively pursue bringing on board new agencies and help new users conduct searches of the system. As Kent County Sheriff (MI), Lawrence Stelma says, "I get just as much benefit from having my records in N-DEx, as I do from using the system. Investigators from other jurisdictions are constantly bumping in to my investigations and assisting us in solving our county's crimes."

In this day and age, it is necessary to use all of the tools available in order to solve and prevent crime and promote public safety. N-DEx is one of those tools – a force multiplier – allowing users to access more information in less time. The N-DEx Program Office encourages police dispatchers to apply for N-DEx membership and utilize this valuable tool as they conduct their daily work. Together, partnerships between local law enforcement and the FBI can make the world a little safer place.

Authors note: *To obtain N-DEx access, visit the LEEP at www. CJIS.gov and fill out the online application. If you already have a LEEP account, you can request N-DEx access by finding us in the "Services" section of LEEP and choosing "Request Access". For contributing data to the System, contact the N-DEx Program Office's help desk at ndex@leo.gov and your request will be routed to the Liaison Specialist associated with your state.*