

Entering all new warrants into NCIC - Scottsdale, Arizona Police Department

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In July of 2013, the Scottsdale (Arizona) Police Department began entering all new misdemeanor warrants into the FBI National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. For a population of about 235,000, Scottsdale PD enters approximately 400 new warrants and 400 quashes per month. The department's goals were to increase officer safety and warrant resolution, and to improve the availability of records for firearms background checks. The decision to send all warrants to NCIC and not the NICS Index was made at the state level because submitting records to the NICS Index would have required a new set of workflows.

The Arizona Criminal Justice Information System (ACJIS) Supervisor in Scottsdale is responsible for all CJIS data entry and maintenance. Because he is familiar with processes at both the state and FBI levels, he serves as a resource for others in the state. Many other counties have a designated warrant person, but in other counties, that individual may or may not be responsible for or familiar with all of the CJIS duties.

Strategy

In 2013, it was not a statewide practice to enter all misdemeanor warrants into the Arizona Crime Information Center (ACIC) for submission to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). The Scottsdale ACJIS supervisor took the initiative at the local level to begin the process for Scottsdale. He oversees the process with the assistance of two staff. According to the supervisor, it took about three months to implement the process. Entering the warrants did not create much additional workload for the department and no new staff or resources were required, even though the process is almost entirely manual.

ACJIS staff run a report of warrants from the courts daily, validate them in AZTEC (the Arizona court case management system), and then enter them into ACIC within the three-day timeframe required by the FBI. Then they conduct a secondary validation check after the warrants are entered to ensure that the NCIC and AZTEC records match. This often includes quality control checks such as verifying the accuracy of names or other information.

Two minor technical modifications were required to accommodate submission to the NCIC. Fields were added to the data entry screen to indicate "limited extradition only," or to specify "extradition only to Maricopa County, Arizona."

Procedurally, both the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) and FBI allow for the entry of misdemeanor warrants into NCIC. The ACJIS Operating Manual provides guidance and procedures for localities to enter misdemeanor warrants.

Challenges

While the warrant entry process in Scottsdale has been relatively smooth, there have been some technology, process and political challenges. Scottsdale PD has been able to develop strategies to address some of the challenges, while others remain. However, these issues have a relatively minor impact when compared to the benefits. There are four notable challenges:

NCIC only accepts one warrant per name but ACIC accepts multiple entries per person.

Scottsdale established a process to get around this issue. First, ACJIS staff search ACIC and AZTEC to see if there are any other existing warrants for the person. If there are existing warrants, ACJIS staff modifies the ACIC record to add any additional warrants into the miscellaneous field. If no record exists, ACJIS staff creates a new record using one of the warrant numbers. Any additional warrants are added into the miscellaneous field. If Scottsdale receives notification that one of the miscellaneous field warrants is quashed, ACJIS staff can search the system and update that record.

NCIC is limited to 30 characters for the entire name field.

This is an issue with longer last names and hyphenated or double last names. If the name is longer than 30 characters, the system truncates it automatically. Spaces between double names are also removed. Currently there is no solution, other than for staff to be aware of this limitation, particularly when clearing the record, since the NCIC truncated or modified version of the name will need to be cleared.

FBI automatically removes a record 5 days after an “extraditable locate” is placed, unless there is a detainer on the record. If an NCIC “locate” message is placed twice, the FBI removes the record and it must be reentered.

Scottsdale only clears warrants if the court quashes them. Because of uncertainty about whether or not the ACIC system also automatically removes records with the “locate” issue, Scottsdale implemented a process to prevent records from being cleared prematurely. When a “locate” is sent from another jurisdiction, the extradition field is changed to “detained,” a code that indicates that there is a reason that the person cannot be extradited within the 5 days. This prevents the record from being removed. Unfortunately, while this procedure is documented in the ACJIS Operating Manual most other jurisdictions within Arizona are not using the “detained” code. Thus, as of December 2014, this was still an issue at the state level.

Scottsdale has addressed the automatic removal after two “locate” messages issue by changing the code to “limited extradition” and noting “will only extradite in Maricopa County, AZ.” This has prevented other police departments from sending them locates on these warrants and thus, the FBI has not been clearing these warrants.

Having more information available creates new issues.

While entering all misdemeanor warrants into the national database means improved information for background checks, having “minor” warrants available nationally has also created unintended political issues when people are detained because of these often dated, outstanding “minor” warrants. Scottsdale has emphasized the larger issues of firearm restrictions and officer safety, and has stressed the need for consistent enforcement of for all warrants.

Outcomes

- Between July 2013 and November 2014, Scottsdale entered 6,617 misdemeanor warrants into NCIC.
- There is no backlog on entries.
- All warrants that the FBI NICS has called to verify have been valid.
- Scottsdale has not had to re-enter any warrants due to a “locate purge” by the FBI.
- The warrants have provided additional information to other federal agencies, as well (Department of State, ICE, SSA), and have led to the resolution of warrants.

For the future

As of December 2014, several other Arizona police departments and the Arizona Department of Public Safety were in the process of implementing this process, and there were plans to eventually implement statewide. Currently, the process is primarily manual, but an automatic transfer of information from the courts to the ACIC is being piloted in 2015. Eliminating the manual typing and paper list checking will be an improvement. However, quality checks and verification through the police department will still be required.