
Kentucky e-Warrants Case Study

By Michael Jacobson, SEARCH Information Sharing Specialist

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Introduction

In many jurisdictions, reporting warrants to the state criminal record repository from the courts is challenging. States vary in their capabilities to ensure that warrant reporting is complete, timely, and accurate. This variation affects the completeness of warrants at the local, state and national levels. It also affects the quality and completeness of records obtained from searches done by law enforcement officers. Incomplete criminal records, including active warrants, put officer safety at risk, weaken the ability to investigate and prosecute criminal activity, and reduce the ability of courts to implement appropriate sanctions and corrections agencies to develop effective reentry plans for convicted offenders.

Many states are implementing integrated justice information sharing capabilities to address their warrant reporting challenges. In January 2008, Kentucky implemented e-Warrants, a web-based electronic warrants system. E-Warrants automates the complaint-to-warrant service process. It is accessible 24/7 statewide for requesting, issuing, viewing and serving warrants. The e-Warrants program is supported by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), Kentucky Office of Homeland Security (KOHS), Office of the Attorney General (AG), and Kentucky State Police (KSP), and is successfully addressing warrant management in the Commonwealth.

This paper is a case study of the Kentucky e-Warrants system. It attempts to expose some warrant challenges and best practices, including the business policies and processes associated with implementing a statewide warrant system.

Kentucky's Current Environment

The Kentucky Open Portal System (KYOPS) program, headed by Kentucky's Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, is a collection of applications for criminal justice information sharing. KSP initially developed KYOPS to assist law enforcement agencies in collecting data and submitting it for the "Crime in Kentucky" report¹. KYOPS has evolved into an essential tool for criminal justice agencies within Kentucky. It now serves two important law enforcement needs: (1) it provides a data collection system for agencies that may or may not have their own records

¹ To obtain a copy of the latest "Crime in Kentucky" Report see:
<http://www.kentuckystatepolice.org/data.htm#ciky>

management system, and (2) it provides the ability to query all data contributed to the repository. KYOPS has a statewide scope where agencies can quickly find criminal justice information even if the information is not from their local jurisdictions, and e-Warrants is an application accessible through the KYOPS portal that Kentucky criminal justice practitioners utilize to request, approve, query, view and service in-state warrants.

Electronic Warrants

Kentucky's warrant process begins with a complaint filed by the county attorney's office, court clerk or a police officer. If an entity other than the county attorney files the complaint, the county attorney reviews it and upon approval submits it to a judge. The judge may authorize it, send it to mediation, reject it, or suspend it. Once a judge authorizes the complaint and issues the warrant, he or she sends it to the agency that is responsible for notifying other agencies of the warrant.

The e-Warrants system automates this entire process by allowing prosecutors, clerks and police officers to request a warrant by entering a complaint into the system. In Kentucky, the warrant process starts by submitting a complaint. Judges utilize the e-Warrants system to issue the warrant. Once issued, the e-Warrants system sends a notification to law enforcement agencies in the jurisdiction and makes the warrant available to all law enforcement agencies instantaneously. Law enforcement can then query the system to determine if an individual has an active warrant in Kentucky. The system is utilized by nearly 100% of the law enforcement agencies in Kentucky.

The e-Warrants system provides a single application to capture, store, file, distribute, process, and securely access electronic warrants², which is illustrated in Figure 1, below³.

² <https://ewarrants.ky.gov/Public/About.aspx>

³ Graphic taken from a presentation provided to the International Association of Chiefs of Police by e-Warrants executive stakeholders:

<http://www.theiacp.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zNIIND6FLF0%3D&tabid=735>

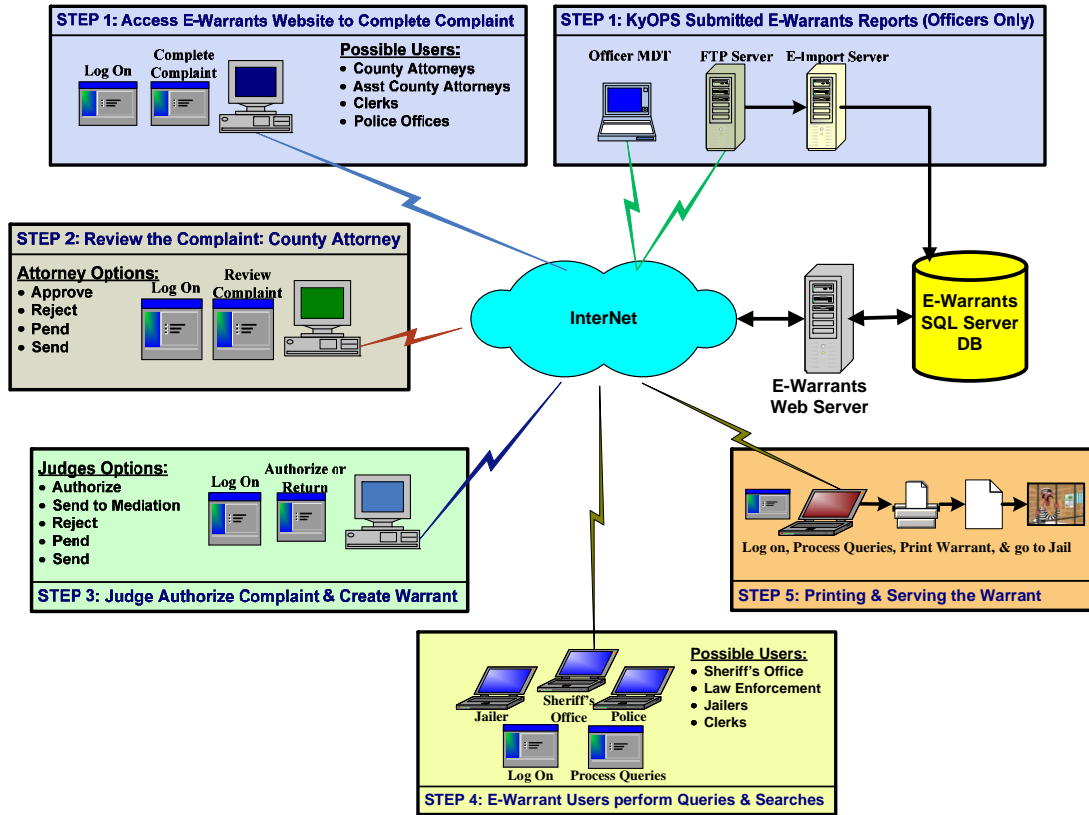


Figure 1: e-Warrants Process Flow

Limitation

One limitation with the e-Warrants application is that it only contains in-state warrants. The e-Warrants system does not automatically post warrants to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). This limitation is due to NCIC⁴ requirements to “pack” and validate warrant records on a regular basis. Packing a warrant refers to the NCIC requirement to ensure that all of the required data fields are populated. Validating a warrant record is the required process for law enforcement agencies to periodically verify that the warrant is a current warrant. Law enforcement agencies in Kentucky do not have the resources to meet all NCIC requirements to monitor the NCIC wanted persons database, validate all warrants, and ensure that they fully populate records with all of the fields required by NCIC. However, if a Kentucky law enforcement agency wishes to utilize the NCIC warrant system, they still have the ability to do so by reentering the warrants into the Law Information Network of Kentucky (LINK), which

⁴ <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ncic/>

provides access to NCIC.⁵ KSP is working with the FBI to allow for the electronic transfer of e-Warrants into NCIC.

The stakeholders implemented the system in phases, initially rolling it out to the judicial districts, then other jurisdictions. At the same time users began using the new e-Warrants system, KSP worked to convert the existing paper arrest warrants to electronic warrants. KSP employed this process to help users start using the system, also improving the system as more users began utilizing it.

The e-Warrants system has proven to be successful by enabling law enforcement to more effectively execute warrants and initiate prosecution. KSP estimates that more than 80% of the Criminal Complaints that become Warrants of Arrest are being served and the offender is arrested. Prior to e-Warrants, it was estimated that less than 10% of the warrants were served.

Reasons for Success

The success of the e-Warrants system is due to several factors:

1. Executive level sponsors from throughout Kentucky's criminal justice community championed the project.
2. KSP and AOC found a common goal and maintain an effective cross-agency relationship
3. The project team provided training to users in the field that could then provide training to other users (train-the-trainer approach).
4. KSP and AOC made sure that the project steering committee consisted of the right people from the beginning of the project.
5. KSP and AOC had a solid communications plan that they used to keep everyone informed of project progress, rollout dates, training, etc.
6. The project team also improved the system and training with each implementation.
7. KSP maintains the system and provides 24/7 technical support. They have 16 KSP dispatch centers where dispatchers access the system to assist with service of warrants for counties not on e-Warrants.

Benefits

Kentucky criminal justice practitioners experience a variety of benefits from the e-Warrants application, for example:

1. It only takes minutes to process a warrant and only requires an Internet connection and logon credentials to do so.

⁵ <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/kar/502/040/010.htm>

2. Once a warrant is approved it is accessible to all officers via mobile data computer or desktop.
3. Agencies can sort and assign warrants by division or beat.
4. The system tracks the history of the warrant and provides an audit trail of everyone who views the warrant.

Conclusion

Kentucky implemented an easy-to-use, streamlined system that is a robust electronic forms application for the criminal justice system. Users can request warrants electronically and judges can review and approve the warrant through a web application on their computer, tablet or smart phone, at their convenience.

Kentucky justice officials are pleased with this system because it has greatly increased the number of warrants that are actually served. In addition to keeping up with current warrants, they have been able to serve 30% of their back-filed warrants.

Strengths:

1. E-Warrants has reduced the amount of time to request and issue warrants.
2. The automated system includes the entire warrant process from complaint to warrant issued to warrant served.
3. Warrants are available to all law enforcement officials as soon as the warrant is issued.
4. The system provides users with sorting and query capabilities that allow law enforcement to quickly find a warrant
5. The system logs transactions to provide a complete audit trail for each warrant.

Weaknesses:

1. The system does not automatically post warrants to the NCIC wanted persons file.
2. There are no information sharing capabilities between e-Warrants and the court case management system.
3. There are no information sharing capabilities between e-Warrants and law enforcement records management systems.

Lessons Learned:

1. Executive sponsorship was essential to the success of the Kentucky e-Warrants system.
2. In-state warrants do not need to comply with NCIC requirement to “pack” the record.
3. Communications with user groups related to project progress helped with user “buy-in”.
4. Continually offering user training has increased the adoption rate.



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