Alabama Warrant Management Project

Business Problems

In early 2014, Alabama counties were all still relying on a paper-based warrant management system. Warrants were generated using a mainframe system or Microsoft Word template, depending on the county, and then were printed and delivered in paper form. The mainframe system lacked sufficient functionality to report performance measures, and there was no consistency in the warrant management processes used by individual counties. Key issues included:

- Inability to reliably track warrants between jurisdictions as they are issued, served, recalled, etc.
- Inability to serve warrants due to a lack of information identifying the subject of the warrant
- Possibility of warrant paperwork being lost/misplaced/damaged.

Business Goals

The goal of the project was to create a warrant management system that would provide an electronic means of communication between the court system (Clerk's Office and Magistrate) and law enforcement (Sheriff's Office), expediting the process of getting warrants to the sheriff to serve, then back to the clerk after execution. Storing warrants as electronic images on a server will make it easier to access and track warrants, capture performance measurements, and generate meaningful reports.

Engaging Stakeholders

To launch the project, the AOC warrant management team visited Lee County to see how paper documents were created and processed. Following this visit, a committee comprised of Law Enforcement (state and local) and District Attorneys was created to answer questions about the current process and identify what improvements would be helpful. Additionally, a committee of magistrates, Circuit Clerks and staff was assembled to build on the LE warrant process for the courts and to review the current process. AOC staff documented the business logic of the current process, and the committees came together to discuss and provide input.

Results

Global Reference Architecture (GRA) conformant web services were developed to request, issue, recall, serve, update, record and query warrants.

Law Enforcement and District Attorney's Staff can now log into the Warrant Portal with AlaCop credentials through the Active Directory Authentication and

Processing Tool (ADAPT). ADAPT is an application of the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center. The warrant process flow is described below.

Request Process
Law Enforcement (LE) or District Attorney's Staff (DAS) enter information for the Deposition and Complaint or an Indictment in the Warrant Portal. The request can be viewed and updated by all LE and DAS within the county. The data is then sent as a request using the Warrant Request Web Service to the Magistrate in the Circuit Clerk's Office.

Issue Process
The Magistrate reviews the information by logging into AlacourtPlus. The new Warrant Management System allows the Magistrate to search, view, and update the Deposition and Complaint to determine if there is probable cause, and then either issue or deny the Warrant. If the Magistrate selects "issued," the Deposition and Complaint must be sworn to. LE e-swears to the Deposition and Complaint by logging into the Warrant Portal, searching and selecting 'Swear to Warrant'. The Magistrate then enters Unified Judicial System (UJS) credentials to complete the e-swearing process. Victims swear to the Deposition and Complaint by signing a printed version. The Magistrate then scans the signed documents into AlacourtPlus. The deposition, complaint, and warrant information are sent as to the Warrant Issue Web Service. If the Warrant is denied, no message is sent.

Indictments from the DAS are reviewed and scanned for the warrant to be issued. Using AlacourtPlus, judges issue bench warrants for Failure to Appear, Failure to Pay, and Writs of Arrest. Bench Warrants can be issued in Civil, Criminal, and Traffic cases. All warrants are sent with the Issue Warrant Web Service.

Recall Process
The Magistrate or Judge can recall a Warrant through AlacourtPlus. The recall is initiated through the Warrant Recall Web Service. A recalled warrant cannot be served through the Warrant Portal.

Serve Process
The Warrant is executed by the LE in the Warrant Portal and sent to the Warrant Served Web Service. The Magistrate can then access the executed warrant and post to the State Judicial Information System (SJIS) to set up the District Criminal (DC) case for original arrest Warrants or Circuit Criminal (CC) case for Indictment Warrants. Cases are updated in SJIS by Bench Warrants being executed by LE in the Warrant Portal.

Update Process
All users with Request Warrant access can update information related to the warrant that does not change the face of the Warrant. The updated warrant is sent to the Warrant Update Web Service.

Query Process
The Query Process is used in the Warrant Portal and AlacourtPlus to search for and view a Warrant. LE or DAS use this process to request an existing Warrant, to e-swear, update, and execute a Warrant. Magistrates and Judges use this process to issue, deny, recall, update and post to SJIS.

Technology

The project is built on Microsoft's .NET infrastructure and uses Windows Communication Foundation services to implement the service-oriented architecture that is the "back end" of the Warrant Management Project. The service identification and design is based on and conformant to the Global Reference Architecture (GRA). The services pass messages that follow the National Information Exchange Model (NIEM) standard. The service identification/design, including the information models associated with the warrant messages, were developed in collaboration with SEARCH and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

Implementation

Implementation started in Walker County, where the AOC Warrants Management Team demonstrated the system to stakeholders, including several judges, the Circuit Clerk, District Attorney, Sheriff and their staff (LE and clerical), along with State Troopers and local Police Department Officers. Following discussions of how the process could work in Walker County, key local stakeholders approved the Warrants Management system, and it was implemented in April of 2014. Perry county was implemented in June 2014).

AOC staff is currently working with Chambers, Macon, Randolph, Tallapoosa, and Mobile counties that have also expressed an interest in adopting the new system. This entails meeting with officials from the courts, DAS and local LE officials to explain the benefits of the system and to determine how the Warrants Portal can assist in improving current business processes. A stakeholders meeting was held with Chambers County officials on May 26, 2015, and they are scheduled to go live with implementing the Warrants Portal on June 15, 2015. A stakeholders meeting was held with Mobile County criminal justice officials – including representatives from the Port Authority and several local colleges – in December 2014, and the AOC will be working on an implementation strategy to bring them online throughout the summer of 2015.

There are no additional costs associated with implementing the Warrants Portal. However, since the system is not mandatory, implementation is dependent on buy-in from local officials. Additionally, the AOC has received support from Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) and the Sheriffs' Association encouraging agencies to adopt the program.

Lessons Learned

Local culture is very different in each county. To address that reality, the Warrant Management system's business logic must be more flexible than originally planned.

Law enforcement officers are not necessarily proficient typists. To address that reality, the request process should not time out as quickly as other processes so there is adequate time for an officer to enter all necessary fields into the warrant portal.

Each county has the authority to define its own warrant management process. Demonstrating the value of the system and persuading key stakeholders of the benefits is the only way the AOC will be successful in getting counties to implement the paperless system. Ensuring "early adopter" counties are successful, and sharing their successes, is essential to getting more counties to adopt the system.

Having one or two "champions" at a local level is key to gaining acceptance of the new system. In Walker county, magistrates supported the project and with the help of AOC, were able to provide the necessary leadership to see the system successfully implemented.

Performance Measurements

With only two of Alabama's 67 counties implemented, the volume of warrants issued via SJIS in a single year is nearly 20% of the total warrants issued via SJIS for all counties for the past five years.

	Old System 5-year total	New System 1-year total
Warrant Status	All counties	Lee & Walker counties
Warrants Submitted to Magistrate	Not Available	2,189
Warrants Issued – Original Arrest	10,746*	1,725
Warrants Denied – Original Arrest	Not Available	130
Warrants Recalled – Original Arrest	68*	39
Warrants Served – Original Arrest	5,244*	1,270
Warrants Issued – Bench	4,509	1,463
Warrants Recalled – Bench	1,406	172
Warrants Served – Bench	1,750	314
Indictment Warrants - Requested		114
Indictment Warrants - Issued		113
Indictment Warrants - Served		73

*Includes Original Arrest Warrants an Indictment Warrants