

## **Toward Integrated Justice Information Systems: An Update on the Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council**

Building a capacity to effectively share information across the broad field of criminal justice and law enforcement communities is the focus of a relatively new initiative, now moving into its second year, the Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council, or LEITSC. Formed in 2002 with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the LEITS Council draws on the expertise and influence of four leading law enforcement associations. The council is composed of members from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), and it is charged with the responsibility of fostering the strategic development of integrated justice systems through the definition and implementation of standards for collection, recording and storage of data.

One key task in any effort to share information is in overcoming the technical barriers to sharing data between dissimilar computer systems. It is inherently unrealistic and prohibitively expensive for regional criminal justice and law enforcement partners to make identical system improvements and procurements. The reality of current fiscal climates means that each agency works in isolation when designing and implementing an information management system. Systems tend to be "tailor-made" to meet local areas needs or capabilities, or more specifically enhanced in order to meet the information management needs of each agency. But in the pursuit of their common purpose, criminal justice agencies collect similar pieces of information (data elements) that relate to records on individuals, all of which can be shared to streamline the delivery of criminal justice services.

Police arrest individuals and record biographical, offense, location, vehicular and other data. As the person makes their way through the justice system, the data is manipulated to suit varying needs but, in the main, is still the same data. Because of the disparity of information systems, the directly relatable information cannot be shared between law enforcement agencies or between law enforcement agencies and their criminal justice partners.

As the complex of systems expands, the solution rests not in trying to force organizations into one type of information system procurement pattern or another; rather, the better option is to develop a communication protocol that will allow effective and accountable sharing of information between disparate systems. It is at this point where standards become an important consideration.

What are standards and how do they impact information sharing? The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines standards as

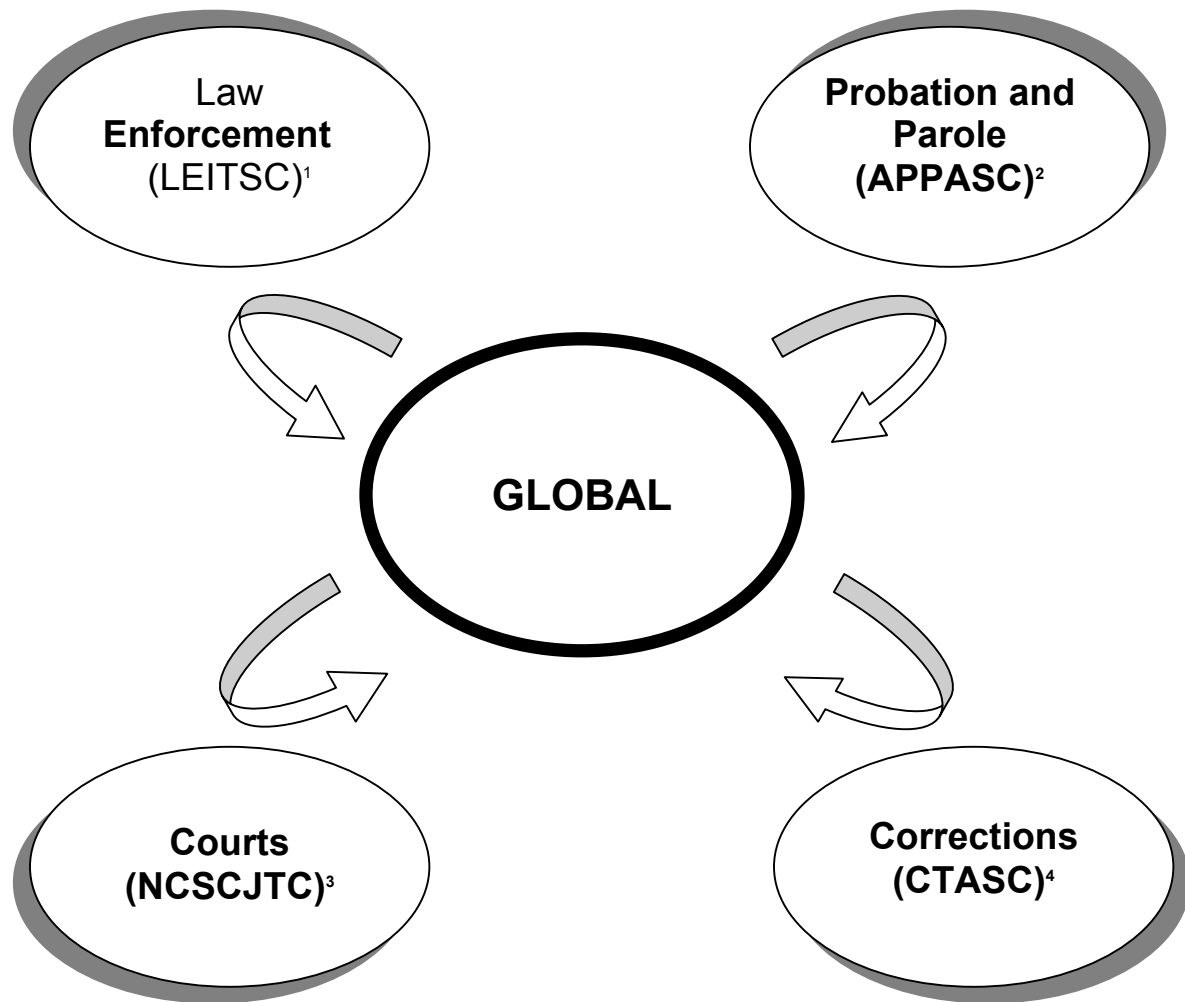
“documented agreements containing technical specifications or other precise criteria to be used consistently as rules, guidelines, or definitions of characteristics, to ensure that materials, products, processes and services fit for their purpose.” What the LEITS Council proposes to accomplish is the development of a documented agreement of standards relating to data transactions (or functional standards) commonly used by the law enforcement and criminal justice community. The standards will be available to all agencies and can be referenced in the course of the design of a new system, or in the process of upgrading an existing information system.

The standards the LEITSC will consider are both functional and technical in nature. Functional standards are directly related to a business process like Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) or Records Management (RMS). Technical standards are those that relate to the electronic and digital processes that are undertaken to move the information from one point to another.

The technical process that has been adopted for information sharing in the private sector, which is now accepted by many elements of the criminal justice community, is known as “XML,” the acronym for “Extensible Mark-up Language.” XML is a non-proprietary computer dialect that is simple to use and understand yet is complex enough to not be too restrictive in its application to law enforcement data, and is flexible in terms of its ability to arrange data in a format that encourages ease in document sharing across a network of computers that are connected for a common purpose (such as law enforcement and criminal justice).

The LEITS Council is the latest component of a larger criminal justice community coordination effort to establish information-sharing standards. The central coordinating force rests in the form of the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative Advisory Committee, otherwise known as “GLOBAL.” The structure of Global is built on the need to represent the main elements of the criminal justice community (Courts, Corrections, Parole, Police). GLOBAL works to act as a central clearinghouse of information technology standards and exists to resolve the information sharing issues that arise between the various elements of the criminal justice community. Information on GLOBAL can be obtained from their website at [www.it.ojp.gov/global](http://www.it.ojp.gov/global). LEITSC is one of the last criminal justice components to join the GLOBAL network.

## The GLOBAL Network



- 1 Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council
- 2 American Probation and Parole Association Standards Committee
- 3 National Center for State Courts Joint Technology Committee
- 4 Corrections Technology Association Standards Committee

### Progress to Date

Now into its second year, the LEITS Council will be moving forward with its efforts to facilitate the development and implementation of functional and technological standards for law enforcement. In terms of functional standards, the Council has identified two key business processes (CAD and RMS) as the initial areas of focus in the development of standards. A functional standards

committee will soon be constituted, comprising members with law enforcement and technical expertise. The Functional Standards Committee will lead the work of two functional standards sub-committees, one each for CAD and RMS. Given the complexity of both CAD and RMS systems, the work on defining standards for each will be broken down into component modules to ensure a complete and thorough review of critical functions. For example, work on CAD standards would see component modules for functions like geographic information systems, mobile communications, and external interface (i.e., NCIC, State and NLETS). Similarly, in terms of RMS component functions, specific modules of review will include incident report systems, criminal history, case management, arrest and booking, and crime analysis, to name a few.

The functional standards sub-committees will lead smaller task teams that will address the standards issues for each of the component functions, or modules. Once completed, a summary of the review of standards will be submitted to the Functional Standards Committee before being brought to the full Council. On Council approval, the standards will be submitted to GLOBAL for inclusion into the Justice Standards Registry and made available to law enforcement information systems developers.

The Technical Standards Committee will focus on emerging technologies, such as the structure of XML and its associated standards. The committee's efforts will first be directed to assessing XML standards and their specific application to law enforcement.

### **The Immediate Future**

The LEITS Council is now in the process of identifying the people needed to staff the various committees and preparing the work plan for the coming year. The technology vendor community will be represented on the committees as a means to ensure the standards submitted to the Justice Registry can be realistically achieved. The vendors will offer the added benefit of their knowledge and insight into emerging technologies, making the work of the Council innovative and leading edge.

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