

**TOP FY 2000
Project Narrative**

County Sheriffs of Colorado

**Grant # 08-60-00030
Littleton, CO**

Project Purpose

Definition of Need

The law enforcement communities of the State of Colorado and indeed, the entire criminal justice system, recognize the need for an enhanced and comprehensive victim/offender information system that would link all the various law enforcement entities of the state. County Sheriffs of Colorado (CSOC), a 501 c (3) non-profit organization, is seeking additional funding for the VOICE (Victim/Offender Information Computer Enhancement) project.

There are 62 County Sheriff offices and several hundred local law enforcement agencies that utilize county, local and private detention facilities in the State of Colorado. In addition there are literally hundreds of local state judges and magistrates processing criminal, civil and traffic violations and warrants. Few of these entities are able to communicate with each other in an expeditious, comprehensive and efficient manner, leaving a gap in the entire criminal justice system. There is a definite need for a statewide interagency system of victim/offender information that is current and reliable, and can be shared with any and all participants in a timely, cost effective and secure manner. This comprehensive database of offender information would be a major asset in officer safety and efficiency, offer a broader base of information for our court systems and be a benefit to crime victims and their advocates.

Warrant arrest victim notifications have been a concern in Colorado since the implementation of Colorado Revised Statute 24-4.1-301, commonly known as the Victims' Bill of Rights. Currently, detention/correctional facilities are not linked together for immediate information sharing. The existing warrant system does not allow for the recording of victim information, and keeping that information current is difficult because of the nature of the system. The current system makes it possible for an offender to be arrested, adjudicated and released in one county while other counties in the state have outstanding warrants for the same individual's arrest and/or the victim in the case never notified. Warrants for other counties often do not have the information to notify the victim. Therefore, this notification can take days to accomplish, if it ever happens at all. This can result in failure on the part of both the originating and arresting agencies to comply with the Victims' Bill of Rights requirements. VOICE will link all jails so that victim notification information will appear on any computer in the state that is part of this system, whenever the suspect's status changes by arrest, release, escape, etc. Our realistic goal is to connect all facilities-state, county and municipal to this network.

While the issues of crime victims remain virtually unchanged, the number of victims continues to escalate as the population increases. Colorado has five of the top 10 fastest growing counties in the nation. The state population has grown from 3.1 million at the last census to over 4 million today. Colorado has outgrown its manual method of victim notification. Continued growth will only exacerbate this condition.

Proposed Solution

CSOC seeks TOP funding to partially implement VOICE, a statewide, fully integrated, automated victim notification process as part of a comprehensive computerized, relational database system. The system will track and report information regarding all aspects of the criminal justice system to any victim, advocate or criminal justice agency with access to the Internet. VOICE is the future of service for victims and of criminal justice technology in Colorado.

VOICE is a computer system enhancement that will change the way we communicate with victims in the criminal justice system. It represents a method of communication that can be implemented statewide, allowing for all elements of the criminal justice system to communicate with each other and to communicate effectively with victims.

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that a statewide-automated victim notification and jail linkage system will result in better service to victims of crime. When an offender is apprehended in a county that does not have an active warrant for their arrest, the victim will be notified immediately after the booking information is uploaded to the VOICE system.

This should result in greater law enforcement efficiency since every county sheriff office and jail will now be able to find out is suspects they are searching for are being held in another part of the state. Jails holding inmates that are about to be released will know if there is another jurisdiction looking for the inmate in instances where no warrant has been entered into the National Crime Information Computer or the Colorado Crime Information Computer. This would include a summons and complaint or restraining order. VOICE will make it more difficult for offenders to take advantage of the lack of communication that currently exists between law enforcement agencies.

VOICE will also help in managing jails and inmate population planning since counties will be able to see if neighboring jails are becoming crowded or if they have vacant beds available for overflow from county to county.

VOICE can be used in the investigative phase of a crime since it allows law enforcement to use statewide information to identify and locate suspects, crime patterns, and wanted persons. Suspects are entered into a system that tracks many personal characteristics, from type of offense, age, height and hair color down to fingerprints, tattoos and body piercings. This means that if one of the few traits a rape victim can identify about her assailant is a rose tattoo on his left forearm, the database can be queried for previous sexual offenders with rose tattoos on their left forearm. VOICE can also record visitor information to track possible accomplices and conspirators.

Innovation

VOICE is an enhancement and expansion of the IVIS (Internet Victim Information System) developed by the Advanced Solutions Group (ASG) of the University of South Carolina using Bureau of Justice Assistance funds. This system is currently in statewide use in South Carolina.

Because the research and development costs were paid for using Department of Justice funds, it is NOT FOR SALE. The software is free to any state. Both the University and the Department of Justice wanted a system that was easy to replicate. One of the selection criteria of the TOP grant is to find solutions that can be shared among states. Colorado has a unique opportunity to serve as the national model for the reproduction and reliability of VOICE.

The VOICE system is comprised of software written by ASG, and Oracle database, and an IBM RISC 6000 server. This database will be loaded with historical jail data collected from the state's various jails. Current data will be added to the database as individuals are booked into jail and these records are copied to the VOICE system. Though partially funded by a VOCA and DCSIP grant, the VOICE project is still seeking funding to complete the purchase of the server and Oracle database.

VOICE is accessed with a personal computer (PC) with Internet capability. There is no need for any criminal justice agency or nonprofit victim services provider to obtain additional equipment or software to access the system or to assist a victim of crime in accessing the system. VOICE can also be accessed by use of a toll-free telephone number for audio information. The option to find out the status of an offender any time of day or night anonymously, provides an extra measure of security for those victims who "just want to be certain" where their perpetrator is.

County Sheriffs of Colorado is bridging the digital divide by providing PCS and Internet access to those rural sheriffs' offices that cannot afford the expense. To facilitate the transfer of inmate information, CSOC is also providing Colorado Jail Information Management System (CJIMS), a basic jail management software system written by ASG. This software will assist the jail with a computerized management system and put the booking data into a format that can be readily uploaded to the main VOICE server via the web. With these tools, the most underserved areas of the state can now access the shared statewide database of inmates. Sheriffs in these areas will be able to see if any of their suspects are being held in another facility and they will be able to notify victims in other counties if their offenders are captured.

When accessed via the Internet, a complete printout of the offender's status is displayed on the monitor including scheduled court dates, bond hearings, and all other information related to critical stages of the case as it passes through the criminal justice system. Nonprofit victim service providers can guide a victim through the events in their case. This will assist nonprofit advocates in providing a higher level of support to crime victims.

Hyperlinks will be built into the entry page of VOICE's victim notification system and will direct victims to advocacy and support groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, Parents of Murdered Children, child advocacy centers, child abuse hotlines and others.

Because VOICE is a statewide linking system, any agency that arrests or bonds a perpetrator on a warrant will have complete victim notification information readily available. Victims no longer will fall through the cracks of existing systems. Agencies retain ownership and control of their information systems while leveraging the vast amount of information available from partners in the criminal justice system.

Unlike the current method, VOICE is a single-point-of-entry system. The victim's name and case information is put into the system one time by one agency. Law enforcement agencies often would be the point-of-entry, but victims may be added at any point in the criminal justice system, at any point in the process. Once entered and placed on notification status, all information relating to a victim/case sorts directly to that victim's information page by use of a relational database computer enhancement derived from all agencies' information. There is no longer a need for a victim to notify authorities every time a new agency is involved with their case. There is no longer a need for agencies to initiate a victim notification form every time a victim comes into their area of the system. Single point of entry reduces the workload but increases the effectiveness for everyone.

Diffusion Potential

The IVIS system was developed with federal funds with the purpose of being replicated in other states. Colorado, like many other states, has counties that do not have budgets that will allow the purchase and support of sophisticated, large scale criminal justice information systems. IVIS and its Colorado counterpart, VOICE, do not require the replacement of existing software or hardware. It works with and builds upon systems that are already in place. Other states have contacted CSOC and are watching to see if the system can be replicated.

Diffusion of the VOICE system within Colorado is an attainable and agreed upon goal. The membership of County Sheriffs of Colorado unanimously agreed to support the VOICE program by resolution on June 9, 1999. The City and County of Denver, although it has no Sheriff and is not a member of CSOC, has agreed to share their inmate data with the VOICE system.

In order to meet the requirements of the Victims' Bill of Rights, some of the county sheriffs were about to implement another victim notification system. This system is a for profit, turnkey operation requiring dedicated terminals. Notifications would be made from out of state without benefit of local knowledge, and the initial cost was very high. The alternative system has no jail linkage and the system does not hold onto inmate history. It functions on a county-by county basis and only performs victim notifications within a specified area of the state. The recurring costs were also high.

It is expected that next year, CSOC can present to the National Sheriffs Association its plan for execution and implementation of VOICE. The Advanced Solutions Group of the University of South Carolina will also be publicizing this success next year as they will have successfully completed the first replication of their IVIS system.

Project Feasibility

VOICE, like IVIS will be housed in an IBM RISC 6000 server that stores the system databases and provides information over the web. This system is chosen due to its proven performance record, extremely high reliability and stability with the AIX operating system. The RS/6000 is also scalable for future VOICE enhancements. The server system will also include a front-end web server/firewall such as a smaller RS/6000 and two external RAID storage units. The RISC server system will house the database of criminal justice records and will coordinate the web interface to the system.

The Unix web server is required and necessary software that enables the system databases to exchange information with the Internet via web pages. The web server must enable high-security features including SSL Level 2 encryption of data exchanged over the Internet. The web server will enable authorized law enforcement personnel from across the state to enter/view criminal justice records in the system without expensive computers or network equipment at each participating agency.

Nancy Lake is the Executive Director of County Sheriffs of Colorado. Nancy has a broad background of organizational management in private and public industry. She laid the groundwork for the success of VOICE by building agreement and cooperation between the various groups of people needed to make VOICE happen. A previously Certified Managerial Accountant, she holds Juris Doctor from Santa Clara University School of Law.

Lt. James Grayson is the VOICE Project Director. He is on leave from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office to assist in the implementation of VOICE. He has 19 years of law enforcement experience with El Paso County. At the time of his departure from El Paso County, Jim was the Manager of Information Systems for the Sheriff's Department. Jim holds a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Southern Mississippi and is nearing completion of his Masters in Public Administration at the University of Colorado.

David Moschner is the VOICE Field Technician. Dave has 19 years in the public safety arena as a firefighter and paramedic. Since retiring from Parker Fire Department he has been actively involved in adult education as a training specialist. Dave has experience in software instruction, computer installation and repair.

Community Involvement

As stated earlier, the membership of CSOC has unanimously approved the VOICE program. Appendix A contains letters of support for VOICE. The VOICE Advisory

Board is made up of Sheriffs from 3 different counties and representatives from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, Douglas and Arapahoe County's Victim Assistance Coordinators, the Director of Victim Assistance from the 18th Judicial District and VOICE staff from CSOC.

Support for end users

The VOICE field technician is dedicated to client support in the field. The CSOC Information Systems Manager is also devoted to part-time assistance at VOICE sites. These two individuals are tasked with installing the Colorado Jail Information Management System (CJIMS) software on the PCS provided to the most needful county sheriff's offices and providing the necessary training to those departments. The Field Technician will also provide instruction on the use of VOICE to all other sheriffs departments and municipal jails.

Reducing Disparities

By providing PCS and jail management software to Colorado's rural sheriffs offices, CSOC is bringing these regions into the information age. By receiving personal computers, Internet access and training, these offices will be able to maintain their own records in an electronic format as well as share them with all other participating agencies. Victim advocates in these areas will be able to inform their clients when offenders are being released or have escaped from other jurisdictions.

Across the state, victims will have one point of contact to find the status of their offenders. They can request the county's victim advocate office to look up their offender's information, they can access it themselves from their home PC or at the local library or access the VOICE system via an 800 number.

Evaluation and Documentation

The VOICE Advisory Board has set four milestones to document the progress of VOICE implementation.

No later than March 31,2000, ASG will be accepting electronic transmissions of data from CSOC to store on their own server. This server data will have been received and is queriable from the web from Colorado.

By June 30,2000, ASG will deliver the capability to produce printed reports on this data via the web.

By September 30,2000 ASG will begin automatic notification to actual victims of crime in Colorado using telephone servers located in South Carolina.

By December 1,2000, CSOC will make automatic victim notification to actual victims of crime in Colorado using telephone servers located in Colorado.