

MEMORANDUM

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Office of Statistical and Science Policy
Office of Management and Budget

THROUGH: Lynn Murray
Clearance Officer
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FROM: Howard Snyder
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SUBJECT: BJS Request for OMB Clearance to conduct an exploratory semi-structured interview with state UCR/NIBRS Coordinators for the National Crime Statistics Exchange through the generic clearance agreement OMB Number 1121-0339

Introduction

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is spearheading the National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X), a program designed to support the development of national incident-based data on crimes known to law enforcement agencies. Such data are currently submitted to the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) by more than 5,000 law enforcement agencies across 32 states, providing data on a wide range of crimes. However, these data are not nationally representative and thus are not able to generate national estimates. BJS has calculated that if a scientifically selected sample of 400 law enforcement agencies would agree to become new NIBRS participants, the resulting NIBRS data could generate statistically sound and detailed national estimates of crime known to law enforcement.

NCS-X is a collaborative undertaking, supported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other Department of Justice agencies (*see Attachment A for a joint statement of support*), designed to increase participation in the FBI's NIBRS program by providing funding and technical assistance to the selected local and state law enforcement agencies, enabling them to report incident-based data to their state Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program and subsequently on to the FBI. Collectively, this initiative will increase our nation's ability to monitor, respond to, and prevent crime by producing timely, detailed, and accurate national measures of crime incidents. To facilitate these efforts, BJS has entered into a cooperative agreement with RTI International to develop implementation plans for NCS-X, assess the needs of local law enforcement agencies selected to participate in NCS-X, and to provide technical assistance to these agencies and their state UCR reporting programs (*see Attachment B for an overview of the NCS-X*).

The initial phase of the NCS-X will focus on obtaining the necessary background information to assess the viability and costs to local law enforcement of participating in NIBRS, identifying potential barriers for agency participation, and developing incentives to encourage candidate agencies to participate in NIBRS. This background information will provide the foundation for BJS to implement the necessary funding and technical assistance mechanisms to recruit the sample of 400 law enforcement agencies and enable the agencies to begin participating in NIBRS.

One of the first steps in the NCS-X development process is to conduct semi-structured telephone interviews with the UCR/NIBRS coordinators in each of the 50 states and Washington, DC. These interviews will be conducted in order to examine the organization of the state UCR/NIBRS programs and to gather key information about how incident-based data are collected from local law enforcement agencies in each state, processed by the state, and transmitted to the FBI. States vary in the range of information captured by their incident-based data collection systems and by the geographical coverage of their reporting systems. Some states report data from 100% of the law enforcement agencies in that state to NIBRS, while others are partial reporters or report no incident-based data to the FBI. The existing processes and capabilities of each state to collect and handle these incident-based data will be the foundation upon which the planning and implementation activities of NCS-X will be based.

A specific outcome of interest from interviews with state UCR coordinators in each state will be to understand the type(s) of technical assistance each state UCR agency may require to facilitate the NCS-X effort. BJS expects that technical assistance may be necessary at the state level to enable the state agency to 1) assist local agencies to develop their incident-based reporting capacity and 2) expand their own capacity to receive, process and transmit the new incident-based data to the FBI. The level and type of assistance will vary, however, based on the current state of the program. For example, some state UCR agencies may have the capacity to convert a local agency's automated incident data into the state's required reporting format, while other state agencies expect the local agency to assume this burden. Some state UCR agencies may have the capacity to handle the increased flow of incident-based data resulting from the NCS-X, while others may be overburdened by the flow and will require either more funding or technical assistance to compensate for the increase in data. Understanding how the state UCR programs handle these and other scenarios will help BJS to determine the needs that must be addressed by the NCS-X when providing funding and technical assistance to the state UCR agency and local law enforcement agencies with the state.

Request for developmental work

BJS plans to conduct developmental work for the NCS-X under the generic clearance agreement (OMB Number 1121-0339). Specifically, BJS is requesting clearance to conduct semi-structured interviews with the UCR/NIBRS coordinators in each of the 50 states and Washington, DC. The goal of the NCS-X UCR coordinator interview is to reach out to a representative from each state UCR program to develop a record of the state's capabilities and processes for collecting incident-based data and identify within-state barriers to reporting NIBRS data. We will conduct one interview per state. The identification of the UCR coordinator will be done using contact information provided by the Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs (ASUCRP), an organization that will be consulted throughout the data collection process. BJS considers interviewing individuals in each of the 50 states critical to gathering the background information necessary to accurately assess each state's current operations and incident-based reporting capabilities.

Specifically, BJS will employ semi-structured interviews with the UCR coordinator in each state to determine: 1) the structure of summary and incident-based data reported to the state program; 2) how, and in what form, data are reported to the state by individual law enforcement agencies; 3) the role of the state UCR agency in recruiting, obtaining and validating these data, and in submitting UCR data to the FBI; and 4) potential challenges to obtaining incident-based data from agencies in the state that currently do not report such data to the state UCR agency.

For each state, the state UCR coordinator interviews will identify: the number and type of law enforcement agencies within the state that currently report incident-based data; current methods used for collecting incident-based data from state and local agencies (e.g., online options, hardcopy reports); methods for processing and performing quality control checks on incident-based data; and any perceived barriers for increasing incident-based collection and processing from non-reporting agencies in the state. In addition, state coordinators will be asked about the methods by which the state transmits collected incident-based data to the FBI, and whether any law enforcement agencies in the state participate in other regional crime information systems, which may be potential sources of incident-based data from a large number of agencies. Lastly, we will identify additional resources that may be needed by the state UCR programs to handle the planned increased flow of information from law enforcement agencies, as well as possible incentives that could be provided to local or state law enforcement agencies to encourage their reporting of incident-based data to the state UCR reporters. This information will be used to help BJS develop cost estimates and feasibility assessments for NCS-X implementation by providing an understanding of the in-state reporting requirements, as well as the capacity and capabilities of state UCR programs, to assist non-reporting local agencies to participate in their state's incident-based reporting system. State UCR programs will likely vary greatly in their ability to help NCS-X increase participation by local law enforcement agencies in incident-based reporting via NIBRS, and understanding the nature of this variability is critical for NCS-X planning and cost estimation.

Design of the Exploratory Study

Sample Design:

Sampling is not needed for these semi-structured interviews as the entire group of state UCR coordinators will be interviewed as part of this process. The ability to realize the ultimate project goal of generating statistically sound national estimates of crime known to law enforcement hinges on obtaining current information on each state's current UCR reporting system, policies, and procedures prior to approaching the 400 sampled law enforcement agencies. Accordingly, BJS will conduct interviews with a representative from each of the 50 states and Washington DC for this developmental work.

Data Collection Procedures:

This developmental study will be implemented through several steps. First, we will identify the points of contact (POC) in each state with responsibility for the state's UCR/NIBRS program. Most of these POCs will be identified by contacting the Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs (ASUCRP). The ASUCRP membership list is available online; however to verify the contact information, we will contact the ASUCRP directly and ask if any revisions are needed. Because of the availability of the public contact list, identifying the vast majority of respondents is anticipated to be very straightforward. For the small number of states that have state UCR coordinators who are not members of ASUCRP, the project will contact the FBI to obtain the names of their UCR contacts in those states.

To encourage participation for this developmental work, BJS will contact the President of the ASUCRP and ask that ASUCRP send an e-mail using their listserv to their members that describes the NCS-X and urges ASUCRP members to participate in the interviews when contacted (*see Attachment C*). After this initial e-mail has gone out to the ASUCRP members, each state UCR coordinator will be contacted by phone and asked if they are willing to participate in the interview or to identify an alternative POC to complete the interview. If a state coordinator agrees to participate, they will be asked if they wish to complete the interview at that time or schedule an alternative time that is more convenient for them (*see Attachment D*). Once a state coordinator has agreed to participate, project staff will ask a series of semi-structured questions to obtain information from respondents about the nature of the state’s UCR program, data submission and processing procedures, and potential barriers to obtaining incident-based data from new agencies (*see Attachment E for semi-structured interview questionnaire*).

Burden Hours for Developmental Study

The survey protocol has been pilot tested with two state UCR coordinators. These were the coordinators from Missouri (who is the President of ASUCRP) and Massachusetts (who serves as the ASUCRP representative to the FBI’s UCR Subcommittee). Neither state is a full reporter to the NIBRS system. The two states have different NIBRS coverage; one state receives NIBRS data from more than 80% of its law enforcement agencies, while the other receives NIBRS data from less than 15% of agencies. The two coordinators, while able to represent their states, also have years of experience interacting with their fellow state coordinators. Consequently, they were able to advise BJS on the reactions we are likely to encounter to the interview items in the other states. The pilot test found that the items were easily understood and elicited the information needed to construct a model of UCR reporting in the state, the barriers to expand reporting, and the efforts that would be needed to successfully implement NCS-X. The pilot tests with the two agencies (excluding the debriefing period) required about around one hour to complete.

Based on the pilot tests, it is estimated that the burden to conduct the NCS-X coordinator interviews in the other 48 States and the District of Columbia is 57.5 hours. The burden hour estimates are divided into 2 tasks: 1) identification of the POCs and scheduling the interviews (8.5 hours), and 2) conducting interviews in the 48 states and Washington, DC (49 hours). The burden hour estimates are based on the pilot tests in the two states (described above) and the experience of NCS-X team in conducting similar interviews for other studies. Further details about the burden hour estimates are provided in the following table.

Pilot tasks	Average burden per jurisdiction	Total estimated burden hours
Scheduling with points of contact for time to conduct interview	10 minutes	48 States and Washington, DC* X 10 minutes = approximately 8.5 hours
Conduct interviews	1 hour	48 States and Washington, DC * 1 hour = 49 hours
Total Respondent Burden = 57.5 hours		

Informed Consent and Data Confidentiality

Before an interview takes place, each participating state coordinator will be fully briefed on the purpose of the NCS-X and the objectives of the interview specifically. The interviews are not intended to collect information on individuals or information that would otherwise be considered sensitive in nature. As such, the activities associated with this task are not considered human subjects research. However, participants will be informed that their participation in the interview is voluntary, and that respondents may decline to answer any and all questions and may stop their participation at any time.

Data Security

Information collected during the interview will be entered into the NCS-X web portal (that is maintained by RTI) by NCS-X team staff. This site is password protected and secured by a Secure Socket Layers certificate which encrypts data during transmission. All data are then stored in an SQL database that resides behind RTI's firewall.

Contact Information

Questions regarding any aspect of this project can be directed to:

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Attachments

See the list below for additional attachments.

Attachment A: NCS-X FBI BJS Joint statement of support for NCS-X
Attachment B: Brief Overview of the NCS-X
Attachment C: Proposed memo to ASUCRP members
Attachment D: NCS-X State UCR Coordinator Interview Introduction script
Attachment E: NCS-X State Interview Questionnaire