Statewide Sex Offender Management – A Case Study in Statewide Collaboration

Category: Partnerships

Jurisdiction Name: Douglas County Government

County Manager Name: Doug DeBord

Innovation Award: Yes, I believe Douglas County is a member

Rapid Fire Session: Unsure of what this is

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# Synopsis

In the state of Colorado, individuals convicted of a sex offense are statutorily required to register within 5 business days of becoming a temporary or permanent resident of Colorado or of being released into the community under criminal justice supervision. If the offender resides in more than one location, he/she is required to register with all law enforcement agencies within which he/she establishes a residence. Given the mobility of the sex offender population, who often move several times per year, management of these offenders can be challenging, particularly when it comes to transferring sex offender information between jurisdictions.

In response, Douglas County Government, in collaboration with four Douglas County-based law enforcement agencies, cooperatively designed a web-based application called SOTAR that provides law enforcement agencies with an effective means of managing sex offenders, sharing sex offender data, and transferring sex offenders between jurisdictions. The system, built in-house by Douglas County Information Technology, also provides the public a seamless view of sex offenders in their area without regard to jurisdictional boundaries. Since its inception, SOTAR has expanded past the County’s borders to include 22 Colorado-based public safety jurisdictions, the Colorado Bureau of Investigations, and the US Marshall’s Office. Additionally, the County has 10 more agencies waiting provisioning. None of these agencies have ever paid a fee for this application.

The SOTAR application is made up of two components: a law enforcement agency (LEA) component and a public component. Law enforcement agencies have the ability to manage and track offenders. They can search for offenders on a number of different criteria and across jurisdictions including within a user-defined radius of an address. A mapping component allows law enforcement officers to view the location of offenders geographically. There are work queues/dashboards where users can keep up to date on relevant activities, including house checks and registrations due, wanted offenders, jurisdictional ownership information, and transfers. Within a jurisdiction, they can also manage their own LEA users and assign roles for those users. One of SOTAR’s most desirable system attributes is the ability for one or more jurisdictions to manage an offender. Multiple agencies can manage a single offender record (e.g., in cases of dual registration), but track house check and registration information independently. A registrant’s full SOTAR record can also be electronically re-assigned from one agency to another without record duplication or loss of data. This helps ensure that offenders do not fall through the cracks. Any LEA using SOTAR can view any other agency’s data in the system.

The public component of the SOTAR application (which can be found at http://apps.douglas.co.us/apps/soso/initPublicIndex.do) provides a means for citizens to search for sex offenders by location or name, view limited details on those offenders, and even sign up to receive notifications when sex offenders move in to the area. Just like the LEA component, users can view offenders within a given proximity of an address or plot offenders geographically.

In late 2011, Douglas County in conjunction with the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, applied for and was awarded a U.S. Department of Justice SMART (Office of Sex offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking) grant. This grant, which provided nearly $250,000 in hardware and development funding, is awarded for developing or enhancing programs that address SORNA (Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act) requirements for the Adam Walsh Act. While SOTAR was developed to support multi-jurisdictional use, the application required an infrastructure update and a self-provisioning feature in order to technically support a statewide rollout.

Having a single, robust, statewide solution for management and tracking of sex offenders has numerous benefits, including:

* Increased public safety through data sharing and collaborative management – offenders can no longer slip through the cracks moving from one jurisdiction to another.
* Increased visibility to citizens who want to be notified of the location of sex offenders regardless of jurisdictional boundaries.
* Decreased time spent entering data if that offender has been managed by another participating jurisdiction
* Decreased costs – It is more cost effective to share the costs of one system over individual agencies sharing costs

While the benefits of a shared sex offender management tool are great, it also has resulted in a number of sustainability challenges for the County:

* Hardware will need to be replaced every 4-5 years,
* A circuit to support the anticipated increase in traffic will have to be procured and monthly fees paid
* Users will have to be trained to use the system and enter data in a manner consistent with other agencies
* Technical support
* Enhancement requests, including those that may be statutorily driven

To date all hardware and network costs, development, training, and support have been the exclusive responsibility of Douglas County. In order to maintain a high level of service to the SOTAR user community and to balance the upkeep of hardware over the years, Douglas County needed to develop a new support model that would keep the system sustainable, while balancing the need to keep costs low.

Rather than solve these sustainability issues ourselves, Douglas County has been working collaboratively with other agencies to define alternative support models. We believe that by partnering with other participating agencies we can identify and recommend innovative solutions that will ensure sustainability of SOTAR. Amongst the discussion points are:

* Creation of a SOTAR LEA user group that will help set the vision for the application as we move forward.
* Identification of alternative funding sources, including grants and charging sex offenders a fee, that would help pay for ongoing hardware, network, and support costs.
* Development of an externally-available collaboration site to post product announcements, training documentation, and encourage end user support through discussion groups.
* Contribution of resources from other jurisdictions that can be used for development, testing, support, and technical writing.

SOTAR has required constant collaboration since its inception, starting with a collaboration between Information Technology and the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office, and then with law enforcement agencies within Douglas County boundaries. As this application moves statewide we find that a single jurisdiction cannot support it. The only means we have to ensure its sustainability is through collaboration with all participating Colorado law enforcement agencies. The statewide rollout of SOTAR has forced us to work together and deliver services in a whole new way and, while Douglas County is in uncharted territory, we welcome the continued challenges ahead.

# Presentation Style

The presenters plan on using PowerPoint for the core presentation that will cover the application itself as well as the evolution of the associated partnerships. The PowerPoint will have embedded video clips to illustrate the product.

Additionally, the interaction between the two presenters will be well-orchestrated, yet entertaining because they have developed a strong partnership out of necessity and respect for one another that has evolved over the years.

**Interview Notes**

Issue: several agencies trying to keep track of sex offenders. All sex offender data is tracked and retained. Have added more and more agencies. 22 total in the state of Colorado, and 10 more about to join.

Approaching Others: marketed to other jurisdictions (demonstrations, word of mouth) costs are free for a good application.

Innovative: typically Public Safety is very silo’d and data is personal and kept under wraps. We are able to share data and partner. Overcome obstacles.

The System Itself: data is shared for the agencies as well as the public. Notifications sent if within a certain radius.

Transferability: share experiences of working with other agencies. Started because we had a need to share organization with smaller organizations.

Presentation: powerpoint, live demo, entertaining.