



INFORMATION QUALITY: THE FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE DECISION MAKING



United States
Department of Justice

A SIGN OF THE TIMES: INCREASING ELECTRONIC DATA EXCHANGE INCREASES THE NEED FOR INFORMATION QUALITY

Recent events, such as terrorist threats and catastrophic natural disasters, have revealed a critical need for increasing information sharing across disciplines, jurisdictions, agencies, and geographic areas. As these needs are addressed by the application of new technologies and cross-agency interaction, it is also imperative to address the quality of the information that the justice system depends on for sound decision making.

WHAT IS INFORMATION QUALITY?

Few professionals in any discipline will dispute that “good information is good business.” But what constitutes “good,” or “quality,” information? Conventional wisdom typically equates good information with accurate information. Good information, however, should also be timely, reliable, and complete. Today, information quality (IQ) is understood to be a multidimensional concept that encompasses critical relationships among multiple attributes, such as timeliness, accuracy, relevancy, and others. Together, these attributes contribute to the validity of the information. Quality information is the cornerstone of sound agency decision making and inspires trust in the justice system and in the law enforcement entities that use information. Such information enables agencies to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively.

WHAT PROBLEMS ARISE FROM POOR INFORMATION QUALITY?

The typical triggers for poor information quality are commonplace business challenges such as incomplete records, delays, failure to update record information, data-entry mistakes, or improper releases of information. Additionally, technical issues, information volume, and the widespread availability of data may lead to IQ concerns.

The routine nature of day-to-day business processes underscores the potential for inadvertent generation of inferior IQ. As data is increasingly shared and becomes more readily and rapidly accessible, justice agency control over IQ becomes a bigger challenge.

Poor information quality can be harmful to the individual, the community, and the justice entity. Failure to actively and continuously evaluate and improve IQ in justice-related information sharing practices may result in harm or injustice to individuals, lawsuits and liability, population of other agency databases with inaccurate data, public criticism, inefficient use of resources, or inconsistent actions within agencies.



The following scenario demonstrates why quality information is critical for justice information sharing.

On a busy holiday weekend, a police officer pulls over a speeding driver. After checking whether the vehicle is stolen and whether there are warrants for the registered owner, the officer approaches the vehicle. The driver presents his driver's license, and the officer observes that there are two young girls and an adult female in the car. The officer runs a routine driver's history check and a search of the state's criminal history file. She discovers that the driver has recently been released from prison after serving a term for third-degree sexual conduct with a child. The conditions for parole indicate that the driver is not to be in the company of minors. The officer is able to make an arrest because an appropriate amount of justice information was accessible, complete, and available at the time it was most critical.

More scenarios on page 4.