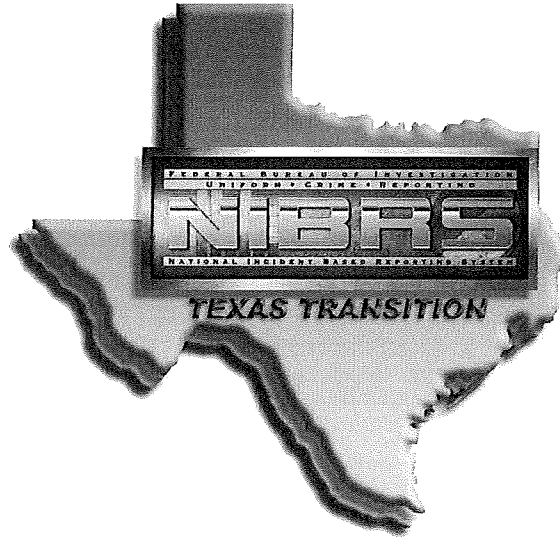


The Texas Transition to NIBRS

In February 2016, the FBI announced that it would retire the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program's Summary Reporting System (SRS) for collecting crime statistics and effect a full transition to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) by January 1, 2021. The NIBRS transition a top priority and a main component of the FBI's Crime Data Modernization initiative. However, before the FBI's announcement, Texas decided to make its own transition to submitting crime statistics to NIBRS. In 2015, the 84th Texas Legislature required that the state's program implement a goal to achieve transition of all law enforcement agencies in Texas to NIBRS by September 2019, well before the FBI's 2021 deadline. Texas lawmakers also allocated funding to assist local agencies in making this transition.



Why Texas Decided to Make the Transition

Multiple factors prompted Texas' decision to make a statewide transition to NIBRS. The state of Texas has long understood that incident-based reporting leads to better crime statistics. In fact, the Texas UCR Program has been FBI NIBRS-certified since 1998, but many Texas agencies have not switched to the more detailed method of NIBRS reporting. This was largely due to the perceived complexities associated with NIBRS reporting. However, advancements in records management systems (RMSs) have made NIBRS reporting less of a burden on the UCR contributors and more attractive to them. Texas law enforcement agencies and legislators recognize that more detailed crime statistics can benefit the state in several ways:

- Provide a more comprehensive understanding of crime trends in an area
- Better inform those in the decision-making process regarding the allocation of resources
- Help measure the effectiveness of law enforcement programs and initiatives

Legislative and Fiscal Support

In 2015, the Texas Legislature recognized the importance of capturing more detailed and comprehensive crime data and directed the state to begin a transition to NIBRS. As a result, effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Legislature amended the state law to require the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to oversee the transition of Texas local law enforcement agencies to an incident-based crime reporting system by September 1, 2019. The legislature also approved \$16.2 million in grant funding to assist local agencies with their transition to NIBRS. Any local law enforcement agency that does not comply by the September 2019 deadline could face limits in grant funds it might otherwise receive from the state. The legislature also tasked the DPS with submitting an annual report beginning January 1, 2017, detailing the number of law enforcement agencies that have implemented the NIBRS requirements. According to the 2017 report, the number of Texas agencies reporting crime data to NIBRS increased from 75 to 97 during 2016. The 97 reporting agencies represented 14.4 percent of the Texas population.

As Texas DPS Director Steven C. McCraw stated in the 2015 edition of *Crime in Texas*:

“While criminals will always seek to carry out their illicit activities, Texas law enforcement partners will continue to work together to help prevent and deter crime across the state. The national and state initiatives to move to reporting crime through the National Incident-Based Reporting System will vastly improve the utility of crime reporting in the future, which will in turn enhance our ability to accurately assess the impact of all crime occurring in our communities. For instance, crimes such as drug smuggling, extortion, corruption, bribery, money laundering, and kidnapping typically associated with criminal enterprise organizations, such as Mexican drug cartels, are not currently captured through index crime reporting, and therefore are not reflected in these state crime statistics.”

Reaping the Benefits of NIBRS

As Texas continues to move toward full NIBRS submission, the state will benefit from the transition in a number of ways.

- With NIBRS, law enforcement agencies can see not only that a crime occurred, but they also have access to incident-related details, such as the people involved and the location where the incident occurred. This added level of specificity is valuable to strategically deploy limited law enforcement resources in the most efficient way to combat crime.

- The greater amount of data available through NIBRS reporting will serve to improve the reliability of crime statistics. This is important for fostering a common understanding about crime among law enforcement agencies and members of the community.
- The DPS will be able to use the NIBRS data to analyze crime trends. This is especially useful on the border, where NIBRS data can provide new information about the residual impacts of the state's efforts to increase the level of security.
- The fully electronic format of NIBRS submission is quicker, more consistent, and more accurate. NIBRS allows for an automated check for errors at the local agency level and in the state's system, and local agencies can avoid the redundancy of paper reporting by regularly compiling and reporting electronic files. As a result of the transition, Texas has already observed that agencies make fewer errors in reporting.
- NIBRS provides Texas with a single reporting methodology. With better data than the SRS, NIBRS allows for a comprehensive and truer understanding of crime in Texas, rather than summary-based interpretations.

The transition to NIBRS reporting has substantial benefits. The richer data submissions stand to improve the awareness of law enforcement, government leaders, academia, the media, and citizens of crime occurring in their area.

Facing Challenges

As with any change, Texas has experienced some challenges while making this transition of agencies to NIBRS. The primary misconception by contributing agencies is that after an agency's transition to NIBRS, the agency will automatically experience an increase in the community's crime rate. The state continues to manage expectations by reaching out to local agencies to explain that once they switch to NIBRS, their updated crime rate is simply a more complete measure of crime. If the rate happens to be higher under NIBRS than it was under SRS, it does not necessarily represent an actual increase in crime; it is merely a more accurate reflection of crime that has already been occurring. Concerned law enforcement leaders can then use this more comprehensive data to better assess the public safety threats in their jurisdictions.



Another challenge is the cost of effecting a transition to NIBRS reporting. State and federal grant money and initiatives have helped to ease the financial burdens incurred by law enforcement agencies in Texas that are working toward the transition to NIBRS. However, budgeting and implementation of the incident-based system continue to challenge smaller agencies that must operate with moderate resources.

Lessons Learned

Based on its experience with the state's transition to NIBRS reporting, Texas has learned some lessons that may help other states:

- Disseminate information openly and regularly. For instance, state officials should explain to law enforcement agencies that implementing NIBRS would not automatically result in an increase of a community's crime rate. This can help to dispel a common misperception about NIBRS.
- Seek the input of stakeholders. For example, the Texas DPS enlisted the support of major city police chiefs. DPS Director McCraw met with the police chiefs to discuss the benefits and importance of NIBRS. These jurisdictions represent a large portion of the state's population, so obtaining their input, ideas, and collaboration early in the process was very important and helpful.
- Enlist the support of state leaders. If a state's leaders support a transition to NIBRS reporting by all law enforcement agencies in the state, the leaders' support encourages compliance and timeliness by agencies throughout the transition. This is especially true if the state takes legislative action to dedicate grant funding toward the effort or to require NIBRS reporting by law enforcement agencies as a condition for acquiring state grant funding for other programs, such as Texas did.
- Recognize the challenges and obstacles for local agencies. A state should take local challenges and obstacles into consideration in its outreach to local agencies. Along with acknowledgement of local concerns, the state should take active measures to help the local agencies address and overcome the causes of concern.
- Be flexible and adaptable. A state moving toward NIBRS reporting must develop plans and goals for a successful transition. However, unforeseen obstacles can occur. All agencies are not the same, so the same approach will not work for all agencies. While implementation plans must maintain a certain level of uniformity, they should still be flexible enough to adapt to the differing needs of the reporting agencies.

Thanks to the continued efforts of the Texas Legislature and the continued work by law enforcement agencies across the state to achieve a transition to NIBRS reporting,

Texas will be better able to report and assess crime and develop effective strategies to address crime occurring in Texas communities.