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Creating a Multi-Agency Shared Software System: Best Practices

A Spillman Technologies White Paper
Multi-Agency Data Sharing

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Spillman: A History of Seamless, Reliable Data Sharing

In addition to agencies in Utah County, 79% of Spillman customers use Spillman software to share data with anywhere from two to 51 other Spillman and non-Spillman agencies.

Spillman software is designed to make it easy to create a multi-agency shared software system. Users can store data on a single Spillman database, which can then be accessed in real time by all participating agencies. Each agency has the capability to restrict access to specific data while still providing users with a collective pool of information.

Agencies can also customize their Spillman software to meet their unique needs. They can purchase modules individually or as a shared system, allowing each jurisdiction to create a software system that fits its needs and budget.

Every 12 to 18 months on average, Spillman releases a software enhancement with upgraded features, taking the guesswork out of software upgrades. Customers with annual maintenance agreements receive these upgrades along with telephone and online support at no charge.

Spillman maintains system security by allowing agencies to set user privileges, defining which users can access data and at what level. Spillman offers encryption that complies with the following standards: National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS).
Introduction

Forming a multi-agency shared software group enables participating public safety agencies to share data, minimize costs, improve crime-fighting strategies, and boost officer safety. Agencies with a common vision of how to manage the system, and a willingness to cooperate, can overcome organizational challenges and jurisdictional conflicts to successfully share data.

What is a Multi-Agency Shared Software System?

A multi-agency shared software system allows agencies to seamlessly share data with other agencies across multiple jurisdictions. In most scenarios, agencies will use a single database to store the data collected by all participating parties. One agency acts as the host by storing the server at its location, and other participating agencies store data on a designated segment of that same server.

The Benefits of a Multi-Agency Shared Software System

Data sharing allows agencies to achieve interoperability, enhancing the ability of emergency responders to work together to prevent crime and improve efficiency. By sharing law records, fire incidents, names, vehicles, property, digital images, and other data on a daily basis, agencies can better identify regional crime trends and develop prevention strategies. The ability to access live data from the field and view alerts and warnings in real time gives field personnel the information they need to stay safe. Interoperability also provides agencies with information needed to coordinate responses to large-scale disasters and strengthen homeland security.

Best Practices for Creating a Shared Software System

Technology and Leadership Committees

One of the first steps in forming a shared software system should be to form a technology committee to direct the implementation and function of a shared system. Each participating agency should appoint at least one member to the committee. The technology committee should research vendors and solicit RFPs, make recommendations for a software purchase, and ultimately, set the groundwork for the day-to-day working of the system.

Support from chiefs, sheriffs, and other top administrators is crucial for the success of a shared system. By also forming a leadership committee that operates separately from the technology committee, agency leaders have the ability to approve the technology committee’s recommendations and appropriate funding without becoming directly involved in the technical details of the system.
Managing Billing and Maintenance Fees

In some systems, host and shared agencies may want to work together to find a way to share maintenance and billing costs. The host agency can also collect maintenance fees by requiring agencies to contribute a set amount each year, based on the number of sworn officers employed by each agency.

Overcoming Obstacles

When trying to form a shared system, agencies may face opposition from within and outside the group of participating agencies. Top administrators may be reluctant to give up full control of what they consider to be “their” data. The shared system’s technology committee can meet with administrators to explain how the ability to access a wide range of data will give all agencies involved the ability to solve more crimes and improve officer safety. The committee can also explain how a shared system leads to cost savings. By using a shared system, agencies save the expense associated with hosting and administering their own servers.

When an agency shares data with another agency, the first concern is often about what information will be shared and what will be restricted. For example, administrators may want to share data about a common burglary while restricting access to information about an internal investigation. The technology and leadership committees need to carefully evaluate any data sharing solution to ensure they will have the ability to control access to sensitive information.

Once administrators are comfortable with the content that is being shared, they can turn their attention to making sure that the data is secure as it traverses public networks such as the Internet. This level of security can be accomplished using software that utilizes security tools such as Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and a Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS)-approved encryption methodology, such as Advanced Encryption System (AES) or Triple Data Encryption Algorithm (Triple DES).

Multi-Agency Case Study: Spillman Data Sharing in Utah County

Overview

As the second-largest county in Utah, Utah County is home to more than half a million residents and acts as a conduit for people driving the I-15 corridor from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas and California. Public safety agencies throughout the county needed a way to track criminals as they moved across jurisdictional borders. Sharing data enables these agencies not only to work together, but also allows the smaller jurisdictions to benefit from technology that they would not be able to afford on their own.
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