

***Beyond “Beyond Bean Counting”:***

*Early experiences from six Ohio Incident-Based Reporting System agencies*

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**Foreword:**  
*Beyond what?*

The year was 1988. Over a half century had passed since the Uniform Crime Reporting program had been implemented in the wake of President Hoover's Wickersham Commission Report, yet the nation was still looking at its crime problem through UCR eyes. A couple of years had passed since a national redesign study had recommended an incident-based format for the new crime reporting program. And 1988 was the year a sometimes contentious national conference on crime reporting convened at Gulf Shores, Alabama, to hammer out the tough issues which inevitably surface when an institution, such as law enforcement, considers radically changing its most important piece of documentation, such as the basic crime report. Through all of the arguments and agreements one point was repeatedly stressed above all others: *the new crime reporting program would sink or swim based on its value to local law enforcement agencies.* Whatever other benefits might accrue to the FBI or state agencies, incident-based reporting (IBR) had first to "deliver" for local chiefs and sheriffs.

The year 1988 was also notable for another event: the publication of a little booklet entitled ***Beyond Bean Counting*** by the Police Executive Research Forum via a grant from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Essentially, the booklet profiled several local agencies and officers who were successfully using IBR crime reporting techniques in their daily operations. The publication spoke eloquently of the benefits of IBR through the voices of law enforcement personnel who had already gone down that road. From its warmly personal opening sentence ("Officer Jim Jackson had seen it all before."), to its concluding personal testimony to IBR cost-effectiveness 26 pages later, ***Beyond Bean Counting*** made a convincing case for IBR to fellow law enforcement officers. If, as the national debate had insisted, the case was to be decided by value to local agencies, then these officers were the necessary witnesses.

Thirteen years and hundreds of happenings later the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services is taking "Bean Counting" to another level. With millions of dollars and huge energy expenditures invested in what has become the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS—or OIBRS in Ohio) it is time to return to that crucial first question: Of what value is the program to local law enforcement agencies?

***Beyond "Beyond Bean Counting"*** is, with apologies to PERF and BJS, Ohio's attempt to answer that question in the same effective style of the earlier landmark document. Six local agencies, representing a wide spectrum of local law enforcement, offer their NIBRS stories in this report. The Belmont and Tuscarawas County Sheriff Offices, along with the police departments in Richfield Township, Dennison, Dover, and Dayton, offer their views of Ohio's new crime reporting initiative in these pages. Here is no mere plan or promise or hope, but rather the actual experiences of people who have had to live with NIBRS for at least a couple of years. Within the next year OCJS will also produce demonstration research which will highlight some of the actual NIBRS data and its uses in local agencies.

But first, even before the physical evidence, come the witnesses.

*Who monitors the monitors?*

One of the benefits of OIBRS that was not fully anticipated ten years ago is the potential for analyzing the nature of officer-citizen encounters. Although informal contacts are an important aspect of law enforcement, the highly charged issue of potential “targeting” abuses—especially in the form of racial profiling—has cast a pall over both the credibility of law enforcement officers and their ability to pursue routine responsibilities. While OIBRS does not, in itself, secure racial profiling data, corollary systems being developed in the wake of NIBRS may lead to that end. Specifically, the Law Enforcement Officer’s Toolkit (LEOT) developed at OCJS by OIBRS staff is a macro-level approach to law enforcement records, which includes not only the OIBRS module, but also a traffic citation module. Cathy Bickford of the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office notes that this traffic citation module will allow monitoring of the racial profiling issue via its provision of demographic data on drivers involved in stops.

This is no small thing. Nationwide some of the toughest arguments about racial profiling concern the “measurement” aspect of the problem. Indeed, former BJS Director Jan Chaiken has publicly stated that seldom has the “observer factor” impacted more heavily on operations than when BJS began monitoring driver demographic data in traffic stops. Some law enforcement officials believe that suddenly forcing the recording of such information will severely reduce the number of stops officers will make in the future. However, an already existing reporting module in which traffic stops are only part of a much larger system--and in development for many years prior to the national emergence of racial profiling--suggests much better prospects of escaping a “gotcha” perception among line officers.

But officer quality control goes beyond any single aspect of that role. Chief Ron Johnson of the 23-officer Dover Police Department used his new computer-driven records system to flag a serious problem which had developed with one of his officers regarding DUI arrests. The officer had developed an overreaction to any evidence of drinking among drivers he stopped, and was routinely arresting and bringing into custody even those who ultimately fell far below the .10 standard for drunk driving. While “driving under the influence” does allow officers more discretion than that dictated by the .10 standard, the practice of routinely arresting drivers who weren’t drunk was creating a citizen-relations nightmare for the department. When the new system provided a quick and comprehensive documentation of the abuse the officer’s union and legal representation urged him not to contest the Chief’s determination to curtail the practice.

Such uses of the greatly improved information in OIBRS might be expected to generate resistance from law enforcement labor organizations. But early indications suggest that is not happening. The very comprehensiveness of the reporting system argues

*“At first my officers were doubtful about it, but several have come to me since saying it seems like a fair thing.”*

**Tuscarawas County Sheriff Walt Wilson** on using the new system for tracking officer activity.

against abuse. Anyone wishing to use one narrow piece of information for illegitimate purposes must also open himself to all of the other implications of that larger system, including information which can exonerate officers and provide fuller perspectives for the issue at hand. Like DNA evidence testing, improved officer tracking information cuts more ways than one. It seems a fairer prospect for both law enforcement executives and line officers

### *Commitment costs*

Although seldom portrayed on the TV cop shows, a significant part of a chief's or sheriff's daily anxieties revolve around budgets and records. OIBRS, if it is to succeed, will have to convince law enforcement CEOs that that it more cost-effective and efficient than their current operations systems. Sheriff Walt Wilson says that when he first looked at upgrading his computer system into a usable tool for 21<sup>st</sup> Century law enforcement he immediately ran into a \$60,000 software price tag on the open market. Chief Johnson of Dover cited a similarly prohibitive figure of \$30,000 - \$40,000. After apprising local county and city officials of these costs it was easy to return to them with the news that the state of Ohio was offering all of this and more in an OIBRS package which could be had for \$300 a year, and \$25 for each additional computer. Johnson noted that this 99% savings has allowed him access to other support funds which fall far below the original estimate, and which relieved city officials are happy to provide.

Even in the smallest of departments a remarkable amount of computing power can had for very small cash outlays. The Richfield Township Police Department consists of five officers serving under part-time Chief Dave Arbogast, who also carries a full-time teaching load at the local joint vocational school in nearby Medina. The department's small offices are located in the back basement of a fellowship hall. Yet the agency's link to an OIBRS computer provides it with analysis and tracking advantages similar to neighboring giant agencies in Summit and Cuyahoga Counties. Arbogast has also ambitiously pursued automated relationships with the Medina County Sheriff's Office and Sagamore Hills Police Department to stretch his

informational reach. “As fast as they develop the new reporting modules, we’ll put them to use,” he says, noting that OCJS’s pending LEOT (Toolkit) traffic citation module will be very welcome in a township where one in every five police calls involves an auto accident. Arbogast is even anticipating the use of laptops in his cruisers to relieve the need for his officers to return to headquarters to fill out their large number of reports.

*Proving what you already know*

There is a popular bar in Dover which has a history of creating the kinds of problems familiar to law enforcement officers everywhere. It exists along a strip of similar night spots but has the worst reputation for trouble. Fights are common, as are police calls, and only a pharmacy and flea market are left among the neighboring businesses. Dover is certainly not the first city to experience this kind of “hot spot” of criminal activity. Researchers have frequently documented the waves of crime reports which spiral outward from such troubled centers. Chief Ron Johnson, using the geo-coding capacity of the OIBRS system, was able to create reports which immediately documented the disproportionate amount of city resources being poured into problem. Crime reports, in themselves, do not determine the right of a private business to operate, but geo-coding crime analysis provides local leaders with the kind of larger impact assessments which are legitimately used to make licensing decisions. Johnson has been able to properly prepare his leaders for that option should the bar not respond to other pressures to clean up its act. He also foresees an important future for the geo-coding (i.e., mapping) function in making licensing decisions for establishments which negatively impact a neighborhood.

In nearby Dennison Chief Doug Dunlap sees a similar potential for the always difficult problem of tracking (sometimes absentee) landlords with a history of allowing their property to deteriorate. Numerous citizen surveys by the Office of Criminal Justice Services have documented in Ohio what has also been found consistently true nationwide: even in the most crime-ridden neighborhoods citizens rate rundown housing, litter, graffiti, and other quality of life issues as greater threats to their safety than crimes, themselves. In one major study of Community-Oriented Policing in a tough Toledo neighborhood OCJS researchers found that when asked to rank their public safety concerns local residents overwhelmingly cited litter and rundown housing at the top of the list, and physical attacks dead last. Those residents intuitively understood that quality of life drive the crime issues, and not vice versa. But the difficulty of tracking property complaints and absentee landlords--in addition to involving officers in an area of civil government traditionally foreign to law enforcement--has often rendered the police powerless to attack this documentably important crime issue at its source.

The tracking potential of the NIBRS data and the larger LEOT modules greatly reduces this old barrier. And the ease with which data and reports can be shared even with non-law enforcement agencies opens important new possibilities for multi-agency partnerships in fighting crime. Information easily analyzed, visibly presentable, and frequently shared may prove to be the most important tool law enforcement will have in the new century. I

Indeed, both the type and accessibility of the incident-based crime data would seem indispensable tools for the Community-Oriented Policing (COP) initiative that promises to be the standard model for the nation's law enforcement agencies in the decades ahead. COP officers in

Ohio will no longer have to wait for their critically sensitive community data analysis to emerge from the hidden depths of “Central Planning” in the police department. Instead, using their own computers—perhaps even laptops in their cars—the officers can run their own analysis of the data submitted as recently as moments ago. This capacity will not only immediately and effectively make for a better COP officer, but also will allow that officer to become a key provider of information to the community groups, businesses, and residents who serve as her partners in law enforcement.

Sometimes the computerized format, itself, forces improvements in law enforcement quality. Dayton Det. Bob Puz remembers that completing a “supp”(supplemental report) used to be done with one phone call-in after the detective had completed his or her investigation. Naturally such a report was often abbreviated since many days’ worth of investigating might be loaded into that one call. With DIBRS, however, detectives tend to stop in each day and quickly add a paragraph or two to a running “supp” which, when finally completed, is far more comprehensive and valuable.

### *Crossing the boundary lines*

“It used to be if you wanted to check a crime report against something similar which happened in a neighboring jurisdiction you had to hunt down the arresting officer,” noted Sheriff Wilson in describing the pre-OIBRS difficulty of working with neighboring agencies in trying to analyze a crime pattern bigger than a single jurisdiction. “If that officer was on vacation you might have to wait two weeks before you could get what you needed.” Two weeks

*“The ‘one-size-fits-all’ feature of OIBRS—especially the ‘nature of calls’ code—let’s us match up with all kinds of other agencies.”*

**Chief Doug Dunlap, Dennison PD**

can leave a rather cold investigative trail. And criminals can be pretty disrespectful when it comes to honoring the jurisdictional lines of law enforcement agencies.

One of the most promising aspects of OIBRS is the capacity for a common language for law enforcement. Everyone in the business has experienced communications nightmares when trying to coordinate with sister agencies. Neighboring agencies may not use the same wording on call and arrest reports, thus limiting chances for identifying common characteristics of an MO. And where computer systems do not match up (or don’t exist) the prospect of sorting through a myriad of crime characteristics for commonalities becomes virtually impossible.

The benefits of a common language among agencies are not limited to large agencies. Richfield Township was one of several communities which suffered a long night of mail box vandalism when 38 of its residents reported damage. One of those residents, however, who had been victimized before, had placed an open can of red paint just inside his mail box in anticipation of a return visit from the bat-wielding vandal. When an officer in neighboring Northfield Village spotted a car with the telltale red splashed all over it he had little trouble making the connection. The juvenile admitted to far more than that one damaged mail box.

Chief Arbogast recounts his success in solving a rare, major burglary which he estimates involved at least \$250,000 in stolen goods. Fairlawn officers made the critical linking arrest when they found gold bars on a suspect, which led to five other arrests. In that case Richfield’s

shared dispatcher in Sagamore Hills had also been alerted to the unusual stolen evidence involved.

As Sheriff Wilson noted, the OIBRS field for describing the “nature of the call” is, in itself, a valuable tool for matching common criminal modus operandi cross jurisdictional lines. Tuscarawas County is now considering a county-wide systems integration project which would tie all law enforcement agencies into a common OIBRS format for better cross-agency communications. Indeed, improved collaboration among agencies was mentioned as the most important advantage of using OIBRS when the question was put to the three Tuscarawas County chief executive officers.

*Don't do it twice—or thrice*

Duplication is the enemy of any records system. Walt Wilson says that before OIBRS his agency had to write up the same report three times in processing a complaint just so the same information could be available at three different locations. Reporting for juveniles was even more complicated. The costs in confusion, wastage and frustration involve far more than time loss. The prospect of a record being entered once into a central repository where it can serve as a common reference, not only for the entire agency but outside agencies as well, is one welcomed by time-conscious law enforcement CEO's.

The appreciation spreads beyond the law enforcement field. Judges in Tuscarawas County and the county prosecutor have expressed appreciation for the richness and consistency

of OIBRS reports. As central decision-making points in the criminal justice system the courts must rely upon crime reports from a variety of agencies in the county. Any inconsistent or unintelligible information in the reports erodes the capacity of the courts to fairly administer justice. The uniform format of OIBRS reporting allows for speedy access to data which does not require guess-work or comparisons.

In some agencies the reduced paperwork headaches alone make OIBRS worthwhile. The Belmont County the Sheriff's Office moved to OIBRS from a system which was wholly paper-based. Sgt. Dave Lucas notes that even the single task of reporting UCR data has seen a reduction in time from hours to minutes, and it can all be done without having to handle paper. This is largely due to the automatic conversion program in which OIBRS reports are automatically translated into UCR summaries via a program at the Office of Criminal Justice Services in Columbus. A process which used to require writing crime reports in widely varied formats, needlessly duplicating them in some cases, then having to sort through them again for UCR submissions to the FBI is now completed with one electronic entry. And, like Tuscarawas County, the Belmont SO has received favorable comments on the uniform and professional formats of the OIBRS reports from other justice officials in the county.

*More than a records system*

*"In effect, we are compiling a day-to-day training manual with OIBRS."*

***Belmont County Sheriff Tom McCort***

Information cuts many ways, and can serve many purposes. The Belmont County SO has found that the increased information required by OIBRS is providing at least two additional benefits relative to training and investigation. The investigation benefit followed naturally enough: the enforced OIBRS discipline of collecting better and more timely information translates into more fruitful felony investigations. There is a standing assurance that every case investigation will be backed up by a consistent and readily accessed store of information--and one which lends itself to all of the advantages of computerized crime analysis.

The training angle recognized by Sheriff Tom McCort is more subtle, but no less valuable. "It's not just a records system," he says. "It also gives us information on new programs we're trying, and even mistakes that we make." This is the effectual "day-to-day training manual" value of OIBRS, and is often used by Belmont County officers to make adjustments and changes to their law enforcement practices.

In the Dayton Police Department a two-day training course on the valuable and varied uses of DIBRS quickly converts officers into believers and users of the system. Sgt. Moises Perez says that the typical "I never knew we could do that" reaction of the trainees is the first step in a rush to be on the screens all the time for information.

*"The only grumbling about the system comes from people who haven't used it yet."*

**Dayton Sgt. Moises Perez**

Sheriff McCort, who sometimes teaches a course at the local technical college, says he likes to demonstrate the "before and after" impact of OIBRS for the students. Before

demonstrating the multiple advantages of his present system he shows them a paper crime report form which he, himself, created for the agency many years ago on his typewriter. (And even this was a considerable break-through at the time.) The improvement is hard to miss.

*“Playing with the computer, again”*

One of the least tangible--but perhaps most important--aspects of OIBRS implementation in Ohio has been the significant attitude adjustment needed to accommodate a program demanding agency technological and cultural changes on a large scale. The crime report is the bread-and-butter document in most law enforcement agencies. Any changes relating to its form, content or uses reverberate throughout the agency. But OIBRS requires something more than simply “re-doing” the crime report form. It, like most information system changes of the past decade, also forces changes in personal philosophies. Computers, for better or worse, have become a way of life.

Such change does not come easily. “The first six to nine months were pretty difficult,” Sgt. Lucas remembers, a judgment offered by most of the agencies. There is usually a standing battery of start-up stories reflecting the inevitably difficult transition from “before to after” OIBRS. Common among these are tales of program errors and the shock which accompanies an officer’s first misinterpreted look at the multiple data entry screens (most of which are not relevant in a routine incident report).

These issues are common to automation. More difficult are the “people” issues. Fear and ignorance create bigger obstacles than those offered by technology and procedures. “Whenever a councilman comes in and sees one of us on the keyboard he assumes we’re just playing with the computer again,” says one officer. Sometimes the officers, as well, fall victim to the assumption that computer operations are not “real police work.” But those attitudes can change quickly in a field such as law enforcement where daily danger is never far away. The Belmont County deputies were given a fast lesson in computer appreciation when their dispatcher used OIBRS data to warn off a deputy about to make what seemed like an ordinary trailer park arrest that, in fact, involved an armed and dangerous felon wanted in Georgia. With appropriate back-up the arrest eventually was carried off without incident. The deputies have also seen the advantages of immediately knowing if a dispatch involves a repeat call to a certain address with a history of domestic violence or other officer-threatening activity.

Several of the agencies’ officers commented on the importance of tolerating the learning curve, and of seeing OIBRS as a “works in progress,” as Dover Chief Ron Johnson says. This attitude is, of course, critical to the success of the program both in Ohio and nationwide. The long-standing UCR program is now over 70 years old and still exists in roughly the same format generated by the Wickersham Committee report of President Hoover. There is no “last new program” out there which can serve OIBRS as a learning model. The Ohio law enforcement community, like that of the larger nation, is learning as it goes.

### *Orders from General Acceptance*

For the most part, however, non-law enforcement professionals whose jobs are impacted by the new OIBRS program have responded to it favorably. Dennison Chief Dunlap notes that his council members find his up-to-date and very readable computer reports helpful in understanding crime and justice issues. Chief Arbogast in Richfield Twp. used similar report presentations to impress his council members with the argument that his agency should not be consolidated into the nearby village police department. And some of the appreciative comments from judges and prosecutors have already been noted.

Sometimes OIBRS's engagement of "outsiders" takes some funny turns. One of the great early worries of sheriffs and chiefs concerning NIBRS was that the media would not understand (or take the time to understand) the immediate increases in NIBRS crime reports when compared with the UCR summary reports. The increase, universally expected with the dropping of the UCR "hierarchy rule" which only reported the most serious crime in multiple felony incidents, could have put the law enforcement CEO's and their superiors in the awkward position of having to explain that 10%-20% one-year crime increases were only artifacts of the new reporting system, and not a crime wave. Yet, very few of Ohio's chiefs and sheriffs seem to have had that kind of problem. To the contrary, OIBRS newspaper reports in Tusarawas County actually had the opposite effect of helping the program by publicly pressuring two non-reporting agencies into program participation.

In Dayton the police department provides journalists with on-line computer access to significant parts of their DIBRS data base. The reporters must come to headquarters to make the connection, but there is a great savings in energy and frustration since they don't have to hunt down individual officers for information.

*Working yourself out of a job*

On December 31, 1997, the Dayton Police Department took the plunge. During the very last minute of that year the department was still fully operational on the old criminal justice information system crime reporting program. The next minute all 500 sworn officers and 112 civilian department employees were cast into the world of DIBRS--the Dayton Incident-Based Reporting System. Logistically, Dayton was better prepared than most agencies for making the transition. The department's larger management information system was already years in development by 1997, and many of the other management information system (MIS) components either anticipated or complemented the new crime reporting format. "Everything leads to something else," says Crime Analysis section chief Det. Bob Puz. Aliases, warrants, even non criminal issues which mark an address can all lead to important information in felony cases. Puz was musing on the advantages of the larger MIS in their plans to create a "suspect tickler" file. Indeed, the power to link detailed information in the DIBRS has created many such potential improvements in Dayton.

That belief is strongly supported by Fifth District Detective Squad Sergeant Moises Perez, who describes the DIBRS-empowered suspect locator file as "priceless". Perez adds that

“in the past we were always saying, ‘wouldn’t it be nice if we had [this and that] for our investigations’, and now we do.” Everything down to a parking violation can help the detective squads locate suspects since the same computer screen which displays DIBRS also connects to the department’s larger MIS. This arrangement comports well with the view of SEARCH, Inc. Assistant Director Dave Roberts, who has long maintained that local departments and sheriffs’ offices should be encouraged to first think of their overall records management needs, then to determine how NIBRS fits into that larger need-based scheme.

But not all of the department’s personnel were psychologically ready for the quick shift to the high speed crime reporting gears. According to Puz and Lt. Rob Langford it took several

*“We believe in teaching people ‘how to fish.’ ”*

***Dayton Detective Bob Puz***

meetings with Dayton PD command staff in order to convince them that “they don’t need us [crime analysis staff] anymore.” In other words, DIBRS is so accessible and powerful that any officer can do in a couple of minutes what it took the crime analysis staff hours or days to do. One patrol sergeant challenged her officers to wean themselves from the information-feed which has been the staple of roll-call sessions for decades, and to go directly to the DIBRS screens for what they need each day.

The crime analysis staff now consists of only Det. Puz and former Lt. (now civilian) Scott Barker, but these two roles are usually limited to MIS (i.e., system) issues or providing verbal or written summaries of the data to persons who do not make direct use of DIBRS. Even the media representatives have direct access via a computer set up at police headquarters. Puz explains that when he first began working crime analysis in 1983 a larger crime analysis staff used to invest the first 2-3 days of every week in the preparation of a demanding report for command staff which, hopefully, would be on their desks by Thursday. Today, the same amount of information is produced in a few minutes with a couple of key strokes and report generation commands.

So, how well are Dayton's officers and civilians advantaging themselves of this new tool? As with most of the NIBRS programs in Ohio some of the jurors are still out on this issue. Change is always difficult, and especially so when it involves the basic crime report. Yet the early anecdotal evidence is encouraging. Det. Puz notes that homicide investigation officers have told him that when they have to connect with DIBRS at 2:00 a.m. in order to locate people central to an investigation they seldom have trouble doing so. The very fact that they can make those inquiries at two in the morning, rather than having to await the arrival of day shift crime analysis staff, says much in itself.

Not many people are having to await crime analysis from Dayton's crime analysis unit these days. And that's the way Det. Bob Puz wants it to be. He knows that their business is no longer feeding, but rather enabling.

*At the end of the day . . .*

*“We literally went to our DIBRS system overnight, and it was overwhelming at first. The old system was very simple and easy. But it was easy because so little was required. I could fill out those forms in my sleep. But, of course, we could never get anything out of it either. DIBRS is a lot more demanding, but it makes the input from the officer’s report valuable. Finally, we have information we can use.”*

***Sgt. Moises Perez, Dayton PD Fifth District Detective Squad***

Hard-copy editions of this report may be obtained from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, 400 E. Town St., Suite 300, Columbus, OH 43215-4242.