Razing Expectations:
Erecting a Strategic Vision for Fusion Centers

**International Association of Chiefs of Police,
Homeland Security Committee**

Razing Expectations:

Erecting a Strategic Vision for Fusion Centers

It is the view of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Homeland Security Committee that across the nation, fusion centers should:

‣ Act as principal intelligence enterprise nodes to network state and local law enforcement, homeland security, and public safety entities to each other and the federal government;

‣ Harness and apply the collective knowledge of their constituents to address issues related to threat and risk; and

‣ Assume the leading role in information sharing initiatives related to law enforcement, homeland security, and public safety issues.

Our argument has its beginnings in the Atlantic Ocean...

In May 1968, the *USS Scorpion* failed to return to port at the Norfolk, Virginia, Navy base after a tour of duty in the Mediterranean Sea. The nuclear submarine was carrying 99 crewmen. Upon learning of the missing sub, the Navy dispatched a search-and-rescue mission to the *Scorpion's* last known location. The search area extended across a large circular area and penetrated thousands of feet deep into the ocean. The task seemed impossible considering the ocean's currents, but not for Naval officer John Craven. He demonstrated that harnessing the collective knowledge of many could solve the impossible.

Dr. John Craven was the Chief Scientist of the U.S. Navy's Special Projects Division. He created several scenarios of what might have happened to the *Scorpion*.[1] He then brought together a team of men, all with a wide range and diverse set of knowledge backgrounds, and asked each expert to "take their best guess" at each of the scenarios he offered in terms of how likely the scenario was. The results were truly amazing.

Five months after the sinking of the *Scorpion*, the sub was located nearly 200 yards from where Dr. Craven's team suspected. The team included sailors, mathematicians, and salvage and submarine specialists. The success of Dr. Craven's work underpins the notion that collaboration among diverse entities engenders the development of solutions to the world's most difficult problems.

---

[1] Surowiecki, John. *The wisdom of crowds:* Why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies, and nations. Anchor Books: New York (2005), p. xx.

Dr. Craven's use of the "wisdom of crowds" approach to find the *Scorpion* is essential to the success of fusion centers nationally. The collaboration of interagency and interdisciplinary specialists to tackle problems related to crime, public safety, and terrorism can produce extraordinary results. Of course, the key to this model is unfettered collaboration and the free flow of information to uncover patterns and trends to prevent crime and detect terrorism.

Early Expectations

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the IACP held an Intelligence Sharing Summit in March of 2002 that prepared the framework for intelligence-led policing issues. The idea was straightforward: open the lines of communication among federal, state, and local agencies to increase intelligence sharing. At about this time, the idea of intelligence fusion centers began to percolate among many in law enforcement and burgeoning homeland security practitioners. There were strongly held beliefs that fusion centers, spread throughout the nation, could augment our nation's Intelligence Community (IC).

What our nation needed was a means to address intelligence gaps inside the United States—an apparatus that could sound the early alarm that terrorists were plotting to carry out additional attacks. State and locally managed intelligence centers would become prominent fixtures in the IC. The IC would push intelligence down to fusion centers, who in turn would act as gatekeepers and pass on information to other state and local entities. These fusion centers could also funnel information from state and local entities back up to the IC. The aim was to

connect the proverbial "dots" and become terrorism early warning watch centers.

Yet, soon thereafter, the Bureau of Justice Assistance acknowledged, "The intelligence operations of state and local law enforcement agencies often are plagued by a lack of policies, procedures, and training for gathering and assessing essential information."[2] These shortcomings, along with the failure of fusion centers to formally integrate into the IC, had prevented them from achieving those early expectations that fusion enterprises would augment national security issues.

In November 2007, the IACP hosted a follow-up summit on the critical topic of intelligence. It found that while "state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies have made great strides in their ability to share intelligence... the full benefit of intelligence sharing has not yet been realized because the process itself remains a mystery to many police officers, and some law enforcement executives consider their agencies too small or too remote to participate in criminal intelligence sharing."[3]

Recently, though, the shift of fusion centers from a focus on counterterrorism to an "all-crimes, all-hazards, all-threats" model has changed the equation. Fusion centers are finding increased relevance among their state and local consumers, and the benefits of information and intelligence sharing are beginning to be realized.

While there is still a maturation process that fusion centers nationally are enduring, this process has been hastened because of the collective insights of several involved entities. The Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (Global) authored the original *Fusion Center Guidelines.* While this work was followed by Global's *Baseline Capabilities for State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers,* the original Guidelines still serve as a road map for fusion centers. The Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council (CICC), created after the 2002 IACP summit to coordinate intelligence sharing across the nation, has also been instrumental in providing legal and ethical guidance to fusion centers as they navigate the Information Sharing Environment (ISE). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis continues to spearhead the growth and development of the national fusion center program. Its efforts have resulted in earmarked funds needed to assist with sustaining the national program. Lastly, the National Fusion Center Coordination Group—composed of members from the

Office of the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment, CICC, IACP, DHS, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)—continues to advocate on behalf of the national fusion center program. The collective inputs of all of these interdependent entities have positioned fusion centers strategically to embrace the innovative perspectives that follow.

A Critical Node in the Network

At last count, there are more than 70 fusion centers spread out across the nation. Some of these centers reside under the purview of specific states, others are regional in perspective, and still others are managed from within major urban centers. Many of these centers have begun acting as the principal intelligence sharing enterprise among their federal, state, and local law enforcement counterparts. This arrangement places fusion centers as central nodes within loosely organized but structured local information and intelligence sharing networks.

Aided by hindsight, practitioners are now seeing the value of this arrangement. It has moved fusion centers well beyond just brokering information for the IC. Instead, fusion centers are raising their value with the constituencies they serve because they can:

▸ Distill information and intelligence streams for relevancy for their state and local consumers.

▸ Harness information from their state and local partners to provide strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.

▸ Provide a level of analytical service to agencies that have none.

▸ Serve as models with regard to protecting privacy and civil liberties within an information sharing environment.

And though there is still much room for improvement, many fusion centers around the country are carrying out these integral processes on a daily basis:

▸ In Los Angeles, a collective effort is under way to report, analyze, and investigate suspicious activity.

▸ In New Jersey, the fusion center has spearheaded an interagency collective, primarily with local jurisdictions throughout the state, to collect, assess, and produce information and intelligence products aimed at targeting recidivist offenders and suppressing gun violence.

▸ In Illinois, the fusion center established a program to enhance information sharing with the private

---

[2] Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Intelligence-Led Policing: The New Intelligence Architecture*, NCJ 210681, http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/pdf/IntelLedPolicing.pdf.

[3] International Association of Chiefs of Police, *National Summit on Intelligence* report, http://www.theiacp.org/PublicationsGuides/ResearchCenter/Publications/tabid/299/Default.aspx?id=10, accessed on July 5, 2009.

sector to provide tactical and strategic information related to critical infrastructure. The center also provides support to major events and violent crimes occurring throughout the state.

▸ In Las Vegas, the fusion center is leveraging the Casino Security industry's capacity to generate intelligence in an effort to collectively assess threats to critical infrastructure and key resources.

▸ In Tennessee, the fusion center utilizes a combination of a statewide Consolidated Records Management System for sharing law enforcement data and SARs.

▸ In San Diego, the fusion center fuses information and intelligence related to cross-border issues and local gang activity to identify current and emerging trends.

▸ In Florida, the fusion center is augmenting statewide suspicious activity reporting by providing access to data submissions to include non-law enforcement partners. This has enhanced the collection of suspicious behavior in order to ferret out threat activity needed to protect Florida's citizens.

▸ In Minnesota, the fusion center, in order to assist a sheriff's department with a request for information related to outlaw motorcycle gang criminal activity, tapped into the national fusion center network to collect and share criminal intelligence reports.

▸ In New York, through the integration of Infrastructure Protection personnel, the fusion center has enhanced its ability to monitor, evaluate, analyze, and report on suspicious activity.

This "new arrangement" shifts the focus of fusion centers from information brokers to intelligence producers. It has harnessed the information streams of individual law enforcement agencies at very little cost, while also providing analysis in areas that did not exist prior to the advent of fusion centers. This is the strength of fusion, which places these centers squarely within an intelligence-led policing model—a model that also establishes that the key to successful fusion of information is grounded in constitutional safeguards and privacy protections.

Wisdom of Crowds

Every other Thursday, a unique event occurs in Jersey City, New Jersey. In a CompStat-like environment, the Jersey City Police Department, the Hudson County Prosecutor's

Office, the Hudson County Sheriff's Office, the New Jersey State Police, the New Jersey State Parole, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the FBI, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives come together to exchange intelligence and coordinate enforcement operations. The meeting, hosted by the Jersey City Chief of Police, is part of a DEA High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) initiative titled Violent Enterprise Source Targeting ("VEST"). VEST focuses interagency resources at violent offenders who plague jurisdictions. The Jersey City VEST initiative is one of three others like it in Newark, Perth Amboy, and Trenton, New Jersey.

VEST provides an extraordinary opportunity for individual law enforcement agencies to come together and share information for a common cause: to reduce violent crime and recidivism in a jurisdiction or region. Similar to the phenomenon that Naval officer John Craven witnessed, bringing together diverse entities with different specialties and tacit knowledge experiences to interact on problems results in greater shared explicit knowledge and creative problem solving.

The "wisdom of crowds" phenomenon has already been shown to be the underpinning of successful fusion center operations. Expressed in a different way, when agencies pool their resources, under one roof, the results become exponential. "There are more tools in the analyst's arsenal (data, information, and knowledge) to draw from, while the stakeholder and constituent base amplify."[4] This is occurring at the New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center (NJ ROIC), which boasts a robust interagency intelligence force consisting of a myriad of local, state, and federal interdisciplinary entities that come together to produce intelligence products. The results are magnified when the fusion center steps out of its own building and supports local information sharing initiatives.

Much of the success of the VEST initiatives in New Jersey can be attributed to the sharing by individual participating agencies of a common operating picture of what is occurring in their joint operational environments. The state's fusion center has been responsible for supplying the analysis and intelligence products to create this common operating picture for the decision makers, who range from street-level commanders to executives. Essentially, the NJ ROIC is expanding its fusion outside "the bricks and mortar" of its building and into the local jurisdictions that desperately need crime and intelligence analysis to formulate better crime reduction strategies to maximize resource allocation toward greater effectiveness.

---

[4] Ray Guidetti, "Collaborative Intelligence Production," in Jerry Ratcliffe (ed.), *Strategic Thinking in Criminal Intelligence*, 2nd ed., The Federation Press, Annondale, New South Wales, 2009, p. 224.

Building a common operating picture requires that commanders support the unencumbered exchange of information and intelligence among intelligence producers and consumers. The successful New Jersey VEST initiatives are enhanced because of the state's fusion center interagency intelligence processes. They formalize the concept of collaborative intelligence production through crowd sourcing. The "wisdom of crowds" model aggregates creativity and talent and leverages resources and ingenuity, while reducing the costs and time formerly needed to solve problems.[5]

Another example of crowd sourcing is taking place in southern California with Operation Stampede. The San Diego Police Department's Criminal Intelligence Unit, in its effort to dismantle the South East Locos criminal street gang responsible for four shooting murders and illegal gun trafficking, collaborated with the San Diego Law Enforcement Coordination Center. The fusion center provided the local intelligence unit with open source information and regional intelligence that assisted in linking local arsons to the gang members. The collaborative effort between the intelligence unit and the fusion center led to 31 arrests and the seizure of 44 firearms. More important, the intelligence-led operation is credited with reducing the overall violent criminal activity in an area once controlled by criminal street gangs.

In Las Vegas, the Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center takes the Wisdom of Crowds model a step further. By incorporating the private sector into its overall intelligence model, the center is leveraging the talents and resources of the Casino Security industry to better safeguard critical infrastructure and key resources in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. The collaborative efforts between the fusion center and the private sector are resulting in a robust system for assessing suspicious activity reporting that occurs in both the private and public realms. The partnership includes the private sector funding of a law enforcement analyst position at the fusion center to enable daily collaboration with the casinos. Essentially, this arrangement affords private sector entities the opportunity to provide and receive intelligence information in a structured and formalized manner. The Las Vegas example underscores the value of incorporating the private sector into a fusion center's operation as a critical source and consumer of intelligence.

A New Normalcy of Information Sharing

In June of 2009, the world witnessed the power of Web 2.0 technologies originating in, of all places, Iran. After the

presidential election, the cries of protest from supporters of opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi were the most strident in a medium that did not even exist the last time Iran had an election. The Twitter medium, categorized as "highly mobile, extremely personal, and very quick," became the ideal communication enterprise for a mass protest movement. Twitter is simple for the average user, extremely difficult for any central entity to control, and free of charge.

The thousands of Iranian protesters who used Twitter to communicate their circumstances demonstrated the speed and power for spreading information in a Web 2.0 world. In contrast, every day, interoperability barriers that prevent the sharing of routine information plague diverse police organizations throughout the United States. Many of these agencies neighbor one another, and the inability for them to share routine information constrains their capacity for identifying threats and hazards to the environment. Interestingly enough, a central tenet of intelligence-led policing is the ability of organizations to proactively interpret their environments to identify patterns in order to predict threat activity.

Fusion centers are beginning to participate in national programs that facilitate information sharing to interpret the criminal environment. One such program is the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI).

> The Nationwide SAR Initiative is an outgrowth of a number of separate but related activities over the last several years that respond directly to the mandate to establish a "unified process for reporting, tracking, and accessing [SARs]," in a manner that rigorously protects the privacy and civil liberties of Americans, as called for in the *National Strategy for Information Sharing* (NSIS). The NSI process is a cycle of 12 interrelated operational activities, which address the requirements outlined in the NSIS. The long term goal is that most Federal, State, local, and tribal law enforcement organizations will participate in a standardized, integrated approach to gathering, documenting, processing, analyzing, and sharing information about suspicious activity that is potentially terrorism-related. In addition to government agencies, private sector organizations responsible for Critical Infrastructure/Key Resources (CI/KR) and foreign partners are also potential sources for terrorism-related SARs.[6]

The NSI requires participants to utilize a shared server space technology to integrate routine information across

---

[5] Daren C. Brabham, "Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies*, 14(1), 2008, pp. 75–90.

[6] Information Sharing Environment Web page located at http://www.ise.gov/pages/sar-initiative.html.

the myriad of jurisdictions that are employed across the nation to police the homeland.

But to truly develop a police culture that can exchange data, information, and intelligence to interpret the criminal environment and address occurring threats and hazards in near real time, broad changes to the way law enforcement organizations manage their information technology must occur. Although there is still much room for improvement with social media technologies, such as the one used by the Iranians to collaborate in response to their elections, in terms of security, law enforcement can learn a great deal from their current applications. In fact, as pointed out in a recent article, "They're being used every day, even in emergencies:

▸ In the recent wildfires in California, a Second Life "mash-up" operated by young teen boys routinely provided better, faster, more reliable evacuation notices than the local reverse 9-1-1 system (according to a local Department of Homeland Security official).

▸ When cellular communications failed during the Los Angeles-area earthquake of July 2008, Twitter was the emergency communications platform of choice. The Red Cross is also using Twitter—to replace emergency phone banks. And during recent hurricane disasters, individuals came together via the Tsunami Help Blog and Katrina Help Wiki.

▸ In Europe, the Swedish Emergency Management Agency is operating its own "mash-up," complete with internetworked communities of trust that stretch from the prime minister's office to local ambulance dispatch."[7]

Historically, though, law enforcement systems have been "closed" because of the sensitivity of the information involved. While the intent of the "closed" system was aimed at the security of information, regrettably, the system has translated into information silos spread throughout the United States. Today, there are still neighboring jurisdictions that do not share information, which, if exchanged, could be of tremendous value. For example, in one police jurisdiction in the Northeast, a significant amount of resources were expended over a six-week period to interdict a violent robbery crew preying on area bodegas. Instead, they found at the end of their operation that a neighboring jurisdiction had arrested the same robbery crew six weeks earlier.

Fusion centers are in a principal position to challenge the old norms that have produced information silos. By assuming a leading role and setting a new stage for information sharing among the nation's law enforcement community, fusion centers can demonstrate that if they "share everything, anything is possible." Of course, "opening up" law enforcement information systems requires a high-assurance approach to the government-to-government exchange of sensitive information to ensure that safeguards are in place to protect civil liberties and privacy.

In one state fusion center, analysts are spearheading an initiative aimed at enabling collaboration among law enforcement agencies to confront the issue of gun violence and recidivist offenders. The information technology team associated with the fusion center constructed a virtual platform for law enforcement agencies across the state to enter, analyze, and share shooting and gang offender information. Individual law enforcement agencies now have full-time access to pooled information from jurisdictions across the state and have the ability to produce fundamental temporal and spatial crime maps. Moreover, the fusion center also has access to this information to build sophisticated intelligence products that are funneled back to the law enforcement community. While this innovative project operates within a "closed" system, the logical, natural progression of the initiative will be to enlist the power of the "Cloud" to enhance information sharing.

Cloud Computing refers to the massive connectivity of simple nodes to create large redundant networks to share information. It is changing the way information technology business models are applied. Think of the value, when information assurance standards are in place, in law enforcement agencies exchanging routine law enforcement data and information across a county, a region, a state, and the nation. Couple this massive information sharing with the power of fusion centers to analyze information to identify patterns and trends. The opportunities are endless for harnessing the "wisdom of crowds" at very little cost.

Across the nation, there are densely populated areas in and around major metropolitan areas that have high incidences of crime. These swaths of landscape are often policed by multiple law enforcement agencies whose jurisdictional borders mean little to the nefarious offenders who cross them. Applying Wiki technology to these affected areas, supported by the trusted Cloud, can increase information sharing, analysis, and intelligence production exponentially, again at little cost. Fusion centers that support these initiatives can increase their value to their constituents virtually overnight.

---

[7]Jeff Frazier and Charles Jennings, "Trust Clouds: An Emerging, Horizontal Information-Sharing Service for Governments," 2009, http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg.

Once the Cloud is up, the benefits derived from increased opportunities for information exchange are boundless. A new virtual community can enable and harness the knowledge of nontraditional partners to solve crime and homeland security problems. One example is an initiative currently under way to collaboratively analyze shooting incidents. By inviting trauma experts and law enforcement professionals to "mash" their respective data sets related to shooting incidents, the fusion center can capture the full promise of partnership. Trauma personnel— who share a different perspective of the consequences of violent recidivist offenders— can add to the understanding of community violence, while exacting a dollar-amount value in terms of emergency care, for the shooting incidents that the police investigate. The "mash-up" of shooting data from disparate communities can assist with fueling the public policy debate on the health crisis involving shooting violence that plagues many cities.

Fusion centers can perform a key function for law enforcement and homeland security by providing platforms needed to advance not just collaboration but information assurance. By employing Web 2.0 and enterprise technologies, fusion centers can harness disparate information feeds, analyze them, and channel the results to customers who occupy trusted virtual communities.

Recommendations

Our recommendation to fusion centers nationwide is to revisit their business models to ensure that they are aligned in a manner that will embrace collaboration and information sharing to meet the demands of both the present and future. Then begin connecting and establishing relationships with diverse partners to share information needed to tackle the problems inherent to crime and homeland security.

The following areas can provide guidance in this realm:

Fusion Center Governance Bodies

▸ Ensure that governance bodies are representative of the diverse constituencies they serve.

▸ Provide strategic guidance with regard to incorporating privacy policies, procedures, and training necessary for protecting civil liberties.

▸ Ensure that governance bodies set guidance and policies that promote collaboration.

▸ Promote and advance Web 2.0 and other enterprise technologies that support collaboration and knowledge production.

▸ Promote policies that establish high-assurance approaches toward the exchange of information.

Fusion Center Command

▸ Establish outreach programs to expand fusion to participants outside the fusion center.

▸ Ensure that an interagency mission grounds all fusion center operations. While a single agency may be responsible for executive management, the focus of all operations must be interagency and, where appropriate, interdisciplinary.

▸ Align information dissemination protocols to support creative collaboration measures.

▸ Solicit the participation of nontraditional partners, including those from the private sector.

▸ Employ and advance collaborative strategies to exchange and analyze information.

▸ Assess existing information technology policies to ensure that open information sharing is not constrained.

▸ Assess existing information sharing policies to ensure that civil liberties and privacy concerns are addressed.

▸ Focus on customer needs to drive fusion center priorities.

▸ Challenge personnel to create relationships with nontraditional partners to mash up information and data.

▸ Assess information sharing practices against high-assurance models.

▸ Capture feedback, outline lessons learned, revise operations, and scale appropriately.

Fusion Center Customers

▸ Seek out assistance from respective fusion centers to explore creative information sharing opportunities.

▸ Provide the fusion center with access to information sources and resources where appropriate.

▸ Practice information sharing with the fusion center.

▸ Participate in collaborative working groups hosted by the fusion center.

▸ Provide feedback to the fusion center with regard to its products and services.

IACP Next Steps

▸ Workshop meeting between respective fusion center directors, State Associations of Chiefs of Police chair, and state police representatives.

▸ Development of an IACP technical assistance package that can assist respective fusion centers with outreach. The outreach packages will be divided among business or community action teams and the general public.

▸ Establishment of a recognition program for law enforcement agencies that provide information to fusion centers.

E Pluribus Unum

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin met to discuss the motto of the United States. It has been reported that the motto they chose—*E Pluribus Unum:* "out of many, one"—was borrowed from a popular English journal circulated through the Colonies at the time. The journal published an annual anthology that contained the greatest writings from the previous 12 months. The anthology's motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, captured the essence of that annual collection. Incredibly, the forefathers shared that same sentiment for the country—a great nation is born from its many states.

Nearly 200 years later, Dr. John Craven demonstrated that by harnessing the skills, knowledge, and experience of the many, he could do the impossible as one. He understood what our forefathers expressed in the motto *E Pluribus Unum*. Collective knowledge is a powerful tool.

Today, more than 70 fusion centers spread out across the United States. They represent a powerful capability in regard to combating crime and terrorism and safeguarding citizens from the known and unknown hazards present within our environment. By acting as principal enterprise nodes to network state and local law enforcement, homeland security, and public safety entities, fusion centers can in fact reap the benefits of *E Pluribus Unum*. They are in positions to harness and apply the collective expertise to address the issues of threat, hazards, and risk, but only if they assume a leading role in advancing leading-edge information sharing initiatives. This monograph presents a vision for the future for managers of fusion centers, as well as local, state, and tribal customers/stakeholders of the fusion center.

It is the mission of the IACP to advance the science and art of police services; develop and disseminate improved administrative, technical, and operational practices and promote their use in police work; foster police cooperation and the exchange of information and experience among police administrators throughout the world; bring about recruitment and training in the police profession of qualified persons; and encourage adherence of all police officers to high professional standards of performance and conduct.