About the Uniform Crime Reporting Program

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of more than 17,000 city, university and college, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. Since 1930, the FBI has administered the UCR Program and continued to assess and monitor the nature and type of crime in the Nation. The Program's primary objective is to generate reliable information for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management; however, its data have over the years become one of the country's leading social indicators. Criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and other students of criminal justice use the data for varied research and planning purposes.

UCR Advisory groups

Providing vital links between local law enforcement and the FBI in the conduct of the UCR Program are the Criminal Justice Information Systems Committees of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The IACP represents the thousands of police departments nationwide, and the NSA encourages sheriffs throughout the country to participate fully in the Program. Both committees serve in advisory capacities concerning the UCR Program's operation.

In 1988, a Data Providers' Advisory Policy Board was established to provide input for UCR matters. That Board operated until 1993 when it combined with the National Crime Information Center Advisory Policy Board to form a single Advisory Policy Board (APB) to address all FBI criminal justice information services. The current APB ensures continuing emphasis on UCR-related issues. The Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs (ASUCRP) focuses on UCR issues within individual state law enforcement associations and also promotes interest in the UCR Program. These organizations foster widespread and responsible use of uniform crime statistics and lend assistance to data contributors when needed.

Historical background of UCR

Recognizing a need for national crime statistics, the IACP formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records in the 1920s to develop a system of uniform crime statistics. After studying state criminal codes and making an evaluation of the recordkeeping practices in use, the Committee completed a plan for crime reporting that became the foundation of the UCR Program in 1929. The plan included standardized offense definitions for seven main offense classifications known as Part I crimes to gauge fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime. Developers also instituted the Hierarchy Rule as the main reporting procedure for what is now known as the Summary reporting system of UCR.

The seven Part I offense classifications included the violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. By congressional mandate, arson was added as the eighth Part I offense category in 1979.

In January 1930, 400 cities representing 20 million inhabitants in 43 states began participating in the UCR Program. Congress enacted Title 28, Section 534, of the *United States Code* authorizing the Attorney General to gather crime information that same year. The Attorney General, in turn, designated the FBI to serve as the national clearinghouse for the crime data collected. Since that time, data based on uniform classifications and procedures for reporting offenses and arrests have been obtained from the Nation's law enforcement agencies every year.

Redesign of UCR

Although the data collected and disseminated by the UCR Program remained virtually unchanged throughout the years, in the 1980s a broad utility had evolved for UCR. Recognizing the need for improved statistics, law enforcement called for a thorough evaluative study to modernize the UCR Program. The FBI concurred with the need for an updated Program and lent its complete support, formulating a comprehensive three-phase redesign effort. The first two phases of this effort, guided by input from representatives of the FBI, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the IACP, and the NSA, culminated with the release of a comprehensive report.

The final report, the *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program* (*Blueprint*), was released in May 1985. It specifically outlined three areas of enhancement to help the UCR Program meet future informational needs. First, agencies would use an incident-based system to report offenses and arrests. Second, the national UCR Program would collect data on two levels (i.e., limited and full participation), and third, the national Program would introduce a quality assurance program.

In January 1986, the FBI began phase III of the redesign effort guided by the general recommendations set forth in the *Blueprint.* Contractors developed new data guidelines and system specifications while the FBI studied various state systems to select an experimental site to implement the redesigned Program. Upon selecting the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), which enlisted the cooperation of nine local law enforcement agencies, the FBI developed automated data capture specifications to adapt the SLED's state system to the national UCR Program's standards, and the BJS funded the revisions. The pilot demonstration ran from March 1—September 30, 1987, and resulted in further refinement of the guidelines and specifications.

March 1-3, 1988, the FBI held a National UCR Conference to present the new system to law enforcement and to obtain feedback on its acceptability. Attendees of the National UCR Conference passed three overall recommendations without dissent: first, that there be established a new, incident-based national crime reporting system; second, that the FBI manage this Program; and third, that an Advisory Policy Board composed of law enforcement executives be formed to assist in directing and implementing the new Program. Furthermore, attendees recommended that the implementation of national incident-based reporting proceed at a pace commensurate with the resources and limitations of contributing law enforcement agencies.

Establishing the NIBRS

From March 1988 through January 1989, the FBI proceeded in developing and assuming management of the UCR Program's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), and by April 1989, the national UCR Program received the first test tape of NIBRS data. Over the course of the next few years, the national UCR Program published information about the redesigned Program in five documents:

- *Data Collection Guidelines* (revised August 2000)* contains a system overview and descriptions of the offense codes, reports, data elements, and data values used in the system.

- *Data Submission Specifications* (May 1992)* is for the use of local and state systems personnel who are responsible for preparing magnetic media for submission to the FBI.

- *Approaches to Implementing an Incident-Based System* (July 1992) is a guide for system designers.

- *Error Message Manual* (revised December 1999)* contains designations of mandatory and optional data elements, data element edits, and error messages.

- *Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook,* NIBRS Edition (1992) provides a non-technical Program overview focusing on definitions, policies, and procedures of the NIBRS.

As more agencies inquired about the NIBRS, the FBI, in May 2002, made the *Handbook for Acquiring a Records Management System (RMS) that is Compatible with NIBRS* * available to agencies considering or developing automated incident-based records management systems. The handbook, developed under the sponsorship of the FBI and the BJS, provides instructions on planning for and conducting a system acquisition and offers guidelines on preparing the agency for conversion to the new system and to the NIBRS.

Originally designed with 52 data elements, the NIBRS captures up to 56 data elements via six types of data segments: administrative, offense, victim, property, offender, and arrestee. Though, in the late 1980s, the FBI committed to hold all changes to the NIBRS in abeyance until a substantial amount of contributors implemented the system, three modifications have been necessary. To meet growing challenges in the fight against crime, the system's flexibility has permitted the addition of a new data element to capture bias-motivated offenses (1990), the expansion of an existing data element to indicate the presence of gang activity (1997), and the addition of three new data elements to collect data for law enforcement officers killed and assaulted (2003).

The FBI began accepting NIBRS data from a handful of agencies in January 1989. As more contributing law enforcement become educated about the rich data available through incident-based reporting and as resources permit, more agencies are implementing the NIBRS. Today, 30 state Programs representing approximately 35 percent of reporting agencies are certified for NIBRS participation: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Among those that submit NIBRS data, ten states (Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Michigan, Montana, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia) submit all their data via the NIBRS. Ten state Programs are in various stages of testing the NIBRS. Six other state agencies, as well as agencies in the District of Columbia, are planning and developing the NIBRS.

The FBI Suspends the Crime Index and Modified Crime Index

In June 2004, the CJIS APB approved discontinuing the use of the Crime Index in the UCR Program and its publications and directed the FBI publish a violent crime total and a property crime total until a more viable index is developed. The Crime Index, first published in *Crime in the United States* in 1960, was the title used for a simple aggregation of the seven main offense classifications (Part I offenses) in Summary reporting. The Modified Crime Index was the number of Crime Index offenses plus arson.

For several years the CJIS Division studied the appropriateness and usefulness of these indices and brought the matter before many advisory groups including the UCR Subcommittee of the CJIS APB, the ASUCRP, and a meeting of leading criminologists and sociologists hosted by the BJS. In short, the Crime Index and the Modified Crime Index were not true indicators of the degrees of criminality because they were always driven upward by the offense with the highest number, typically larceny-theft. The sheer volume of those offenses overshadowed more serious but less frequently committed offenses, creating a bias against a jurisdiction with a high number of larceny-thefts but a low number of other serious crimes such as murder and forcible rape.

UCR: Summary and NIBRS

For roughly the last 15 years, the UCR Program has maintained its long-running time series of data via the submissions of both Summary and NIBRS contributors. Though the FBI continues to covert NIBRS data to provide equivalent Summary statistics for the annual publication *Crime in the United States*, the FBI has published a number of monographs to demonstrate the utility of NIBRS data. It has also made available the raw data files for those interested in studying them.

Technology has expanded our information resources. Since 1995 the FBI has published its three annual UCR series to the Internet to reduce its reliance on printed copy: *Crime in the United States, Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted,* and *Hate Crime Statistics.* This year the FBI discontinued the printed versions of these publications to focus its efforts on retooling the electronic versions to be more useful. Future plans include providing database-driven presentations of Summary and NIBRS data, as well as more special studies using NIBRS data.

* These documents are available at <www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>.