

Creating a Culture of Data Sharing

How Pennsylvania used a hybrid integration platform to transform its criminal justice system.

State and local governments collect a vast amount of citizen data to support business processes and programs, from personal information for health and human services programs to data from court and law enforcement agencies about a constituent's interactions with the criminal justice system.

Like many states, Pennsylvania faced the challenge of improving data sharing among its various criminal justice agencies and collating this information together to deliver better decision-making in service to the public.

To address these challenges, in 1996, Pennsylvania established the Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET). The state needed an easy way to integrate its data, gain access to real-time information and share criminal justice data across agency lines so each agency could more effectively achieve its mission.

Over time, JNET stakeholders developed a hybrid integration platform to bring together data from various justice, corrections, law enforcement and social services agencies. In recent years, new technology solutions have enabled even more ways to integrate information innovatively and efficiently.

Pennsylvania's experience offers a model for other state and local governments. By embracing a platform approach to integrating data, organizations can overcome data silos, better manage data sprawl and create a culture of data sharing that enables agencies to enhance service delivery and execute the work of government much more efficiently.

Data Sharing Challenges in Pennsylvania

Before implementing JNET, data silos were a fact of life in Pennsylvania's criminal justice system.

Many agencies relied on different technologies, some of which were legacy systems that lacked interoperability and made data integration cumbersome and time consuming. These legacy systems also had individual vulnerabilities that made it challenging to share data among agencies and with partners. Additionally, issues with data accuracy, duplication, complexity and sprawl made data management difficult.

"Before JNET, state public safety and criminal justice agencies, such as the Department of Corrections and the Parole Board, each had their own data and managed their own systems. To complicate matters further, in Pennsylvania there are separate county-level corrections, and county-level probation offices with their own information systems. Just being able to properly exchange data and share it with who could benefit from it was challenging," says Joseph Centurione, JNET's business relationship manager. "These entities still have their own systems,

but JNET makes it vastly easier for authorized users to access and use the data from these many disparate sources and take action based on the information that is available to them."

Data has become a critical tool for governments, but fully leveraging it depends on delivering information to the right person at the right time. Technology leaders in Pennsylvania knew they needed the ability to broker data at the federal, state and local levels from one centralized integration point. They sought a data-agnostic software solution that would help create a secure, enterprise foundation — one that could bring in information from various applications and data sources without the need for hard coding or expensive hardware that would likely become obsolete in a matter of years. Pennsylvania chose a hybrid integration platform to address its data sharing and data management challenges and to improve data accuracy throughout the state's criminal justice system.

The Power of a Hybrid Integration Platform: The Impact of JNET in Pennsylvania

Today, JNET serves as a fully integrated justice portal and information broker for Pennsylvania's criminal justice agencies.

Various departments and agencies permit access to their data through the JNET portal, including the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges Commission and more.¹ These agencies also decide which users can access their information, allowing the state to balance access control with data privacy and security considerations. JNET being the broker of the data enables contributing data providers to remain the sole source for storing their data.

"JNET provides two main services: our portal, which is a user logging on and doing individual queries into different data sources — we actually have 20 state-level data providers in addition to about 100 county-level providers for local jails and probation offices. The second big thing is messaging. Criminal justice agencies' ability to subscribe to court data and have it feed into their records management system just sort of brings things together," Centurione says. "We also offer 32 web services that qualifying agencies can subscribe to with the ultimate approval always going back to the data provider. This is system-to-system delivery of data, and in most cases, this integrates with an agency's own records management system. Rather than have to jump here and there to look at a record, everything is in one place."

While each agency has varying policies for its users, access to data can be made through any agency-owned and -managed device, according to Centurione.

“Our exchanges are very secure based on the infrastructure [of the hybrid integration platform], so the data is available to users whether they are in an office setting or in the field. The portal is designed with mobile in mind, so it works on an authorized PC, tablet or smart phone,” he says.

JNET also has enabled the state to realize cost and operational efficiencies and improve service delivery. Using data through JNET messaging, DOC provides information to DHS to connect people being released from prison with benefits even faster. Centurione says confirming their eligibility for public services was previously a manual process that involved someone applying for benefits after their release and then waiting for an eligibility determination.

Now, he says, the system notifies human services officials that a reentrant is expected to be released soon.

“It allows DHS to do some pre-work,” he says. “The result is when that person is released, they’re in a much better position to apply for and receive eligible benefits in a much quicker time than before this process was implemented.”

JNET messaging also provides data to agencies that issue professional licenses so they can determine whether an applicant might be ineligible for certain licenses due to an arrest or conviction. For other agencies, JNET helps ensure individuals are eligible for the benefits they are receiving.

“We developed a messaging service that allows the Department of Labor and Industry to receive a message about individuals being incarcerated,” Centurione says. “When you are incarcerated, you are not eligible for unemployment compensation, so that allowed them to properly adjust and be able to send that compensation only to those who were eligible.” That service has saved the Department of Labor and Industry approximately \$12 million annually.

As Pennsylvania demonstrates, using a hybrid integration platform to create a foundation for data sharing offers multiple benefits for state and local governments. This platform creates a single agnostic data integration layer to pool data from different sources, which allows agencies to transition away from non-interoperable, point-to-point integrations that hinder data sharing. Rather than individual data sharing agreements or manual hard coding, agencies can more efficiently and securely integrate data, applications, devices, systems, and

public and private clouds on a single platform, which speeds information sharing.

A hybrid integration platform supports the most widely used security and privacy standards. It provides agencies greater visibility into their data and access control over who can use this information. Users are authenticated and the data is encrypted, which enhances security during the transfer process. All of these capabilities also enable criminal justice agencies to streamline risk management, compliance management and reporting — while laying a foundation for increased data sharing and collaboration among government agencies.

Creating a Data-Sharing Culture

There are plenty of hurdles that prevent government agencies from sharing all the business information they collect, but a hybrid integration platform can serve as a key enabler for improving the work of government agencies, allowing them to break down existing organizational silos, bring all their data together and securely share this information.

While agencies can leverage technology to create a data sharing culture, they also need to lean on leaders within their organizations to socialize inter-agency data sharing and allay the concerns of other departments that may be hesitant about potential compliance and security risks.

Working with a technology provider who has public sector experience, and whose technology security design equals that of JNET’s architecture, can help agencies address many of these concerns. Along with leveraging a hybrid integration platform, establishing robust data governance policies can empower government agencies to create a culture of data sharing within their organizations.

Centurione says it is crucial for agencies to be committed to building a strong technology foundation for their data sharing efforts, along with implementing strong, ongoing data governance. Taking this approach has served Pennsylvania well for over 20 years.

“If you talk to JNET users and folks that have seen JNET grow over the years, our ability to securely deliver data to criminal justice agencies and getting that type of data in front of people just puts them in a much better position to make the best decisions.”

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Software AG Government Solutions.

¹ <https://www.pajnet.pa.gov/WHO%20WE%20SERVE/Pages/Our-Partners.aspx>



The Center for Digital Government, a division of e.Republic, is a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government. Through its diverse and dynamic programs and services, the Center provides public and private sector leaders with decision support, knowledge and opportunities to help them effectively incorporate new technologies in the 21st century. www.centerdigitalgov.com



Software AG Government Solutions is wholly owned subsidiary of Software AG USA, Inc. We are dedicated to serving the Public Sector, Higher Education, and Aerospace & Defense communities in the United States. Our world-class software products (webMethods, Alfabet, ARIS, Cumulocity, Adabas & Natural) are focused on reducing the complexity of IT ecosystems that have evolved over many years. We help our customers understand what IT they have, how to optimize their architecture, and execute on a fully integrated modern enterprise. We leverage a highly effective “Prove IT First and Prove IT Fast” approach to solving complex IT challenges. Widely embraced by our customers, this approach has been proven to minimize risks associated with IT investments. Learn more at www.softwareaggov.com