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Homeland Security Information and Intelligence Sharing: The Way Forward

SUMMARY

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) invites its members to engage in a continuing dialogue on methods to improve our nation's homeland security information and intelligence sharing processes. The *LLIS.gov* "Local Anti-Terrorism Information and Intelligence Sharing" Best Practice series surveyed exemplary information and intelligence sharing programs in states and localities. These jurisdictions have collaborated with their local federal authorities and each other to identify requirements and build functioning information and intelligence sharing programs. These state and local initiatives are not designed to replace national information and intelligence sharing systems developed by the federal government. The *LLIS.gov* Best Practice series assists local officials in the development of intelligence and information sharing programs to prevent and prepare for acts of terrorism.

The *LLIS.gov* Best Practices reflect only one component of a larger effort to reform and improve information and intelligence sharing at a national level and among all levels of government. A number of key issues and challenges must be addressed to create more effective processes for sharing information and intelligence nationwide.

Four principal issues and their related questions are presented to stimulate discussion. *LLIS.gov* encourages readers to share their comments, suggestions, and experience using the feedback tools found on *LLIS.gov*. This feedback will be shared directly with the Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Advisory Council, to assist in its efforts to strengthen and improve our nation's information and intelligence sharing capabilities.

DESCRIPTION

Federal, state, and local agencies across the country are currently undertaking substantial reform of their information and intelligence sharing processes. In the [Final Report](#) of its Information and Intelligence Sharing Initiative, the Homeland Security Advisory Council describes the fragmented nature of the current information and intelligence sharing environment. The Report also identifies several of the key issues and challenges that should be addressed to make our nation's information and intelligence sharing more consistent, efficient, and effective. These issues include:

- Establishing **common, standard terminology** for all federal, state, and local agencies and entities involved in anti-terrorism information and intelligence sharing;
- Developing a formal **information and intelligence requirements process** to define the information and intelligence needs of state and local agencies and the protocols for sharing information with federal intelligence agencies;

- Integrating the various **information and intelligence sharing mechanisms** into a more unified, coherent technical system that includes federal-level intelligence community members, as well as their state and local partners; and
- Developing a **consistent and effective training program** for intelligence analysts.

Standard Terminology and Definitions

There is currently no single, common terminology for information and intelligence sharing. Agencies and entities at the federal, state, and local levels often use different terms to describe the same aspects of the information and intelligence sharing process. Definitions for basic terms and concepts, such as “intelligence” or “fusion centers” vary widely. Establishing a common language will improve communication and foster mutual understanding among agencies at all phases of the information and intelligence sharing process. Some questions for discussion include:

- From what source(s) does your jurisdiction derive its information and intelligence terminology?
- What are some commonly used terms that are often misunderstood or whose definitions vary among states and jurisdictions?
- What are the most important terms to be clarified or standardized?

Roles, Responsibilities, and Requirements

No formal process currently exists for state, local, and private sector entities to define their intelligence requirements or coordinate their information and intelligence sharing efforts with federal entities. Because of concerns about sensitive information, state and local officials often do not receive the threat information they need to refine and improve their preparedness efforts. What information they do receive from federal sources is frequently “scrubbed” to the point of holding little value for state and local jurisdictions. To address this lack of timely, “actionable” information and intelligence, many states and local jurisdictions have established their own information collection, analysis, and dissemination processes. As these efforts have not been coordinated, the information and intelligence sharing capabilities and activities of these jurisdictions have varied widely across the country. Some questions for discussion include:

- Has your jurisdiction ever engaged your federal and state partners in a process to define its intelligence needs and requirements?
 - If so, what are some lessons that other jurisdictions could learn from your experience?
- Do you feel as though your jurisdiction’s roles and responsibilities with regard to information and intelligence sharing are unclear or undefined? What do you think can/should be done to clarify these roles and responsibilities?

Integration of Information and Intelligence Sharing Mechanisms

There are currently several different information and intelligence sharing mechanisms that are not fully integrated with each other. These mechanisms, such as the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) or Law Enforcement Online (LEO), are effective means of disseminating terrorism-related information and intelligence. However, different agencies and levels of government have varying levels of access to these systems. In addition, the sheer number and lack of integration among these mechanisms has led to fragmented technical systems for information and intelligence sharing. Some questions for discussion include:

- What technical or other communication mechanisms could improve information and intelligence sharing among federal, state, and local agencies and entities?
- What technical or other communication problems have you encountered in the transmission of terrorism-related information and intelligence to other agencies or entities?
- Have information classification and sensitivity issues significantly hindered the transmission of information and intelligence from the federal level to your jurisdiction?
 - If so, what solutions has your jurisdiction adopted to improve information and intelligence sharing with its federal partners?

Intelligence Analyst Training

Even as states and local jurisdictions increasingly establish their own fusion centers and other analytic capabilities, there still exists no standard training program for the analysts performing this function. While much of the training is “on the job,” the formal training that exists varies widely across jurisdictions. A consistent, rigorous training program would enable intelligence analysts from across the country to share the same basic skill set; this would also promote the standardization of intelligence-related terminology and definitions. Some questions for discussion include:

- What training do intelligence analysts in your jurisdiction currently receive?
- What skills or education should be standard for all intelligence analysts nationwide?
- What skills or education are most lacking in current training for anti-terrorism intelligence analysts?
- How and from where are intelligence analysts recruited?

CONCLUSION

Once again, *LLIS.gov* encourages its members to provide their input on these questions and on any other issues related to anti-terrorism information and intelligence sharing by using the *LLIS.gov* feedback tools. The goal of this effort is to stimulate discussion among federal, state, and local officials on ways to reform and improve our nation’s information and intelligence sharing capabilities.

REFERENCES

- Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Advisory Council. *Intelligence and Information Sharing Initiative: Final Report*. December 2004. ([LLIS.gov ID# 11985](#))

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