



Commonwealth of Kentucky

2007 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination  
Category: Government to Government

## Kentucky eWarrants

*Kentucky Office of Homeland Security*

This project will provide the Commonwealth of Kentucky with a statewide electronic warrant system that is accessible real-time to all criminal justice agencies requiring warrant information. This will revolutionize the way warrants are created and processed in Kentucky leading to a reduced backlog of unserved warrants and increasing public and officer safety.



## ***Executive Summary***

In 2006, the Commonwealth of Kentucky launched the eWarrants project to provide the criminal justice community with the ability to better access information needed to serve warrants. There are an estimated 300,000 unserved arrest warrants in Kentucky and all counties have reported problems accessing warrant information. In part, this was due to Kentucky's lack of a statewide system for issuing, tracking, and serving most warrants. From county to county, different criteria govern when a warrant is issued; different agencies hold the unserved warrants; and different law enforcement agencies attempt to serve them, using different policies and different procedures. This situation is not unique to Kentucky.

Prior to eWarrants, the warrant system was fragmented, with no single agency responsible for managing warrants and no standardization of process or procedures. The process was paper-based and access to warrant data was often limited to 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM operations. Further aggravating the problem is that only six percent of all warrants are entered into the Law Enforcement Information Network of Kentucky (LINK) system resulting in statewide law enforcement having access to only a very small percentage of warrants outside their particular jurisdictions. The result has been that hundreds to thousands of wanted individuals were stopped and/or detained but released for lack of having warrant information available to those with arrest authority.

As a result, the Commonwealth's public safety agencies set out to create a statewide electronic warrant system that would automate the warrant from inception to service. All warrants are generated electronically, signed electronically, and stored electronically in a database accessible 24/7 to all law enforcement agencies, courts, prosecutors, correctional facilities, and other parties with a need to access them.

The eWarrants system has the long-term potential to decrease the current backlog of unserved warrants, decrease the costs of handling warrants, particularly by eliminating paper, reduce the potential for duplicated effort in trying to serve warrants; and reduce the workload for a number of agencies and make them more effective. Ultimately, the eWarrants system is improving public and officer safety.

This project's cost was \$1 million. The system is provided at no cost to local and state agencies and requires no additional equipment.

## **Project Description**

Prior to the eWarrant project, Kentucky did not have a statewide system for warrants. Each of Kentucky's 120 counties maintains their own warrants. Some counties store warrant information in databases, but most maintain paper-based warrant files ranging from large rooms to file cabinets to paper boxes. There are an estimated 300,000 unserved arrest warrants in Kentucky. This backlog is primarily due to counties not having the ability to access the warrant information when needed to serve them. Because most warrants are not visible statewide, wanted persons can have many types of interactions with criminal justice agencies without ever being arrested.

The eWarrant system addresses the problem by providing immediate access to complete and accurate warrant information. Having accurate information available in the jails and prisons will ensure that any new warrants issued while a person is incarcerated are served prior to release. Instant visibility of cleared warrants prevents law enforcement from serving the same warrant multiple times. Instant lookup at traffic stops and other encounters helps law enforcement determine the level of caution needed to ensure the safety of officers and the public, and can ensure that all outstanding warrants are served, especially from other jurisdictions.

eWarrants is a web-based application that allows prosecutors and law enforcement the ability to create a complaint on-line. Upon completion, the complaint becomes available to the judge for his or her review. The system allows for the judge to deny the warrant or to approve it. Upon approval, the warrant is made available to all law enforcement statewide for service. The process is virtually real-time and replaces what normally could take hours to weeks. It also eliminates the need for law enforcement to drive across counties to obtain a hard-copy signature by the judge. The system is totally paperless up until the point a copy of the warrant is printed for the offender at the time of service.

The eWarrant system provides criminal justice agencies the ability to easily access one comprehensive source of warrant information. Edits are in place to ensure data integrity and accuracy, the system collects offender information normally not made available on the paper warrant. This additional information, such as alternate address, place of work, detailed descriptions of scars, marks, and tattoos, and family location information, all improve the likelihood of locating a wanted person.

While law enforcement can query eWarrants during a traffic stop or other event, they also have access to eWarrant information via the Law Enforcement Information Network of Kentucky (LINK). Prior to eWarrants, only six percent of warrants were entered into LINK. With this program, there is a communication interface from LINK to eWarrants and vice versa enabling LINK queries to show an eWarrant exists and also clearing warrants out of LINK when they are marked served in eWarrants. This is a tremendous benefit to field operations in that most Mobile Data Computers (MDCs) do not have internet access but eWarrant information can still be accessed in LINK across our state data network when running LINK/National Crime Information Center (NCIC) queries.

The eWarrant system has been Phase 1 operational in two counties since October 2006. Plans are in place to capture the current paper-based warrant backlog into the system and to incorporate other citation driven forms that have the basic look and feel of a warrant.

## **Significance to the improvement of the operation of government**

While criminal justice agencies at all levels of government do use some information systems to help track warrants, unfortunately, most of these systems do not communicate with each other and are not helpful beyond a single jurisdiction. Being that the eWarrant system is a true statewide system available to all agencies, to include executive and judicial branches of government, both state and local; it successfully bridges this communication gap.

This system enables warrants to be cross referenced, searched, and matched in ways that would be difficult to impossible to do manually. Changes in warrant status can appear immediately and can be communicated instantly to the appropriate agency. Some tasks that simply could not be done in a timely fashion by hand are now possible.

The eWarrant system provides a new form of information sharing and interoperability not previously available that vastly increases our effectiveness and efficiency. It improves our ability to protect our citizens and officers by getting needed information to the right persons at the right time. Overall, it revolutionizes the way Kentucky processes and manages warrants.

## **Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state**

The benefits of the eWarrant system can be easily envisioned. Imagine any situation that requires law enforcement to quickly access information on an individual from any neighboring agency or a middle-of-the-night need to quickly issue a warrant. Consider this real life situation where a suspect tells law enforcement that they have an outstanding warrant but it is 3:00 in the morning and no one is on duty to get a copy of the warrant and the suspect must be released. Other benefits realized by eWarrants include:

- Improved quality and quantity of information obtained at the time the warrant is issued affects the likelihood that it will subsequently be served
- Real time availability of multi-jurisdictional warrant data increases the likelihood of service and increases officer situational awareness and overall public safety
- Complete and accurate warrant information to judges making decisions about setting bond and conditions of pretrial release
- Will replace paper warrants and eliminate problems due to lost, misplaced, or duplicated paper documents
- Effective communication about warrant status across agency lines will facilitate serving warrants and managing cases
- Statewide warrant data will make oversight and accountability possible
- Problem solving will be improved at all levels

The eWarrant system allows law enforcement to manage and prioritize warrant service within a jurisdiction by providing information about:

- How many warrants are still active
- Which warrants are for more serious offenses
- How old the warrants are
- Which agency and officer has primary responsibility for servicing the warrant, and
- What attempts have already been made to serve the warrant

It is clear that all parties benefit from the eWarrant system. Prosecutors and law enforcement can expedite complaints into warrant status. Judges can quickly approve warrants from wherever they have internet access and sign them electronically. Law enforcement has real-time, multi-jurisdictional access to warrant information in the field, and the courts have improved decision making ability and real-time access to served warrants for case management. Most importantly, Kentucky citizens realize an increase in public safety and security.

### **Realized return on investment, short-term/long-term payback**

While it is difficult to determine an exact return on investment because one cannot put a price tag on improving public safety, it is clear that the return outweighs the cost. By providing a common, yet highly secure, web-based application, Kentucky has streamlined the overall implementation costs. As a result, Kentucky was able to equip over 300 law enforcement vehicles with mobile data terminals to access the system. In addition, the system is provided at no cost to agencies, the Kentucky State Police Computer Technologies Branch has committed to maintaining the system and providing 24/7 helpdesk support, and the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security will continue to provide senior project leadership over the initiative.

Costs savings will be realized in years to come as the ability to service warrants increases the amount of accrued court fees, staff once dedicated to paper-based warrant management is available to focus on other assignments, and law enforcement can more quickly assess and clear an event.

It can also easily be seen that if this system had not been implemented, individual agencies would have continued to address this problem in any number of incompatible ways. Local agencies would invest in the development of disparate systems. Branches of government would develop systems requiring costly interfaces and time-consuming business process reengineering. Individual counties would have continued developing personalized warrant forms and procedures impeding a multi-jurisdictional approach to serving warrants. This would not only have ultimately failed, but it would have greatly increased the cost burden to the state, and any economies of scale would be lost.

In 2006 Kentucky issued more than 500,000 citations. Imagine the efficiencies once every law enforcement agency has access to eWarrants. Considering the staggering backlog, many citations will result in the servicing of one or more warrants. eWarrants provides over a half million standing opportunities annually to resolve outstanding warrants via the citation process and to remove wanted individuals from our communities. The short and long-term benefits are immeasurable.

When fully implemented, over 430 law enforcement agencies, 240 County and Commonwealth Attorneys, hundreds of judges and circuit clerks, and over 100 plus correctional facilities will have access to eWarrants. With Phase 2 enhancements to include Emergency Protective Orders, Domestic Violence Orders, Evictions, and Subpoenas, to name a few, the ROI increases are incalculable.

As referenced, the Phase 1 investment was \$1 million. This included development of the core system and training/implementation to two counties. Phase 2 will cost \$4.5 million

with \$3 million going to the investment of 300 MDCs for law enforcement and the remaining \$1.5 million for enhancements to include capturing current paper-based backlog, additional automated storage, and training. No subscription or access fees will be charged to local or state agencies.

At a cost of less than one dollar per citizen, it is easy to see that this new capability is a low cost system that supports all citizens and pays for itself in potential savings of life, property, time, and overall business processes.