
e-WARRANTS

Cross Boundary Collaboration

State of Utah

e-WARRANTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the volume of court cases, law enforcement needed the ability to send search warrant requests electronically to magistrates for signing, speeding the search warrant request and approval process, and promoting stronger enforcement of DUI and other laws. However, creating this type of system requires collaboration between multiple independent government agencies, often a barrier to such efforts. In Utah these issues were overcome, and the e-Warrants system was created.

The e-Warrants system allows Utah law enforcement officers to enter search warrant affidavit information. The system then electronically notifies a prosecutor and forwards the affidavit for review. After review, an officer can transfer the affidavit to a magistrate, electronically notifying him or her of the waiting request. The magistrate can then electronically review the affidavit and generate a warrant, electronically sign the warrant, or deny the request with comments, then electronically send the results back to the officer. The warrant can then be printed and served.

The Administrative Office of the Courts participated with the development of the court side of the system. Buy-off was obtained by all parties involved (law enforcement, prosecution, courts) and the system design and development was commenced. The development was closely coordinated between the Department of Public Safety (DPS), Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office, and the Administrative Office of the Courts, with funding and direction by the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ). After development, all three agencies conducted numerous training sessions for each branch of the criminal justice community affected.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BUSINESS PROBLEM

A crash occurred in Utah where the passenger of the vehicle was killed. The driver was injured and taken to a hospital. There were obvious signs of driving while drinking, including an open bottle of vodka in the driver's purse. While at the hospital, the investigating officer asked the subject to submit to a blood draw to test for DUI. She refused. Fearing that the alcohol would dissipate in the time required to obtain a warrant, the officer ordered the hospital staff to draw blood without a search warrant. Based in part on the evidence gathered, the subject was convicted. She appealed, citing unlawful search and seizure. The appeal was upheld and the case went to the Utah Supreme Court, where the appeal was

overturned. However, the judges admonished law enforcement and prosecutors, stating that electronic methods could certainly be developed that would reduce the time taken to obtain a warrant.

A second court case centered on the ability of a subject, on which a warrant had been served, to view the warrant at the courthouse. An officer had the warrant signed by a judge and then walked out of the court with all the documents, failing to leave a copy at the court.

With these court cases setting the stage, the Utah Statewide Association of Prosecutors (SWAP) set about changing laws and rules to facilitate electronic warrants, including the ability to electronically sign the affidavits and warrants.

A representative from SWAP then approached the Department of Public Safety/Bureau of Criminal Identification (DPS/BCI), the stewards of the Utah Criminal Justice Information System (UCJIS), to develop an application whereby law enforcement could enter affidavit information, have it reviewed by a prosecutor, then submit the affidavit request to a magistrate, and have the response returned to the requesting officer.

Solution Description

e-Warrants is provided through the Utah Criminal Justice Information System (UCJIS) Web front, a secure application using enhanced security features. The e-Warrants system front-end was built in the standard MVC (model, view, controller) environment, to separate the presentation from the business logic and data access. Standard, secure Web services were used to transfer data between the Court's system and UCJIS, using the GJXDM (Global Justice XML Data Model) as the XML standard.

Law enforcement accesses e-Warrants via the UCJIS Web application, a secure portal for criminal justice information. After logging in, the e-Warrants transaction can be invoked. A wizard walks the officer through the entry process, where he or she can select either a DUI or general warrant request (the DUI request is a subset of the general warrant request).

After filling out the required information, the wizard presents a summary screen where the officer can then send the affidavit to a prosecutor for review, return to edit the affidavit, and submit the affidavit to a magistrate. When submitting to a magistrate, the officer is presented with a list of judges (updated every 24 hours by consuming a Web service at the courts). Also in the list is an "e-Warrants judge," which, when selected, consumes a Web service to retrieve the current "on call" judge contact information.

The affidavit is saved and the selected magistrate is notified electronically via e-mail and/or text message to a cell phone, pager, or PDA. The solution architecture and the related e-Warrants process flow is illustrated in Figure 1.

eWarrants Processing Flow

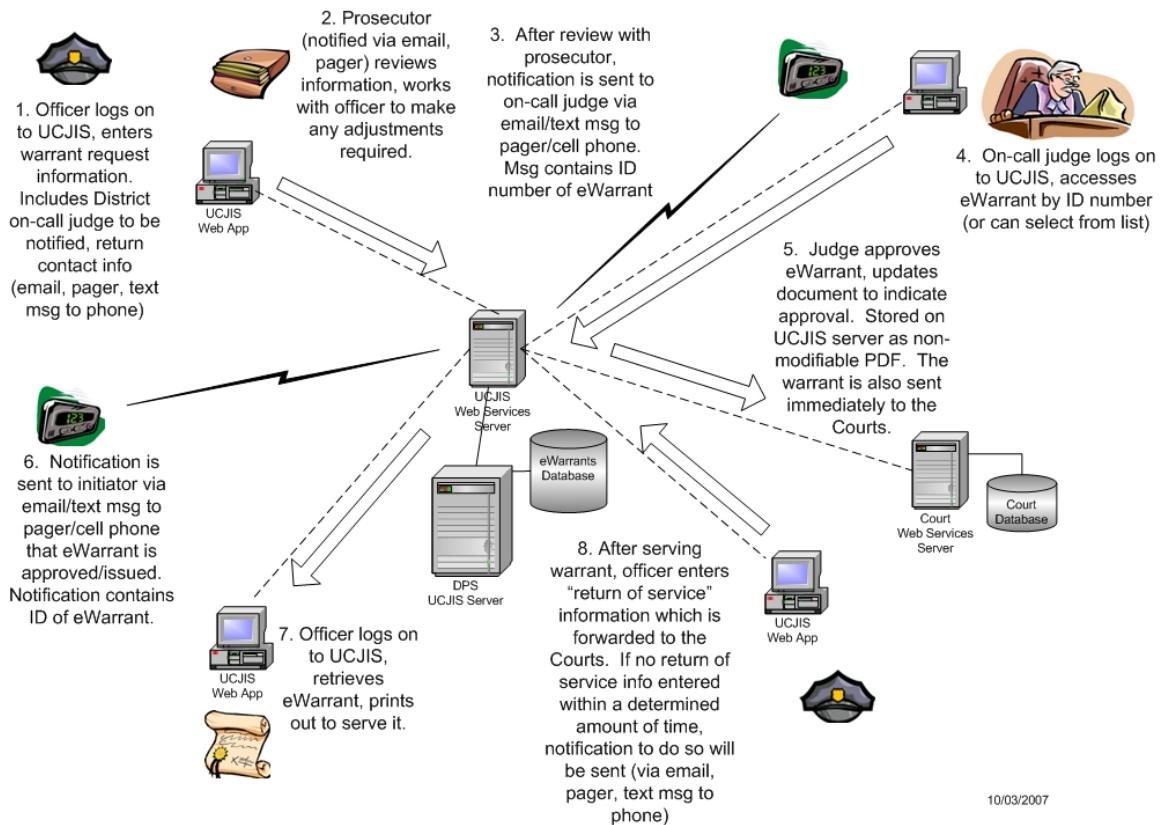


Figure 1. e-Warrants Process Flow and Solution Architecture

Magistrate Review

Upon receiving notification, the judge logs in to the Court's secure Web application, which forwards the login information to the UCJIS Web application. The judge can then view all open warrant requests. After selecting the affidavit, the judge can review it and the warrant generated from the affidavit request. The judge can then approve (sign) the warrant request or can reject the request with comments as to why. If the warrant request is denied, the information is saved and the requesting officer is notified by e-mail and/or text message to a cell phone, pager, or PDA. If approved, the warrant is saved on the UCJIS server and a sealed copy is sent to the Court's document management system (via a Web service) as the official copy of the warrant. The submitting officer is then notified electronically.

Officer e-Warrants Retrieval

Upon electronic notification, the officer can then log in to the UCJIS Web application and retrieve the signed warrant, to print and serve. If the warrant request was rejected, the officer can correct the warrant request and resubmit it.

Officer e-Warrants Return-Of-Service

After an officer has served a warrant, he or she can log in to the UCJIS Web application and enter return-of-service information. Once submitted, the return of service is stored on the Court's document management system, along with the warrant. If the officer does not enter return-of-service information in a timely manner, electronic notification is sent to "remind" him or her to do so.

Ongoing Training

Initially, the project was pilot tested in the Third District Court, with a limited number of judges and police agencies trained to use the system. After the pilot, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) introduced the e-Warrants system to all of the judges at their conferences. They have then trained specific judges (District and Justice Court) in coordination with the training of law enforcement agencies within that District. The Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI) has introduced the e-Warrants system at the yearly Terminal Agency Coordinator (TAC) conference, and has gone on-site to the law enforcement agencies to train the officers. As the law enforcement agencies are trained, the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office (SLCODA) has been training the prosecutors. This is an ongoing, coordinated training effort for the AOC, SLCODA, and BCI until all of the State has been trained.

Length of Time in Operation

The project has been in operation since December 2007.

SIGNIFICANCE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE OPERATION OF GOVERNMENT

Using the e-Warrants system greatly increases the productivity of law enforcement and judges when submitting an affidavit for a warrant. Previously, a warrant request was created manually as a word processing document, and then an officer would need to drive to the courthouse and wait for the signing judge to become available to review the request and sign the warrant. This process could take from two to four hours. The court and officer also needed to remember to leave a copy of the warrant at the courthouse.

With the new e-Warrants system, a wizard walks the officer through building the request and saving certain sections of the warrant request (officer experience, agency, etc.) for reuse in subsequent requests. After submitting the warrant to the judge, the warrant can be signed and returned immediately to the officer, making the total e-Warrant request complete within minutes. If the signing judge is not available, another judge can log in, review, and sign the warrant request.

BENEFIT OF THE PROJECT

Adoption of the e-Warrants system has been very strong. The parties involved are enthusiastic about the process. The e-Warrants system satisfies both court cases that were the impetus for the system. By reducing the amount of time taken by an officer to obtain a search warrant, time critical warrants (DUIs, etc.) can be obtained and served. By storing the signed warrant (and return-of-service) in the Court's document management system, the warrant is readily available for review by the subject upon whom the warrant was served, as is their legal right.

Secondarily, the use of the e-Warrants system greatly simplifies and streamlines the search warrant process while still protecting the rights of subjects.

Public policy goals met with e-Warrants include using Web services and the GJXDM to share data between criminal justice agencies. Legal goals met include the ability to electronically obtain search warrants, reducing the time to obtain a warrant, and protecting the rights of subjects involved.