



Montana Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System

NASCIO Award Nomination Cross Boundary Collaboration & Partnerships Category

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Executive Summary:

The Montana Department of Justice, Project Management Office worked with Sockeye consulting and Microsoft Dynamics 365 to design a Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System that traces kit processing enabling survivors to remain updated, should they choose, in real-time on their kit status. This innovative system advances communication among health care professionals, law enforcement, the State crime lab, victim advocates, and, most importantly, sex assault survivors. It is believed to be the first state-wide Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System in the nation.

Attorney General Tim Fox formed the statewide Sexual Assault Kit Task Force in 2015. The task force assembled a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders to design a system to track sexual assault kits collected in Montana and provide a mechanism for survivor notification of kit status (should the survivor choose). That work group identified the components of the tracking system, needs, and challenges. Justin Stolp from the Montana Department of Justice (DOJ) Project Management Office took on the project manager role and worked with the State Information Technology Services Division and Sockeye consulting to utilize Microsoft Dynamics 365 Online to define the steps a Sexual Assault Kit must travel through to receive appropriate processing.

The Montana DOJ Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System (SAK Tracking) enables the State and survivors to track and manage sexual assault kits through the entire lifecycle from kit manufacture through testing to archiving in evidence. This includes at the hospital, law enforcement, Office of Victim Services (OVS) (if applicable), laboratory, and then back in evidence. Survivors may lookup status and/or opt-in to receive notifications when a change of kit status occurs. The system allows the State to eliminate the opportunity for untested backlog kits to accumulate.

Project Initiation Purpose

The Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System's purpose is three pronged. First, the system eliminates arbitrary methods of kit processing and storage. Hospitals, law enforcement agencies, and labs are required by law to utilize the system. Therefore, the system allows stakeholders to maintain accurate records and kit status. Second, the system allows criminal justice professionals to track the status of the kit for investigation and prosecution. Finally, and critically important, the system is a tool for survivors of sexual assault to track the progress of their kit in real time so they may stay informed about their case. The system gives control back to the survivor. Likewise, stakeholders benefit from the uniformity, accountability, and procedural consistencies which are outcomes of this project. The beneficiaries are health professionals, law enforcement, crime lab technicians, prosecutors, victim advocates, and most importantly, survivors.

Project Initiation Scope

The scope of the project is broad as it includes stakeholders beginning with Sirchie (Global Leader in Crime Scene Investigation and Forensic Science Solutions) where kits are produced and then health care facilities, law enforcement agencies, the Montana crime lab, county attorneys, victim advocate providers, and citizens. This is a multi-agency project between government and private entities statewide. The scope of the project focused on the survivors needs, protection of sensitive information, and user-friendly design.

Project Narrative

Concept

Based on an inventory of all evidence rooms in the state, Montana determined there were 1252 sexual assault kits that had never been tested dating back to 1995. These kits are referred to as the backlog. As of May 2020, all backlog kits have been tested. The concept of the kit tracking system was born out of this backlog. Montana is not unique in having this issue, it is a nation-wide problem. Montana is also not the first jurisdiction to have the idea of a tracking system to eliminate a backlog. The Montana kit tracking system is however the first to go live as a state-wide system including involvement from external stakeholders.

In September of 2016 Montana received Federal funding to develop a tracking system. The Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Task Force established a work group consisting of a County Attorney, law enforcement representatives, the Montana Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) coordinator, victim advocates, state IT staff, and state crime lab staff. Beginning in 2017 DOJ began attending conferences for victim advocates, law enforcement, and forensic lab staff to present information about the new system. By the end of 2017, the design was complete, and development was well underway. Development continued through 2018 with final testing completed through Summer 2019. In August of 2019 just prior to go-live the DOJ Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) sent a memo from the Attorney General explaining the launch of the new system. At the same time DOJ worked with the Department of Labor and Industry to send the same memo to all licensed medical professionals in the state. The system went live state-wide on September 1, 2019.

The DOJ is fully responsible for management, operation, outcome, and cost of this system. The system implementation cost was ~\$250,000.00 with annual licensing to cost ~\$14,000.00 and vendor support at ~\$24,000.00/year. There are also three people who work on maintenance including training and troubleshooting for all stakeholders as part of their other regular duties.

We chose the Microsoft Dynamics 365 platform to build the system on for several reasons. First, the Montana Department of Administration already supports this platform as an established enterprise application. This allowed DOJ to use the platform without having to go through the procurement process which would have added a significant amount of time to the schedule. Second, we chose the Dynamics platform because it allowed us to address one of our larger challenges of access for non-state stakeholders.

To accomplish the non-state stakeholder access, we used the state's existing application access portal known as ePass. This portal allows state agencies to open internal applications to non-state stakeholders. Stakeholders create an account with ePass and then select the tracking system as one of their services. The tracking system then links the ePass account to the application level account.

The project was managed with a traditional waterfall project approach. Although there were iterations throughout development, user acceptance testing did not begin until all features were developed. Throughout the design phase there were two philosophies that took priority. The first philosophy was data security. A system of this nature could contain some very sensitive information about a sexual assault survivor. Given the gravity of this information we decided that there would not be any personally

identifiable information (PII) included in the system. This would mean that even if the entire database were stolen, no kit/case information could be tied to a specific individual. This goal was successfully met with one exception. The system allows a survivor to opt-in for kit status notifications via email and/or text. It is only at this point that there is any PII associated with a kit. The survivor themselves must agree to the warnings about the PII and opt-in on their own.

Significance

Montana developed and implemented a sustainable survivor centered tracking system. The new Montana law, SB52, that went into effect October 1, 2019 dictates that all kits are sent to the state crime lab to be tested. The kit tracking system helps DOJ ensure that those kits are being submitted for testing. The kit tracking system also allows a survivor to take control of their situation in ways never before available. A survivor can view the status of their kit, contact information for each stakeholder (e.g. law enforcement, state crime lab, victim advocates) along the lifecycle of a kit. The opt-in option also allows the survivor to have near real time information about the status of their kit.

The project is already considered successful. As of the date of this document a sample of the number of kits managed is below:

Status	# of kits
All kits tracked (including backlog kits)	2582
In evidence	218
At lab awaiting processing	218
At lab being processed	185
In inventory at medical facilities	659

Impact

Montana SAKI continues to make significant changes in the response to sexual assault. The Montana Department of Justice and the SAKI Task Force collaborates with community and criminal justice agencies statewide to identify challenges to Montana’s sexual assault response. Data obtained from the sexual assault kit backlog enables MT DOJ to target key gaps in kit testing. Gaps include lack of training in areas such as benefits of testing, trauma-informed approach, and effective investigation methods. Additionally, legislative and kit tracking solutions are critical to preventing another backlog. With the implementation of Senate Bill 52 in the 2019 Legislative session, all kits are to be sent to the crime lab for testing. This eliminates arbitrary kit submissions across the state and effectively establishes uniform sexual assault kit testing policies. The graphic below (based on the 2015 investigation) illustrates reasons why kits were not submitted. As you can see 50% of the backlog kits fall under the “other” category which does not give the survivor much information about why their kit was not tested. As kits were tested and MT DOJ received notification of CODIS Hits, the SAKI Site Coordinator and Advocate worked with communities across the state to review the cold case. A team consisting of law enforcement, advocate (usually community based), prosecutor, and a medical professional assembled to discuss the strengths and weaknesses in the sexual assault response. Most importantly, the case review allows the team to discuss the previous and current needs of the survivor. Multidisciplinary collaboration and teamwork create better communication and a successful plan for survivor notification. By conducting cold case reviews, sexual assault training,

legislation, and the implementation of the Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System, the response to sexual assault is changing.

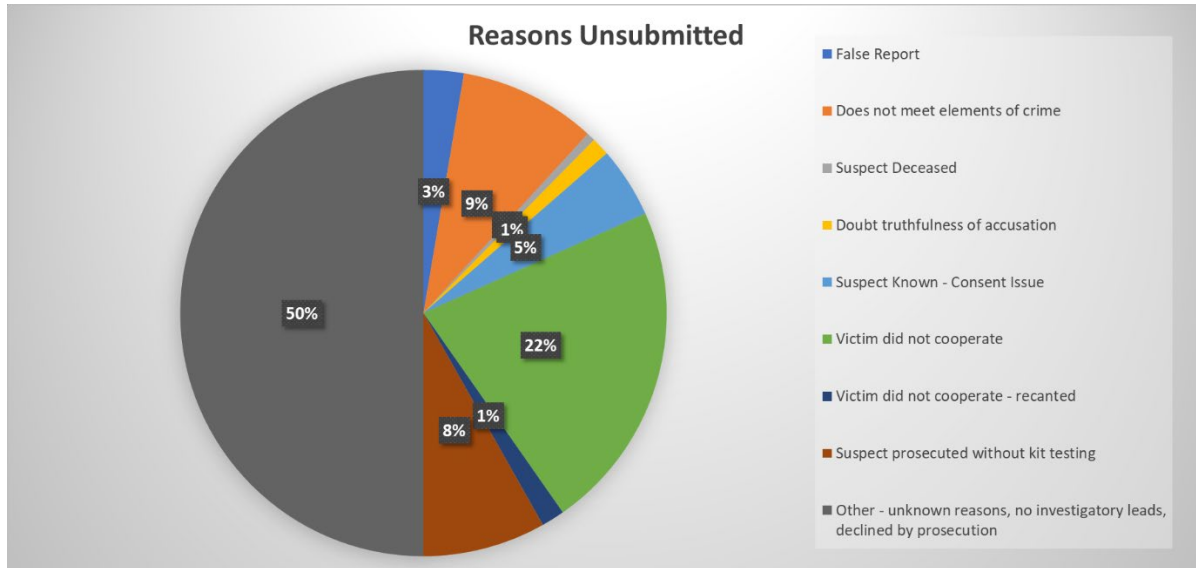


Figure 1 - "Reasons Unsubmitted Statistics"

In addition to the Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System, the SAKI Training Coordinator researched and developed an *Investigating Sexual Assault: A Field Guide for Law Enforcement* resource to facilitate officer training. By partnering with the Montana Law Enforcement Academy, new sexual assault curriculum has been integrated for new cadets. Best practices for investigating sexual assault have been implemented and is now a total of twelve (12) hours of new officer training. Plus, officers must conduct a victim interview scenario, which is pass or fail. The SAKI Team is conducting field trainings, as well. Field trainings allow the SAKI Team to bring best practices to communities. A SAKI field training is a two (2) day, sixteen (16) hour class that is taught by the SAKI Training Coordinator and Site Coordinator. This field training incorporates best practices in investigating a sexual assault, policies and procedures, survivor centered concepts, and the tracking system.

Since 2016, the SAKI Task Force and Team have partnered with professionals and communities across the state. One goal resonates among all stakeholders and that is to improve the overall response to sexual assault in Montana. This is accomplished by working with our communities, leadership, and continuing to bring innovation and change to archaic methodologies. The Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System is a prime example of how when all these elements come together can create a sustainable, successful product for stakeholders and survivors.