



White Paper

Implementing a Comprehensive Police Record Check System for Police Services

This White Paper explores common challenges faced by Police Services, highlighting lessons learned from actual implementations.

Introduction

Providing police record checks is an important box to check when it comes to providing a public service. As prescribed under the Police Services Act, every police service has a responsibility to provide timely police checks and to ensure compliance with the legislative standards established under the recent 2015 **Police Record Checks Reform Act**.

From a community perspective, a police record check is a growing part of a wider risk management strategy - a useful tool to protect assets or keep vulnerable clients safe. Interest in police checks are amplified by growing concerns tied to the explosion of virtual services such as Uber™.

To remain effective police officers from frontline to senior management need to stay abreast of continually evolving technology, trends, and issues. Workflow automation enables reallocating the time and effort spent processing police checks to more immediate operational priorities.

This White Paper provides a case study, introducing a recent advance in cutting edge technology delivering a much faster record check process, eliminating backlogs, while enhancing public satisfaction with online results in minutes. Ease of access along with a prompt service response translates into more requests, increased public satisfaction along with additional revenue for your municipality.

Our goal is not only to inform police leaders but also contribute to a broader discussion on the role technology can play to improve processing of police checks, increase police check revenues and improve the efficiency of police services across Ontario.

The Challenge

Every police service follows an internal set of steps when checking an applicant's history across local, inter-jurisdictional and national databases for criminal convictions or charges. With over 5 million checks conducted annually across Canada, the level of effort demanded by this workload represents a major impact on limited police resources.

Whether online, an electronic PDF, or handwritten form, police must collect and assess information contained in a request. Information must then be verified against local databases, results analyzed, decisions rendered, and documents prepared, then sealed. Staff manually reviews applicants, rekey information into various Record Management Systems (RMS), while at the same time, work to comply with municipal regulations, rates, as well as provincial statutes, policies and procedures.

While this sounds straightforward, challenges exist especially when large volumes of requests are involved.

Increasing Demand and Expectations

For many police services, traditional record management processes are overburdened. Increases in the number of requests by volunteer organizations, landlords or employers puts strain on police record units in both large and small municipalities.

For example, with an aging population, there is more emphasis on vulnerable sector checks for care workers. Other requests come in seasonal waves, based on community coaching and sports. Generally, turnaround is often measured in days or weeks, depending on the volume of requests. Delays and crowded lobbies increase public inconvenience which translates into dissatisfaction and more complaints directed at city officials or the police board.

Time Intensive Processing

Processing police record checks can be inefficient and slow. In many jurisdictions, applicants must often wait for weeks to receive their results or be forced to pay a premium for express services – a cost that is hardly fair to applicants for entry level jobs, community volunteers or those who must travel great distances. Results must be retrieved, consolidated, then analyzed. Official documentation must then record outcomes and then seal for the applicant. In the event of a 'hit', additional work involves fingerprinting and documenting of disclosures – delaying results and processing of other requests. As a result, traditional processing in many municipalities experience ongoing backlogs.

Increasingly Complex Processing

Data sources are siloed. The process of manually entering data, then verification across databases creates delays. Work associated with systematic processing of requests, reviewing RMS and CPIC databases requires rekey of data, decision-making, contingency work tied fingerprinting and handling of disclosures as needed, preparation and distribution of results all demand significant effort. Resulting processes have grown 'organically' in many police services over decades.

Ensuring Privacy and Ownership

Ontario's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) dictates that only the applicant may request and receive their personal police check. Staff must verify while ensuring the confidentiality of results; applicants must appear in person to verify their identity and pick up (or have mailed) their results. This contributes to crowded lobbies and long lineups in larger communities. The question of privacy when it comes to automation imposes an additional layer of complexity when protecting information and security communications between the public and the police service.

Lack of Visibility

Because the process is generally manual, there is lack of visibility into the actual status of each request. Its difficult to establish trends. Lack of visibility impacts resource allocation, audits, and limits efforts to optimize productivity. Assessing retroactive complaints from the public is also challenging. Tracking down incidents or searching through boxes of archived spreadsheets and corresponding paper documents is tedious at best. It is difficult for management to determine workload volumes, allocate work, and confirm the precise status of active individual requests. When the police board demands information on the process, trends, or financials, archived information must be sampled from boxes, data extracted from forms and rekeyed into spreadsheets, then manually aggregated and assessed – time consuming and often imprecise.

Legislative Compliance

Under the Police Services Act, police services are compelled to standardize and administer this service as mandated by the Province of

Ontario. In 2015, the Province of Ontario introduced Bill 113 - the Police Record Checks Reform Act. The Act placed administrative obligations by standardizing what information is collected and how requests must be processed – resulting in changes to forms, data collection and procedures. Compliance placed an additional administrative burden on police services.

Police Infrastructure and Security

Police infrastructure needs to be secure and access to information tightly controlled. Each system is unique to each police service, based on the type of RMS in use. Supporting hardware and network infrastructure (including the in-house system security environment) is unique to each police service. RMS systems are tailored to the unique needs of each police service by third-party vendors, such as Versaterm™ and Niche™. Secure communications with CPIC and inter-jurisdictional data exchange needs protection. Integration with internal RMS systems is difficult if data formats and workflow requirements are not well understood. Each police service has its own RMS configuration and supporting infrastructure that must be carefully navigated – particularly when new processes are introduced. This creates a gap between the identification of needs of the record unit and alignment of applications layered into the police network and its infrastructure.

Ongoing navigation of challenges causes delays and backlogs. These can lead to complaints from your police board or the community when demands for timely services are not met. Complex workflow also makes it difficult to precisely describe requirements for an automated police check process. Police systems must also align with local municipal requirements, payment systems, and rates, as well as extra work related to operational reporting, financial management and resource planning.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Automating police checks is shown to reduce or even eliminate common challenges. Recent advances in workflow automation adopted by police services has proven to alleviate a wide range of issues.

It's important to note that automation dramatically reduces the amount of work by staff while improving the quality of results, as well as providing dramatic audit and quality assurance capabilities.

Here are some actual metrics to consider after 3 years of continuous operation. The following insights are based on actual implementations in Ontario.

Before an electronic police check system was implemented:

Walk-in/Drop off service processed 70,000 submissions annually. Each submission was a handwritten or printed PDF completed form hand-delivered or mailed to the police station:

- Criminal Record Check: 6-8 Minutes to complete (1 staff member)
- Vulnerable Sector Check: 8-15 Minutes to complete (1-staff member)

Police Service had a backlog of 6000+ and an 8-week turnaround for any record check dropped off. This backlog existed from the programs' launch. This was due in part to 'first-in/first-out' manual, multi-system reviews and data capture. When more complex analysis

After an end-to-end police system was launched:

Online Service - 80,000 submissions annually

- Criminal Record Check: Between 30 seconds to 1.7 minutes to complete
- Criminal Record with Judicial Disclosures: Between 30 seconds and 2.1 minutes to complete
- Vulnerable Sector Check: Between 45 seconds and 2.5 minutes to complete

Walk-in/Drop off service - 35,000 submissions annually

- Criminal Record Check: 5 minutes to complete (1 staff member)
- Criminal Record with Judicial Disclosures: 5 minutes to complete (1-2 staff member)
- Vulnerable Sector Check: 6 minutes to complete (1-2 staff member)

Police Service had permanently eliminated its 8-week records check backlog and turnaround times from the public's perspective now range within 24-48 hours (often within 15 minutes!) for 'no-hit' online submissions. All submissions are electronic along with electronic case files. Requests are pre-validated and queued as 'no-hits' allowing for allocation of work based on status of the request.

Ease of access and fast turnaround time saw a 40% increase in volume, which was handled by less staff! This allowed subject matter experts to focus on more complex disclosures. As police services are revenue dependent, this meant more revenue to improve and optimize services. Because all work was switched from a manual to an electronic document format, systems were able process requests with minimal or no additional data entry by police staff. Here are how some efficiencies were achieved and key lessons learned by fellow police services.

**Meet Public
Demand with
Greater
Convenience**

Applicants to complete requests online and receive their results from the comfort of their own home. Results can often be received by applicants within minutes during regular working hours. Using passive, credit-based Electronic Identity Verification (EIV) endorsed by the RCMP using services offered by Equifax™ and TransUnion™. Coupled with tamper-proof digital signatures, near instant results can be returned to the applicant through a secure, automated system by email. The system can also be configured to restrict who's eligible to use the system based on their postal code or licence information.

Lesson Learned #1: In general, the public is familiar with the use of online and mobile services. About 70% of the public preferred to use online services rather than in person. Systems need to accommodate in-person requests by those unable to pass EIV or just prefer (such as the elderly or youth with no credit history) the 'traditional' approach. To compensate, the system allowed applicants to complete a request without EIV or online payment. Completed requests could still be completed, but the applicant must still appear in person. The system was designed to prevent another family member or stranger from making a request on someone else's behalf using 2-factor authentication coupled with the need for the applicant to create an account that can be monitored for irregular activity.

Demonstrate and Ensure Privacy

In concert with PIPEDA, the results are for the applicant's eyes only and it is up to the individual to decide to whom the results will be shared electronically. The Police found over 70% of sponsors for a police check (e.g. employers and volunteer groups) preferred receiving results via email rather than a sealed paper document. Completed forms and document attachments sent by the applicant are for 'police eyes only'. They are encrypted using Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) and are only accessible by authorized police personnel. With respect to data ownership itself, only police services should have any access to requests.

Lesson Learned #2: To protect the privacy of personal information, no information should be stored online or in 3rd party hosted services. This also allows for information to be shielded with access limited to the applicant and police service itself. Any online information in the public domain is temporary stored in memory during the filling out of forms but is never stored online.

Reduce Complexity with Unified Access for Police Staff

Advances in automation and use of deterministic logic streamlined the process to the point where little data entry is required by police staff. Automated rules engines determine eligibility or if the applicant provided inaccurate or illicit information, it can be identified readily. Inter-jurisdictional queries when applicants have recently moved from another city has been automated as well. Whether online or in person, a unified process simplifies processing to the point staff can focus exclusively on the analysis of the request. All forms are automatically pre-populated and distributed dynamically.

Lesson Learned #3: Data contained in CPIC and local RMS systems while unstructured, follows strict layouts, allowing for an automated pre-analysis of results. This can be used to manage the queueing and allocation of results based on the applicant's history. 'No-hits' can be assigned to junior resources for fast tracking. More complex histories can be routed to experts for more detailed review. All forms are pre-populated, eliminating the need for record unit staff to manually complete forms. All processing can be done in compliance with provincial legislation as well as procedures set by the Records Unit.

Results at Home with Minimal Delay

Studies show turnaround time for a typical 'manual' request from an 'in-person' form, online site or PDF typically take between 10 and 20 minutes, assuming there are no 'hits' or inter-jurisdictional delays. Automation eliminates data entry, checking various systems, preparing inter-jurisdictional queries, or completing documentation. The Ottawa Police Service and Peel Regional Police have proven assessments can be completed, rendered, and released back to the applicant by email in as little as 30 seconds.

Lesson Learned #4: Both the municipal government and police board received positive reviews from the public citing ease of use and convenience as positive endorsement of new service options. The key challenge was ensuring the public use the correct type of request. To address this, the police service provided an online checklist to help evaluate the type of request needed. The use of online attachments allowed applicants to provide additional information provided by volunteer organizations and employers. These

attachments were reviewed by records unit staff to ensure compliance and proper use of different police check types as defined by LEARN.

Audits, Quality Assurance and Process Visibility

Since the process is electronic from end to end, every request can be tracked, including content and status in real time. This includes online tracking by the public (which reduces call inquiries) where applicants can monitor status online (to the extent permitted by the police the service). It also includes staff performance and hand-offs between personnel by management. Full document management provides a rich foundation for reporting and other analytics to refine service delivery and resourcing of the process. In the event of an inquiry, real-time status can be determined in moments. Logs determine and measure operational efficiency, including variations in compliance and processing of individual requests. At the same time, there is improved visibility into the activity of the public as well as tracking of fraudulent behaviour.

Lesson Learned #5: The system can monitor each applicant, and their application. It provides a method for managers to request status and decisions as well as track amendments to or hand-offs between records unit staff. Typically, there are over 20 forms that reflect work associated with everything from results to fingerprint requests to disclosures. Information contained in both the request and results from police database can be dynamically scored and forms pre-populated. All requests and outcomes are gathered in a searchable electronic case file. In addition, electronic tracking of inbound requests allowed for monitoring of allocation and time taken to process each request. Delays and bottlenecks were identified using auto-alerts based on age of the request.

Built in Compliance

Workflow, document formats, and database inquiries through the most common police records management systems are standardized. Because of this it is possible to use artificial intelligence to collect data, gather decision points, and interpret findings, building seamlessly on data prepared by applicants themselves.

Lesson Learned #6: Further to provincial legislation, all forms and rules tied to youth between 18 and 22 working for government (for example) were incorporated into the workflow using 'externalized' business rules. In addition, rates and online payment are also 'externalized', allowing for compliance with adjustments to pricing and alignment with municipal payment systems. This allows the system to accommodate variations in workflow between jurisdictions.

Contemplating Next Steps

Introducing efficiencies offered by technology, means better service at a lower cost while optimizing performance and internal resource planning. The benefits of record check automation described in this White Paper exists today and is available to any police service – large or small with minimal capital outlay.

You are now uniquely positioned to address challenges while introducing unprecedented efficiency based on lessons learned by two leading Ontario police services. Requirements have already been defined and a comprehensive change management strategy already

developed. The 'look and feel' can be tailored to your police service. Staff can be eased into the new system by handling current walk-ins first. Once staff become familiar with how the system works, online services can be introduced.

Feel free to reach out and we'll be glad make introductions to your colleagues now using the system. Building on the experience of other police services, your police service can overcome traditional challenges.

In closing, introducing automation on this scale used to require development of specifications, tendering delays, and inherent risk associated with whether an implementation on such a scale is feasible. Integration of workflow and resulting change management has traditionally been a challenge for police IT shops. This is no longer the case.

Implementation does not require specifications, pricing or public tender at this time - you may order this system through the [Police Cooperative Purchasing Group \(PCPG\)](#). You and your team are now in a unique position to leverage procurement economies of scale using a system tailored to standardized police check operations, but adaptable to your jurisdiction.

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