



# TALKING ABOUT NIBRS

## MESSAGING ABOUT CRIME DATA TO STAKEHOLDERS

**PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION** about crime data can positively influence how your agency's crime statistics are received by stakeholders.

Messaging about your agency's transition to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) will help elected and appointed officials, the media, and the public understand how NIBRS benefits your community and improves public safety.

NIBRS records more detailed crime information compared to the traditional Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) standards. Agencies have expressed concern that the public may misinterpret post-NIBRS crime statistics as an increase in crime, rather than a by-product of changes in data reporting rules. Agencies that highlight critical information about their NIBRS transition can help prevent this public misconception and showcase the many benefits of better crime data.

Which headline would you rather see, *"Drug Crime Up in [your jurisdiction]"* or *"[Your jurisdiction] is Leading the Way to Improve Crime Measurement"*? How your agency messages its transition to NIBRS may affect how stakeholders perceive incident-based crime statistics. What your agency communicates will influence the reaction of officials, the media, and the public to changes in crime reporting.

### TIPS FOR NIBRS MESSAGING:

- » Educate personnel and staff on the benefits of NIBRS so agency representatives can highlight the advantages of incident-based reporting (IBR)
- » Anticipate potential questions from data users and prepare responses that highlight the benefits of incident-based data
- » Engage stakeholders about the changes in crime reporting—a lack of communication may be perceived as hiding something
- » Message information to data users through multiple methods to help ensure data are interpreted appropriately
- » Direct stakeholders to additional materials about NIBRS, including those on the NCS-X and the FBI webpages



## COMMUNICATING ABOUT NIBRS CAN HELP:

**BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST** – engage crime data stakeholders to explain why your agency is collecting more detailed crime data. This type of engagement will demonstrate your agency’s commitment to transparency and supports the goal of keeping community partners involved in addressing crime and public safety concerns. Discussing the transition to IBR provides an opportunity to explain how your agency is prioritizing collecting good crime statistics.

**IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING** – crime data are interesting, relevant, and often accessible to users outside of the agency. Data can be used for a variety of purposes by people with differing levels of knowledge and analytic experience. If stakeholders do not understand important

changes in how data are recorded and reported, they may draw inaccurate conclusions about crime trends and offending patterns. Informing crime data stakeholders about changes in how offenses are counted will help ensure your agency’s statistics are evaluated appropriately.

### KEY BENEFITS OF NIBRS:

- Detailed, high quality data that provide a more complete and accurate picture of crime
- Additional context to understand victimization and offending
- Standardized data to compare crime across jurisdictions

## KEY MESSAGES TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT NIBRS:

**BETTER DATA** – inform stakeholders that IBR will allow your agency to collect more accurate, detailed crime statistics, compared to aggregated offense counts, and provide more meaningful data for addressing crime and public safety issues.

**NIBRS IS NOT DIRECTLY COMPARABLE TO PREVIOUS CRIME STATISTICS** – explain that stakeholders should not compare crime statistics using NIBRS data with crime statistics reported using the traditional counting rules. Emphasize the benefits of the NIBRS reporting rules. Remind stakeholders that NIBRS data can be converted to the old format to look at crime trends.

**OPERATIONAL ADVANTAGES** – IBR enables agencies to conduct advanced analysis for developing strategic and tactical responses to crime. NIBRS data can help agencies become more efficient and support budgeting and planning efforts.

### NIBRS FAST FACTS:

- Includes up to 10 offenses per incident
- Create profiles of victims and offenders
- Provides detail on the context of crime
- Improves understanding of multi-offense incidents
- Collects data on 52 crimes across 24 offense categories

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT NIBRS:



**AGENCY WEBPAGE** – create a “NIBRS” section on your agency’s website to provide information about NIBRS. Consider including links to NIBRS resources produced by other agencies including:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation NIBRS website <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/nibrs>

- Bureau of Justice Statistics NCS-X website <https://www.bjs.gov/content/ncsx.cfm>
- National Crime Statistics Exchange <https://www.theiacp.org/projects/ncsx>
- American Society of Uniform Crime Reporting Programs (ASUCRP) <http://www.asucrp.net/>



**SOCIAL MEDIA** – post messages about the benefits of NIBRS on Twitter, Facebook, and other forums to start community conversations. Use hashtags (e.g., #nibrs, #bettercrimedata, #UCR) and mention special interest groups who will benefit from more detailed crime data to start discussions and to get messages liked or retweeted.



**PRESS RELEASE** – issue a press release to announce your agency’s transition to NIBRS. See [NIBRS Transition Press Release Template](#).



**MEDIA ENGAGEMENT** – contact local media outlets, focusing on organizations that cover crime and justice news and that often report on law enforcement activities. Schedule interviews to discuss the NIBRS transition and address common questions and concerns. See [Will NIBRS Reporting Increase Crime Statistics?](#) for tips on responding to questions about the impact of NIBRS.



**COMMUNITY MEETINGS, CITY OR COUNTY COUNCIL MEETINGS, AND OTHER LOCAL EVENTS** – create slides or handouts to show stakeholders what crime statistics look like using the NIBRS data collection standard. Ideally, the slides will compare crime statistics under NIBRS to the previous numbers, and will provide concise explanations for any differences. Focus on ensuring that the comparisons are equivalent and then showcase how the additional information collected through NIBRS benefits the community and your agency.



**ANNUAL REPORT** – include a section in your agency’s annual report that describes the differences between NIBRS and the traditional reporting standards and the impact of the NIBRS transition on crime statistics.



**OPEN DATA PORTAL** – if agency resources allow, consider making your agency’s incident-based data available online. Examples of the types of information made available by other law enforcement agencies on open data portals include: crime incident, arrest, traffic accident, and calls for service data.

Please cite this product as follows: Gardner, A., & Agaard, B. (2020, December). *Talking about NIBRS: Messaging about crime data to stakeholders*. National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X) Initiative Technical Assistance. Available at [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/NCSX\\_NIBRS\\_Messaging\\_Stakeholders.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/NCSX_NIBRS_Messaging_Stakeholders.pdf).