Delivering Minnesota Criminal Justice Information Online

www.mnplan.state.mn.us/cj/index.html

FEBRUARY 1999

Minnesota Planning develops long-range plans for the state, stimulates public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinates activities among state agencies, the Minnesota Legislature and other units of government.

The Criminal Justice Center provides criminal and juvenile justice information, conducts research and maintains databases for policy development.

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February 1999

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View the Criminal Justice Center's home page at www.mnplan.state.mn.us/cj/index.html or access an electronic copy of *Delivering Minnesota Criminal Justice Information Online* at the Minnesota Planning Internet site.

Delivering Minnesota Criminal Justice Information Online

Summary

The Minnesota Criminal Justice Statistical Analysis Center received a grant from the State Justice Statistics Program managed by the U.S. Department of Justice to enhance its web site services. Various improvements were made to the site located at www.mnplan.state.mn.us to give users the opportunity to gather accurate information for learning about criminal justice. *Delivering Minnesota Criminal Justice Information Online* describes the process used to increase access to more comprehensive Minnesota justice information resources.

Enhancements to the site range from the transition to a more advanced data access system, Datanet, and the addition of justice-related data sets, maps, graphs, lexicon and caveats to the expansion of state and national criminal justice contacts and program information. Visitors can download data and supporting documentation, view or print electronic reports and order printed copies of publications as well.

In the interest of providing a variety of useful services, center staff completed a number of activities to ascertain data needs in Minnesota. Need determination involved two focus group discussions with state government professionals, administration of a data needs survey, examination of web site activity and analysis of the center's helpline requests. Results were used to focus site enhancements.

Another objective of the center's enhancement project was to lay the foundation for future implementation of an interactive geographic information system component at the site. This component would enable users to create customized reports, graphs and maps with the click of a mouse button. Regrettably, the center was not able to incorporate geographic information system mapping into the site because statewide criminal justice data in Minnesota is not collected in a suitable format.

Future plans for the site, however, do include offering users the ability to create maps and graphs online using Datanet. These graphics will differ from those currently at the site, because they will be user-customized and created instantly. In addition, local law enforcement offense and arrest data will be added to the site over the next year. Currently, this information is available only by contacting the center directly. Activity at the site will continue to be observed and may aid in pinpointing areas for additional improvement.

Improving access to criminal justice resources

Minnesota's Criminal Justice Center at Minnesota Planning undertook a project in October 1997 to improve its ability to collect, analyze and interpret data on justice issues. As a result of this effort, a number of enhancements to the center's web site at www.mnplan.state.mn.us give policymakers, criminal justice professionals, educators, students and citizens 24-hour access to a wide variety of criminal justice information. They can now obtain the following information online:

- Arrest and apprehension data by age, ethnicity, race and sex from 1985 to 1997
- Criminal justice publications that can be viewed electronically, printed, downloaded or ordered online
- Downloadable database files
- Firearm forfeitures for 1996 and 1997
- Graphs portraying corrections populations from 1981 to 1998
- Links to state and national resources on criminal justice and other topic areas such as education, health and human services
- Maps showing reported crimes, arrests and apprehensions, and probation cases for 1994 to 1997
- Maps showing justice system expenditures from 1994 to 1996
- Probation cases by age and offense level for 1985 to 1997
- Reported offense data for 1985 to 1997
- Sheriff's office and county corrections expenditures from 1985 to 1996
- State correctional facility populations by age for 1981 to 1998
- Supportive documentation including sources, definitions and caveat information for all data sets offered
- A brief description of the center
- A description of Minnesota's teen court system

The mission of the center is to collect and analyze data relating to crime and the justice system, provide accurate information and analysis on emerging and critical issues, and influence policy decisions through long-range planning. A major component of this mission is the broad dissemination of information. Due to the small size of the center's staff and the lack of resources, information requests cannot always be fulfilled as efficiently or quickly as desired. A number of requests are denied simply because the necessary data either is not readily available or would take too long to compile.

Through a grant provided by the State Justice Statistics Program administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, the center was able to make a number of improvements in its ability to provide public access to criminal justice information. *Delivering Minnesota Criminal Justice Information Online* details the steps taken to ac-

complish this objective and support the center's mission. It describes staff activities to ascertain primary data needs in Minnesota, the compatibility of criminal justice data for mapping with a geographic information system and the process used for augmenting the center's web site.

Determining Minnesota's justice information needs

The Criminal Justice Statistical Analysis Center's web site enhancement project was aimed at improving the center's ability to collect, analyze and interpret data on justice issues to better serve its information users. To support this objective, center staff undertook a number of activities to ascertain justice data needs in Minnesota and focus web site enhancements to meet those needs. These activities included two focus group discussions with state government professionals, administration of a data needs survey, examination of how the web site was being used and analysis of the center's helpline requests.

Focus groups identify data priorities

In December 1997, the center held two focus groups with staff from various state agencies. Discussions centered on identifying participants' primary data needs, uses and sources, as well as desired formats, data quality and experiences obtaining data from other agencies.

Focus group participants expressed a common need for all types of criminal justice data on state, county and local levels. Areas specifically mentioned were reported incidents, arrests and apprehensions, court case processing, juvenile breakouts, police pursuits, homicides, bias crimes and narcotics offenses. Also desired was program evaluation and policy analysis of critical justice issues.

Uses of data varied. Overall, most participants said they rely on criminal justice data for writing reports, background information, trend analysis, planning and targeting resources. They also said they seek local data for distributing to clients in specific communities to illustrate activity in their area.

Format preferences also were elicited during focus group sessions. Contacting source agencies directly and consulting printed reports were cited as common approaches to getting data. A number of participants hailed the ease of obtaining data via the Internet, especially in the form of downloadable database files. These individuals said they liked the freedom of working with raw numbers to complete their own analyses. Others said that maps and graphs were a more straightforward means of conveying data. Percent, rate and trend statistics were noted as being informative. Many stated that up-to-date data was the most valuable for their work.

Participants also discussed various issues regarding data acquisition and quality. Many expressed frustration in trying to gather accurate and complete data. Some had obtained numbers that were inconsistent with those previously reported or missing significant components. Differences in collection practices, lack of uniform procedures and untimely data also were identified as problems. Other issues discussed included identifying sources of data and making caveat and other pertinent information available for users to foster appropriate interpretation.

User survey aids in targeting data needs

Another step in planning enhancements to the center's web site included the administration of a data needs survey in February 1998. The survey, which was mailed to a random sample of 1,000 people selected from the center's mailing list, elicited responses from criminal justice professionals, legislative staff, policy-makers, educators, students and citizens. Respondents were asked to provide information about data needs, formats and sources, problems retrieving data, Internet access and experiences visiting the center's web site.

From the 194 responses received, the greatest criminal justice data need was determined to be for crime data on the national, state, county, city and community levels, with a specific focus on county and city data. Court and corrections data followed as the next highest information priorities. Of the noncriminal justice data needs asked about in the survey, population, income and high school dropout data were the top three for respondents.

As for data formats, a majority of those surveyed said they prefer working with raw numbers. Percentages were favored over rates, as were graphs over tables. Useful time frames identified by respondents include yearly, five-year trend and monthly intervals. Prevailing sources for information were printed reports followed by faxed excerpts and the Internet. Overall, respondents said they used criminal justice data for background knowledge, planning activities and writing reports.

A large portion of respondents, 58 percent, indicated they encountered problems obtaining criminal justice data from other agencies. Most said that the data they needed either was not readily accessible, not collected or not up-to-date. Other issues centered on inconsistent reports for the same data, the inability to identify information resources and lack of supportive documentation for accurately understanding the data.

The survey also asked participants about their access to the Internet and experiences visiting the center's web site. Findings showed that while 71 percent of respondents have Internet access at work and 41 percent have it at home, only 22 percent had ever visited the center's web site. Of those who accessed the site, most had used the data component or reviewed online publications. Comments for site improvements include adding more recent data, listing rates along with raw numbers and providing an explanation about the site and how it can be used.

Helpline requests confirm focus group and survey results

The center operates a criminal justice helpline for responding to data requests and answering questions. Users can access the helpline 24 hours a day via an online request form or by telephone. For each phone request, a form is used to document the caller's name, address, telephone number and inquiry. These forms are kept for administrative purposes and were analyzed as part of the data needs determination aspect of the project.

Overall, results from this examination were similar to those gained through focus group discussions and the data needs survey. Crime data, specifically on offenses and arrests, was most frequently requested, followed by corrections and victimization data. Most helpline users asked for statewide or county-level data in raw numbers; however, many requested both numbers and rates. The current year's data was favored as well as either 10- or five-year trends. Specific breakouts for juveniles and by race also were of great interest.

Examination of web site hits shows visitor activity

The center analyzed its web site activity from January through December 1998. Tracking the number of hits, or user visits, to a web page can provide information about the volume of traffic a site receives as well as the demand for various services. Hits to a web site, however, are not necessarily representative of the number of individuals visiting that location. They simply indicate the number of times a page is accessed or reloaded in a given time period.

The center's home page registered a total of 6,498 visits over the 12-month period. Monthly breakouts reveal that the greatest number of hits occurred in November, October, December and April. The volume of site visits during these months may have been influenced by the November elections and the legislative session. It is important to note that only visits to the center's home page were analyzed; therefore, this review does not include counts for other pages accessed at the site or visitors who enter the site through an address other than the main home page.

The center's web site offered users access to limited criminal justice data and maps, answers to justice-related questions, publications and links to other information resources. A more focused analysis of visitor activity in relation to these services was completed as part of the enhancement project. The justice data component and publications recorded the most hits. Maps and graphs ranked third highest, followed by the resource and helpline pages, respectively.

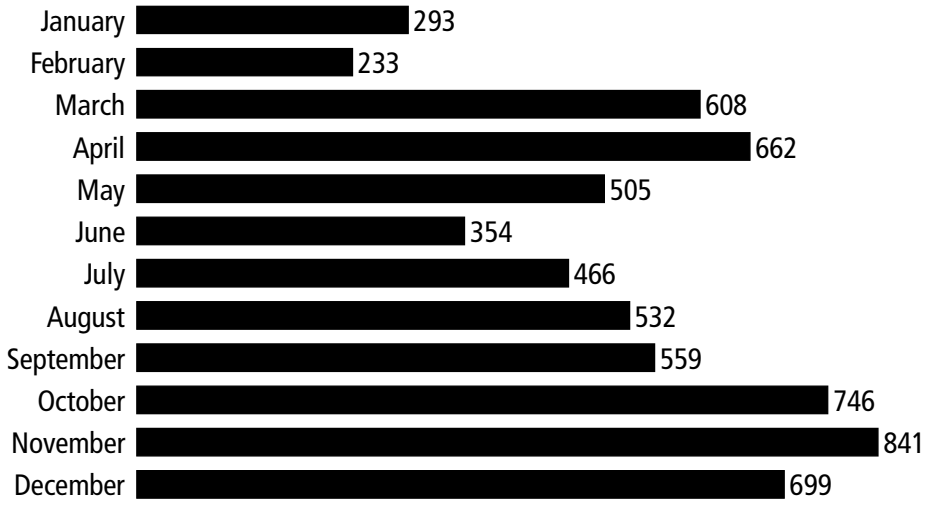
As part of the project's evaluation component, similar hit count and visitor service use data will be compiled once the center's web site enhancements have been announced. This information will be compared to that previously gathered to gauge user satisfaction with site augmentations.

Gauging user satisfaction

As part of the enhancement project, the center also proposed to incorporate an evaluation component into its web

Web site visits fluctuated over a 12-month period

Number of visits to the Criminal Justices Center's home page during 1998



Notes: Only visits to the center's home page were analyzed; therefore, this review does not include counts for other pages accessed at the site or visitors who enter the site through an address other than the home page. In addition, this data may include counts for the same person visiting the site more than once.

Source: Minnesota Planning

site in the form of an online satisfaction survey. Preliminary steps for developing such a survey included viewing other sites to assess what, if any, evaluation methods they employ to evaluate the usefulness of their information. Most of the state and national web sites visited did not use any formal type of evaluation but instead provided a webmaster e-mail address to which visitors could send comments. This option is already available at the center's site and includes the center's mailing address and telephone and fax numbers.

Perhaps the most important insight gleaned from this review of other sites was the difficulty in finding an e-mail address to which comments could be sent. While some sites prominently displayed this address on the home page, many buried it at least two pages deeper into the site.

Additional input on evaluation techniques was elicited from staff at the Center for Applied Research and Educational Development at the University of Minnesota. They knew of no formal evaluation design or protocol being used by any web site but suggested that in designing an evaluation tool, the number of questions should be kept to a minimum to increase the likelihood of visitors providing complete responses.

Based on their findings, center staff decided to continue offering the webmaster e-mail address and add this feature to every page at the site. It was concluded that visitors could relay the same types of information via this method as they could by answering a survey with such questions as "Did you find the information you needed?" or "Was the information easy to access?" In addition, the site presently offers access to a helpline page through which users can obtain criminal or juvenile justice data not available at the site or answers to justice-related questions as well as add their name to the center's mailing list.

Mapping crime data

One objective of the center's online data enhancement project was to lay the foundation for implementing on its web site an interactive mapping component using a geographic information system. This component would enable users to create customized reports, graphs and maps with the click of a mouse button. Center staff approached this issue by gathering information on GIS, necessary data formats, software packages, associated costs and computer requirements.

A geographic information system is a powerful computer-based tool for storing, analyzing and displaying information. GIS can convert data stored in a database into charts and graphs; however, its greatest strength lies in creating maps for complex analysis. Varying layers of map detail can be produced using geographic location fields such as state, county or city aggregate totals, zip code or mailing address. For example, GIS could be used to construct a color-coded city-level map showing the number of crimes occurring in local parks. In another scenario, highways, urban centers and crime types could be overlaid on a map to show the relationship among these phenomena. Some GIS applications involve the use of a global positioning system — a satellite-based technology through which the longitude and latitude of a location are recorded — to generate more precise location data.

Recent technological developments have opened up geographic information systems to use on the Internet. At some Internet sites, users are offered all of the same program functions that PC-based users of GIS have and can create customized maps with the click of a button. This gives users the ability to construct graphics instantly rather than limiting them to viewing static files.

Data format, cost and technology limit use of GIS for criminal justice

GIS has proven to be a valuable decision-making tool in a number of fields. A variety of issues including data format, cost and technological capacity, however, may limit the use of GIS for criminal justice purposes.

The depth of GIS mapping depends heavily on the data format. If a data file contains only county-level aggregate data, the resulting map will depict information only for whole counties. In this instance, overlaying highway or urban center locations would not be helpful, since the county phenomenon mapped is not recorded as geographic points of incidence. On the other hand, if a data file contains global positioning system coordinates, it is readily usable for spatial analysis, and the possibilities for creating detailed maps are limitless.

In the Minnesota criminal justice field, data based on precise geographic points is not widely collected and in most cases does not occur statewide. Incidences of crime and arrests are recorded primarily as aggregate totals at state, county and local law enforcement levels. Even where incident-level data is available, without a specific location for pinpointing this activity on a map, GIS cannot add value.

Center staff could find no Minnesota criminal justice agency offering the application of GIS to criminal justice data on the Internet, although three plan to give users the ability to construct customized maps on the spot based on crime-related data. Two, however, anticipate difficulties in establishing GIS at their sites because of data collection issues: a standardized

collection system has not been developed, and documentation of incident locations has not been consistent. In addition, these agencies will be able to provide only information pertaining to their jurisdiction.

Aside from data formatting issues, the costs associated with GIS mapping, especially those for implementing a web-based system, can be quite high and include software, licensing, program extensions and hardware. Extensions are add-ons to the GIS software product that make web mapping possible.

While a number of GIS software programs exist, some require programming knowledge to operate. Center staff researched three prominent software packages: ArcView and MapObjects, distributed by Environmental Systems Research Institute, and Ivation's Beyond 20/20. Acquisition fees for these packages (including software and licensing) can run from $8,000 to $30,000, depending on the program. A yearly license renewal is required for each and may cost an additional $500 to $2,000. Programming knowledge is necessary to adapt any of these products for web mapping, which also can be an added expense if in-house staff does not possess these skills.

Database software also is needed for working with GIS. If Internet application is desired, Windows New Technology software is necessary. A database program is needed to store the information that will be used to form the map, table or graph created by the GIS software. Microsoft Access, dBase, Excel, Lotus 1-2-3 and SPSS database programs range in price from $320 to $800. The cost of Windows NT software, which supports the interaction between the GIS software, the Internet and the database package, runs from $700 to $1,100.

Finally, GIS mapping on the web requires dedicating a computer to serve the web site and run the necessary software. Computer consultants can offer useful advice in purchasing a computer and the software, but this too will add to the cost of setting up a web-based GIS function. Securing Internet access also might be an issue for some agencies.

Center staff concluded that a variety of issues preclude the implementation of GIS at the web site. The main barrier is the lack of statewide criminal justice data in Minnesota to support location mapping at the incident level. Another obstacle is the cost of initiating such a system, including equipment and software. Further discussion needs to take place with state, county and local officials to ascertain criminal justice use of GIS in Minnesota in the future.

Enhancing web site services

The Criminal Justice Center's staff completed a number of enhancements to its web site during the project and established a process for obtaining annual Uniform Crime Report data from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Site improvements range from the development of a more sophisticated data access system and the addition of justice-related data sets, maps, graphs, lexicon and caveats to the expansion of criminal justice resources and program information.

Streamlined data transfer and Datanet improve access

As already described, center staff undertook a number of activities to determine justice information needs in Minnesota. Focus group feedback, survey responses, helpline requests and web site hit counts all made it clear that Uniform Crime Report data is key information. As a result, the staff decided to continue to offer UCR offense and arrest data at the center's web site and add data for 1996 and 1997 as well as ethnicity breakouts for all years 1985 to 1997.

The Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, a division of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, collects and maintains UCR data in Minnesota. All law enforcement agencies in the state report information such as reported crimes and arrests, supplementary homicide reports, stolen property values, detailed narcotics arrest data, police pursuits and hate crimes. In the past, center staff worked annually with a computer programmer to extract state and county offense and arrest data from the BCA's data files. The staff would convert this data into 102 preformatted text files for each type of data — reported crimes, total arrests and arrests by age, race and sex — on state, county and judicial district levels that would then be accessible via the Internet. Information for one year alone required creating and storing 560 different data files. This process also gave data users no options for customizing their information queries.

The two most challenging and time-consuming components of the center's project involved the Uniform Crime Report data transfer process and modification of Minnesota Planning's web site data access system, Datanet, for use with the center's criminal justice data.

Staff wanted to develop a method for preparing the UCR data files in-house to save programming costs and offer a web-site tool that would give users more freedom in selecting information. In the past, contracted programming services were required because the BCA was not able to provide the center with the specific data it needed and the center did not have the expertise or software to extract only those data elements desired.

Center and BCA staff worked together closely to streamline the UCR data transfer process. A data file format was developed, and a BCA programmer devised a way to pull out selected pieces of information useful to the center. After the process was tested and refined, the center received files from the BCA containing UCR offense and arrest data for the years 1985 to 1997.

For future updates, the BCA agreed to complete the UCR data run each year and send a copy of the file to the center every February. This is a significant gain over previous years, because users will have access to preliminary data months sooner; however, the data will need to be verified against official numbers published by the BCA in late summer. A notice will be posted at the site telling visitors whether the data is preliminary or final.

Once the data transfer process was in place, center staff then had to devise a method for preparing the data for analysis. The BCA file is quite sophisticated and contains a mixture of both offense and arrest data. To further complicate matters, there are double counts for arrests, because data for the same individual is recorded in the UCR program by age and sex, age and race, and age and ethnicity; each of these groups of information had to be sifted from the file.

Center staff used Microsoft Access for separating the various pieces of data. The resulting table files were then exported as text to Excel, cleaned and exported one more time into SPSS for analysis. After the data was brought into SPSS, variable names and value labels were assigned and recoding of variables completed.

Through preliminary data runs in SPSS, it was discovered that many of the UCR offense and arrest figures did not match the same information previously published by the BCA or available at the center's web site. Inconsistent data reporting was an issue raised by the 1997 focus group members and the 1998 survey participants. Center and BCA staff worked to identify the source of these differences and verify the data.

Additional information was obtained regarding the BCA's process for preparing the UCR data for publication. Over the course of four months, each of the 52 data files from 1985 to 1997 was reviewed by center staff and corrected, as necessary. In some cases, discrepancies were attributed to calculation errors in the BCA's published tables. Information learned from this process will be documented and applied in preparing the data files in subsequent years.

Once the data was verified, the files were prepared for the web and general staff use. Runs were executed in SPSS for each of the years 1985 to 1997 on state and county levels for all offenses and arrests in various breakouts, including adults, juveniles, females, males, Hispanics, non-Hispanics, African Americans, American Indians, Asians and whites. This information was then exported to dBase, which is a compatible format for Minnesota Planning's web data access system, Datanet.

Datanet was developed in the early 1980s by staff of the Land Management Information Center at Minnesota Planning. This technology offers access to a whole host of Minnesota data covering topics such as children, economics, education, demographics, health, retail sales, substance abuse and now criminal justice as well. Datanet was initially available via phone line and modem or telnet but moved to the Internet in the fall of 1997.

Compared to the center's old web site information system, Datanet offers the benefits of conserving disk storage space, making updates and changes easier while saving staff time and giving users more options in choosing information. Instead of hundreds of text files being created and saved, one database file is made that contains all years of data. If changes become necessary, only one file needs to be revised. In addition, each new year of data can simply be appended to the existing file.

Considerable programming was done to adapt Datanet for use with justice data. Table templates for displaying each of the data types — total offenses and arrests by age, ethnicity, sex and race — also had to be created and refined. Alterations were made to incorporate the various Datanet screens into the center's web pages as well.

Datanet uses image maps, drop-down menus and common gateway interface programming, which supports the interaction between the Internet user and the web server, to access the data files. Users first select a geographic area — state, county, judicial district or user-defined. The next screen allows them to choose the type of data they want, such as reported crimes or arrests. Once users make a selection and push the "submit" button, Datanet pulls the requested information from the database file and creates a table by putting the selected data into the template. Users can view and print the data tables.

Other web site enhancements strengthen service provision

In addition to the Uniform Crime Report data update and the shift to Datanet, the center's web site was broadened in many other ways. It now has more new data, maps, graphs and resources.

Data improvements give users access to a wide variety of online and downloadable databases. Almost every component of the justice system is covered, including:

■ Arrests and apprehensions by age, sex, ethnicity and race, 1985 to 1997

■ Firearm forfeitures, 1996 and 1997

■ Justice system expenditures, 1985 to 1996

■ Probation cases by age and offense level, 1985 to 1997

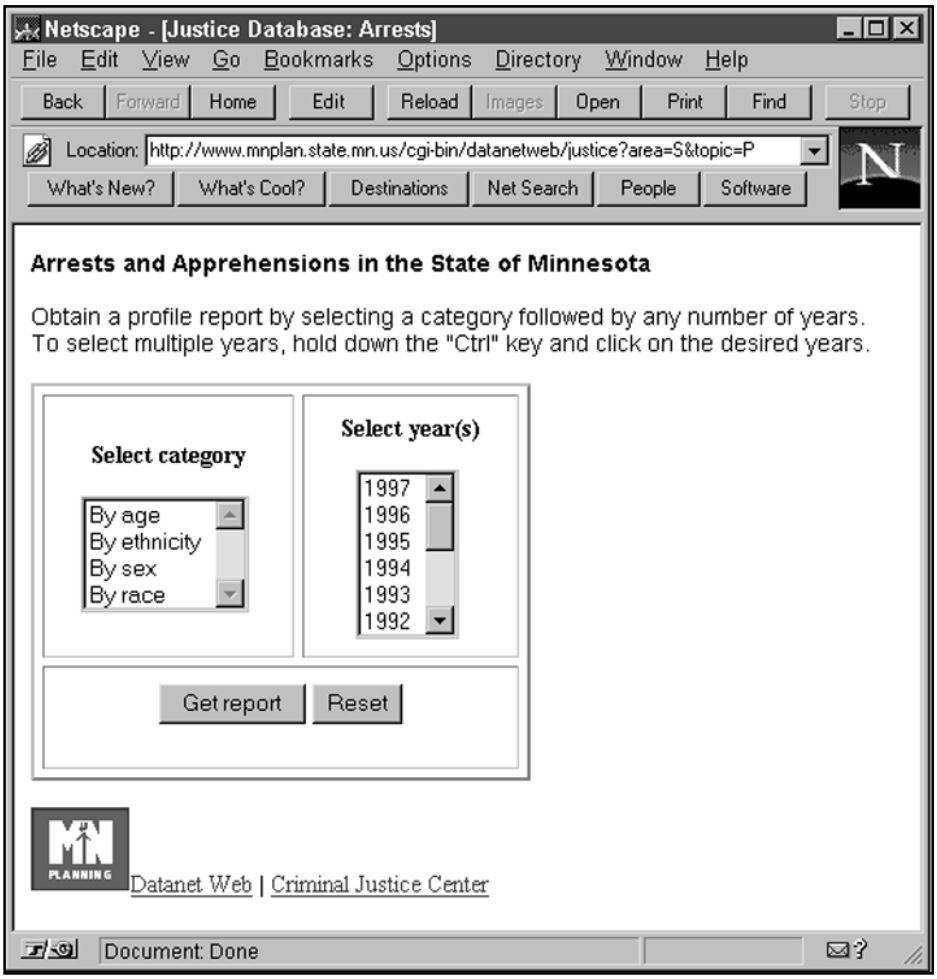
■ Reported crimes, 1985 to 1997

■ State correctional facility populations, 1981 to 1998

In some cases, only current years of data were added, while in others, a completely new data set was compiled. Probation cases and justice expenditures were not offered at the site before the enhancement project. Data is available on both state and county levels for all databases except correctional facility populations, which are compiled statewide by facility. All databases can be downloaded in either dBase or Lotus 1-2-3 formats; however, this feature is not available for corrections populations, since these files are saved as text. The data sets will be updated annually.

Other new data features relay basic but key information. Feedback obtained through focus groups and the data needs survey indicated that data users were having trouble obtaining sufficient information for appropriately understanding the data they acquired.

Data access system relays state, county and judicial district profiles



In response, center staff compiled supportive documentation with sources, definitions, pertinent caveats and additional contact information for each data set. This documentation can be viewed online, printed or downloaded.

Maps and graphs at the site convey visual snapshots of related justice activity. Different data formats are offered to meet the needs of all types of users. Some focus group and survey participants said they preferred raw numbers, while others liked graphics better. Site users can choose from 76 statewide maps showing arrests, expenditures, firearm forfeitures, probation cases and reported crimes by county. Most maps display data for the years 1994 to 1997 in various groupings, including adults, juveniles, females, males, total arrests, Part I arrests, total reported crimes, Part I crimes, total probation cases, sheriffs' office expenditures and county corrections expenditures. Eight correctional facility population graphs portraying data for 1981 to 1998 also are accessible. These graphs display breakouts for adults, juveniles, females, males, African Americans, American Indians, Asians, Hispanics and whites.

Expanded information resources also increase user opportunities for learning about criminal justice. A number of Minnesota-specific and nationwide links were added to the center's web site. Visitors can follow these links to find more information on justice and other related areas, such as education, health and human services. Center staff visited a number of state and national web sites in determining what to add to the center's site. Limited state and national links were offered at the site before the enhancement project, and staff decided that this component would be augmented because lack of resource information was another problem cited by focus group and survey participants. Contact information, including mailing ad-

dresses and telephone numbers for various Minnesota justice-related agencies not currently on the web, is provided as well.

Additional resource features tell site visitors more about the center and allow them to order publications online. A one-page document describes the center's mission and summarizes past and current projects. Multiple options for accessing the center's publications are offered: reports can be viewed electronically, printed, downloaded or requested in printed form through an online order form. The site also features Minnesota's new teen courts, providing an explanation and historical overview of this alternative for dealing with juvenile offenders along with state contact information and related web links.

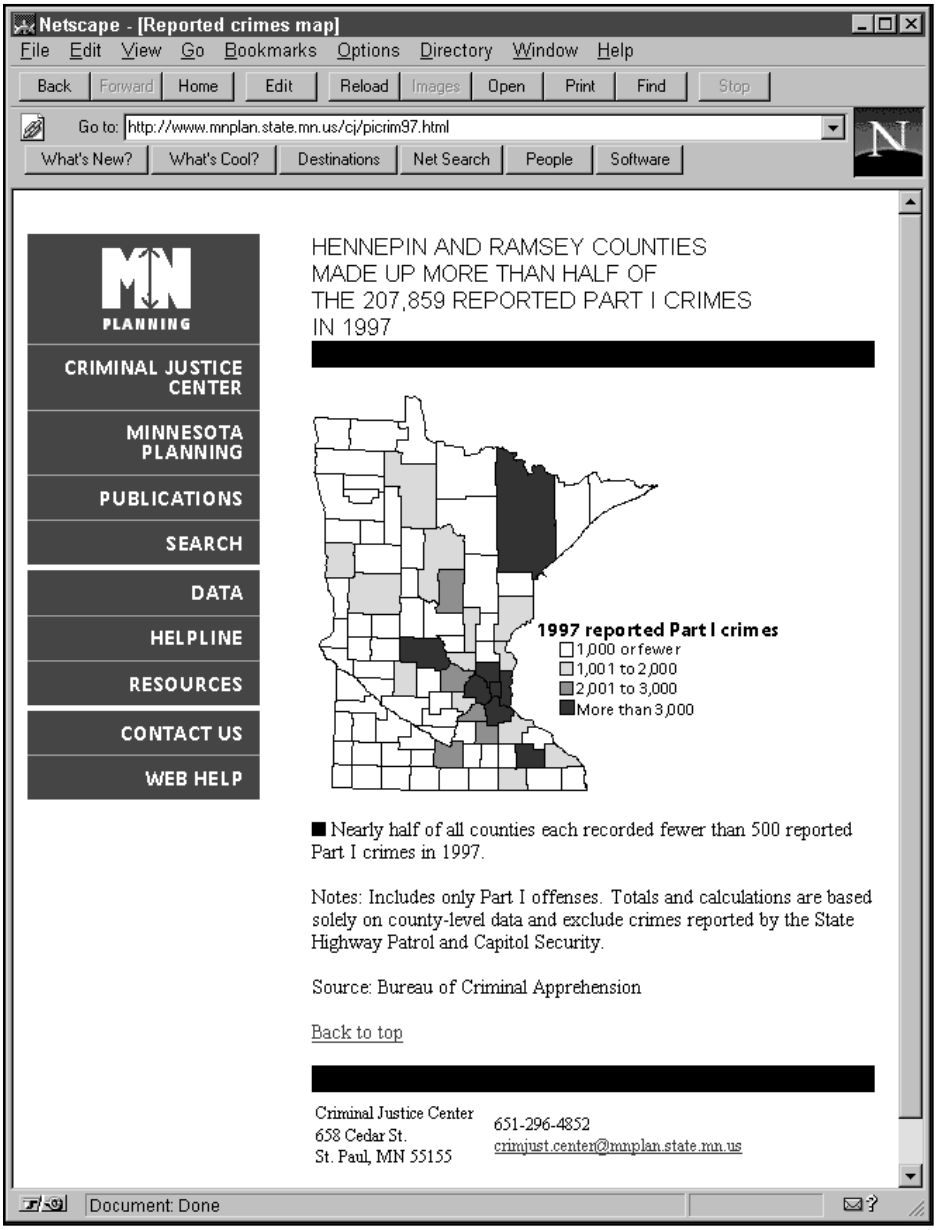
The center's home page address also was registered with four major Internet search engines to increase user access to the site. This service is generally free and allows individuals to find desired web sites using key query words such as *criminal justice*, *Minnesota* and *crime.* Search engines now listing the site include Alta Vista, Infoseek, Lycos and Yahoo!

Future plans for the center's online presence

Regrettably, the center was not able to build a GIS component into its web site. Statewide criminal justice data in Minnesota is not collected in a format suitable for constructing detailed maps with GIS. To accomplish this goal, a uniform statewide data collection system must be developed, agreed upon and implemented. The success of such a system would depend heavily on a precise locational code being incorporated in all data. In addition, cost and technology issues pose possible roadblocks. At least one local law enforcement agency in Minnesota has recorded consistent and exact locational information for crime incidences and plans to build an Internet site with a GIS component. Perhaps the experiences of this agency could be drawn upon to create a statewide system with input from other criminal justice professionals.

While in-depth GIS mapping will not be possible until a supportive data collection system is established, the center foresees offering its clients the ability to create maps and graphs online using Datanet. Early PC-based versions of Datanet could create static map files based on aggregate county data. Staff from the Land Management Information Center are reprogramming this function of Datanet for use on the Internet. When completed, this system will work similarly to the data access system by pulling data from a

Web site offers maps showing crime and justice system data



database file and putting it into a map or graph template. These graphics will differ from those currently at the site, because they will be user-customized and created immediately with a click of the mouse button. This upgrade to Datanet is expected to be done by the summer of 1999.

Graduating to Datanet has opened up other avenues for the center to provide data. The current data access system likely will evolve as technology moves forward. At present, users are somewhat limited in the specific pieces of data they can compile; in the future, however, the system may be more fluid. Data from other systems such as education, health and human services also could be added and analyzed along with criminal justice data. Each of these data sets is offered independently through Datanet right now, so this vision may not be so far from reality.

One certain addition to the site over the next year will be local law enforcement offense and arrest data. This level of information was included in the files obtained from the BCA and will be provided with annual data as well. Additional programming is being completed and table templates created so that Datanet will be able to support the dissemination of law enforcement-level data. There also are notices posted at various locations on the web site informing users of the availability of this data by contacting the center. An e-mail address and telephone number are provided. Center staff also incorporated the law enforcement data into the SPSS files. In the past, requests for this data could not be fulfilled because the center only had limited access to this information in hard copy.

Center staff also will be examining web site hit counts, helpline requests and comments received through the webmaster e-mail address on a continual basis. Information learned through each of these channels will be used to improve the site and help focus the direction of future improvements. The center views its web site as an important Minnesota criminal justice information resource and intends to keep the site fluid to provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date services.