

LISTSERV MIGRATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF NIC'S COMMUNICATION SYSTEM?

"Communication system", for the purposes of this document, includes a combination of software, hardware, and processes performed by administrative staff and members. The NIC listserv-based system was started in 1998 in response to the **progressive and innovative ideas** provided by members of NIC's professional networks. NIC and its networks **quickly adopted** this system as a way to manage email communication and used them vigorously. So much was the system used, that **in mid-2006, the licensed capacity of our listserv system was reached** and some tough choices needed to be made.

HOW HAS THE NIC SYSTEM EVOLVED?

For all intensive purposes, NIC has made **no significant changes to its online communication infrastructure in the last nine years**. Nine years ago, based on the progressive ideas of its members, NIC took a step forward by adopting a new and creative communication system. Since then, though the system was heavily used, not much was done on the technical end to plan and prepare for future needs—both technical and member needs.

WHY IS A CHANGE NEEDED?

The National Institute of Corrections is a relatively small agency that has always **provided its services at no charge**. Sometimes we reach a point, in certain areas, where we can only help a limited number of people with our resources and manpower. There are newer systems, like the one that is currently in place, which integrates with our other systems, consolidates similar systems, and simplifies administration. This allows us to provide additional services, to more people, faster. Supporting and maintaining a legacy system which is a security risk, very high maintenance, expensive and that has reached its licensed capacity to the point of failure was **taking away from our ability to progress and offer new services**.

Maintaining multiple listservs or forums for thousands of members is a difficult task and the capacity to manage them is a key determinant in the number of people that can be served and the quality of service. Future systems will try to leverage new tools to **give key members the ability to take leadership positions** and **assist with the management and development** of their forum.

WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS?

Hindsight is 20/20, and we could have done a lot over the past few years to prepare for a smoother transition. But we didn't, and now it's hurting us and it's hurting our members. Although we can learn from this, we can't change it so we have to take this option off the table and move on.

We can "stay the course." Spend a little money to fix/upgrade listservs and keep doing what we're doing. Is it reasonable to assume that this can continue forever? Does this provide opportunities for growth? Does this leave a healthy legacy for future members?

Or, we can catch up and **start moving forward again**.

WHAT IS THE PLAN?

Recognize where we could have done better and learn.

A few years ago, NIC decided to bring in additional technical experience to take advantage of new opportunities and to update existing systems. While some areas were relatively simple and painless to update, other systems like the **listservs were not going to be so simple**. In working with the listservs, we came to realize how dangerous it is for us to let our technology sit unchecked for so long—regardless of how well it **appeared** to be working.

Implement a new strategy for dealing with future changes to the system.

We are adopting a new progress strategy that provides **for smaller but more frequent increments of change** over time. Big steps, like what we are going through, are hard on everyone and, while we can't promise there won't be any more big changes, we will be **doing a better job of anticipating and preparing** for future changes.

Keep members informed of progress and provide feedback.

It is important that we **keep members aware of upcoming changes** and that members know that their **interests are understood and represented as part of the decision process**. We are not always able to announce every change or accommodate every request, but based on member feedback, here are a few of the changes recently made:

- ☑ *Faster replies with fewer clicks (**the same as an email would take**)*
- ☑ ***Improved system performance** by moving the Community to its own dedicated server. We will also be making further improvements soon*
- ☑ ***View all replies to a question or reply immediately** with single click from an email*
- ☑ *Made email messages simpler and easier to read*
- ☑ *Reviewed error messages and system alerts to make them more readable and helpful*
- ☑ *Created **numerous tutorials and guides** for using and learning the new system*

Keep moving forward.

We must **continually progress and adapt** to maintain a healthy system. We want to return to that innovative and progressive spirit that started the listservs in the first place. We don't have to be "cutting-edge", but **we can't stand still**. Based on member feedback, several projects are already under review or in progress. Here's a sneak peak:

- ☑ *More communication tools to accommodate different types of discussions. We are looking at tools like Instant Messaging and WebEx as a way **to facilitate remote meetings***
- ☑ *Teaching members how to take advantage of new tools like RSS to **make processing information faster and more efficient***
- ☑ *Increasing **support for mobile devices** like Blackberrys and SmartPhones*
- ☑ *Creating custom tools to help corrections professionals **monitor corrections news** quickly and efficiently*
- ☑ *Creating tools that will allow you to **automatically add corrections news and link to new resources on your agency's web site at no cost***
- ☑ *We are looking at the possibility of **adding listserv-like behavior to some of our forums** to work with members who may have a hard time transitioning or whose local network is restricting their access*

WHAT ARE OUR GOALS?

Our goal is to provide a **centralized system where corrections professionals can collaborate, share and learn in a safe, effective, and manageable environment**. Ultimately this will work towards building an organized and searchable knowledge base for future members. To accomplish this we must **balance** the needs of existing members, future members, and the ability to sustain a healthy system.

Balance **Immediacy & Durability**

It is important that the system is responsive enough to make quick decisions, but it must also provide a lasting service for future members. The goal is to **reduce the level of compromise** needed to accommodate both needs.

Balance **Usability & Privacy**

A system that is simple to use and access must be balanced with the need to protect the privacy of the members and the organizations that they represent. The goal is to **provide a secure system** and continue to find ways to make the process of logging in, looking up forgotten login information, and managing accounts as **easy as possible for members**.

Balance **Quality & Capacity**

We want to balance offering our services to as many people in our target audience as possible with the quality of service that we provide. The goal is to offer members, who want to establish themselves as leaders in their forum or profession, the **ability to develop and manage key areas of the system with the support of NIC**.

Balance **Stability & Progress**

Change is not an effortless process, and is often inconvenient and unwelcome. Not changing when it is opportune or necessary leads to bigger problems down the road. The goal is to **introduce future changes in incremental bites that are easier to digest** whenever possible.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Will you make the time?

We recognize our **members have busy lives**. For nine years we kept it really simple for our members while complicating things for ourselves. Now, we need some help from the members to make things **better for everyone** long-term. We need our members to be willing to invest some of their time in learning the new system and providing feedback. This system has some unbelievable opportunities to save you time and make managing your information sources faster and more efficient if you make the investment.

Will you be a leader for your group?

We need tech-savvy members willing to take a leadership role as a moderator for their group forum, or to provide suggestions for improving the usability of the system. **We need visionaries** who can identify new ideas and new strategies to improve the system. **We need experienced members** to share their knowledge and encourage new members. **We need all members** and step forward to show their support by answering questions and opening up new discussions in the new system.

Will you let us help?

It is hard to see someone give up when they are so close to figuring it all out. We've seen many people walk away before even giving us a chance to work with them, and we hope that they will try again and give us a reasonable opportunity to help or respond to problems.

Will you have patience?

Some members will learn the system faster than others. Some have still not enabled email for their accounts to get alerts for new messages. Some have yet to create an account. **You may not get as many responses to your questions as you were used to until these members get on board.** If you are not getting the level of responses you were used to, please help us encourage those who are still not participating to rejoin the group. This won't happen overnight, and any assistance or encouragement the leaders in this group can provide will go a long way to speed up the process.

CONCLUSIONS

It is time to rekindle the determination and innovative spirit that originally started the listservs. NIC can provide a secure, managed, and supported communication vehicle, however it is up to the members to provide the fuel and make it work.

Thank you for taking the time to review this document. Hopefully, this has provided some insight as the why certain decisions have been made, where we are headed, and what we are working towards.