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Nlets 101

By: Teri Harsin

September 30, 2021

Though Nlets has been around for more than fifty years, there is still a substantial amount of confusion as to what, exactly, we do. Today, we want to shed some light on the subject and clarify some frequently asked questions to help you understand how we impact the law enforcement community.

1. Our History

In the mid 1960's, representatives from the 50 United States decided to develop a nationwide, interstate communications system. So, in May of 1967, the LETS – Law Enforcement Telecommunications System was installed in Phoenix, AZ. We have since changed our name to Nlets – The International Justice & Public Safety Network (*but most people just call us Nlets*).

We have existed for over 50 years to connect all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Canada along with numerous federal agencies and various associate members for the secure exchange of criminal justice data necessary to complete our law enforcement, justice, and public safety mission. In other words, our work allows criminal justice information to be shared amongst relevant communities in a highly efficient and secure way.

2. NCIC vs Nlets

Nlets is **not** the same as NCIC! The FBI's NCIC is a computerized index of criminal justice information. This index of information is populated by agencies that are entering records, such as, wanted persons, missing persons, stolen vehicles, stolen guns, etc. The information is made available to federal, state, and local law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies.

Nlets, on the other hand, is a self-funded, private, not-for-profit corporation that has created dozens of secure partnerships for data exchange. We do not own any of the data that is being used in the criminal justice or public safety

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realm – we exist solely for the purpose of securely accessing that information for you. We are funded and governed by the 54 lead law enforcement agencies that make up the principal members of Nlets.

3. Nlets Membership

To understand the way that we operate, you first need to know that we are funded and governed by the 54 lead law enforcement agencies that make up the principal members of Nlets. Each state is represented by one individual, otherwise known as the Nlets Representative. Next, the states are divided into eight regions, each of which elects a chairperson to represent the region on the Nlets Board of Directors (BOD). Finally, the BOD consists of the President, First and Second Vice Presidents, and the Regional Chairs. Together, each of these groups of representatives form the Nlets Primary Membership.

4. Nlets at work

So, what does Nlets look like in action? Here is a common scenario where Nlets is used numerous times each day.

Imagine that you are a California driver on your way to Arizona. Since the drive is long and boring, you start to speed and are then pulled over by a state trooper. Because you are from California, you present your California driver license to the trooper. However, the trooper and dispatch in Arizona do not have direct access to the DMV information that California has about you, so they run a Nlets check to securely access that information.

To accomplish this, the request is sent to dispatch by way of a Nlets query. Nlets first receives the query from the agency and checks to make sure it is a valid request. This is done by validating the Originating Agency Identifier (the identification for each agency/terminal that accesses Nlets and NCIC) to make sure the agency that is requesting the information is authorized to receive it. Once the validation is complete, the request is forwarded to California. California receives the request and pulls the information that is needed by the out-of-state trooper and sends an automated response back to Nlets. Nlets receives the response from California and then forwards the information back to the dispatcher in Arizona that made the initial request and ultimately the information gets back to the trooper that pulled you over.

While this might sound like a lot of steps, the process is extremely quick, averaging about 1.5 seconds in total. What's more, this happens all day, every day. In fact, in 2019, Nlets processed over two billion transactions.

We hope that this article clarified some of your questions and helps you understand what we do. If you want to learn more or have deeper questions about what we do, contact training@nlets.org.

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Myth vs Fact: Five Common Misconceptions About Nlets

By: Matt Butler

September 30, 2021

There are many misconceptions about Nlets floating around the law enforcement community. Our Service Center gets phone calls every day from the criminal justice and public safety community who are not sure what Nlets is or does. Sometimes, they hear from others who believe that we store all data for every law enforcement agency. Actually, that is not accurate at all.

Misconception: Nlets is a governmental agency.

Fact: While we work with the law enforcement community and a variety of governmental agencies, Nlets is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization. We were formed in the mid 1960's when representatives from across the country decided to develop a nationwide, interstate communications system. Since then, we have connected all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Canada along with numerous federal agencies and various associate members for the secure exchange of criminal justice data necessary to complete our law enforcement, justice, and public safety mission.

Misconception: Nlets is a huge organization.

Fact: While we do an enormous amount of work, Nlets is actually a small organization. Nlets has just 40 employees, ranging from administrative to technical staff. The technical staff is comprised of approximately 25 individuals that keep



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the Nlets system functioning 24/7/365. Despite having a small staff, over three billion transactions went through the Nlets secure network in 2020, and this number continues to climb every year!

Misconception: Nlets stores the data for every law enforcement agency.

Fact: Like previously mentioned, while we were founded by representatives from across the country, our primary purpose is to connect the states, commonwealths, and territories. It is important to note that we do not own data and we are not responsible for the accuracy of the data itself. Simply put, our work allows criminal justice information to be shared amongst relevant communities, but again, we do not own any of the data that is being used in the criminal justice or public safety realm. We exist solely for the purpose of securely accessing and sharing that information.

Misconception: Nlets exists only to run DMV-related transactions.

Fact: While drivers and registration checks are consistently some of our most utilized queries, we provide access for our users to many other data sources as well. You can utilize Nlets run a Concealed Weapons Permit Query, Parole Probation and Corrections Information, Sex Offender Information, and much more. Check out our [wiki \(https://wiki.nlets.org/\)](https://wiki.nlets.org/) to get an idea of the queries you can run or contact training@nlets.org for additional information.

Misconception: Any organization can host their servers at Nlets.

Fact: Nlets provides two different types of hosting: Colocation and Virtual. Colocation is defined as having your physical servers run at Nlets' secure facility, and Virtual hosting is through Nlets' Nova cloud environment, where you can purchase public or private virtual machines to run your workloads. Due to the security policies that are in place at our facilities, we cannot offer hosting to just any organization that is interested. One of our most stringent requirements is that the organization must have a law enforcement focused mission. If they meet that criteria, they can [request to meet with our Business Relationship Manager \(https://calendly.com/cris-marquardt\)](#) who will walk them through what the rest of the selection and onboarding process entails.

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