



The Critical Importance of Accurate Law Enforcement Data:

Why a Two-Tier Quality Control Process Is Essential

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In today's era of transparency, data-driven policing, and public scrutiny, the accuracy of law enforcement data is no longer a back-office administrative concern—it is a core operational necessity. Crime statistics influence everything from public trust and media narratives to resource deployment, grant funding, and organizational integrity. The quality of police data begins long before the numbers are compiled. It begins with the police report itself—its accuracy, clarity,

and proper classification—and with the systems and controls in place to ensure those elements are correct.

Across jurisdictions, one consistent truth emerges: **accurate crime reporting requires a deliberate, two-tier quality control process.** This process—first by a supervisor and then by trained records personnel—forms the backbone of reliable crime data, error-free reporting, and public confidence.

Where Accuracy Begins: The Police Report

Errors in crime statistics are most often born at the earliest stage—the moment **a report is written.** A report may be misclassified due to officer oversight, lack of training, unclear policy, or miscoded due to errors in the RMS code tables. These errors then embed themselves into systems, influencing statistics, analytics, and crime trends for years if not caught early. Because these mistakes are often systemic, they ripple outward, affecting investigative decisions, clearance rates, resource allocations,

The solution begins with a clear mandate: **all reports should undergo a two-level review—first by the sergeant and then by the records unit.** This second level is vital, because while supervisors focus on operational and investigative elements, records personnel are trained to identify reporting-specific issues, including NIBRS classifications and reporting rules, data coding errors, and proper case status.

This division of responsibility forms a system of checks and balances, ensuring the correction of errors which slip past police supervisors.

Why a Two-Tier Review Is Necessary

Our experience in working with and training countless agencies in all 50 states since 2008 reveals several consistent patterns, all leading to the same conclusion—no single layer of review is sufficient.

1. Supervisors Don't Always Review from a NIBRS Perspective

Supervisors may review reports for content, officer actions, and investigative direction. But records personnel are typically the subject-matter experts in NIBRS rules, mutually exclusive offenses, and other technical elements of crime classification to determine which offenses should be counted for NIBRS purposes. As outlined in the article "[Why Your Rape Statistics Are Likely Wrong](#)", relying on a one-level report review process can manifest as incorrect crime counts and clearance rates.

2. Systems Cannot Catch Everything

Automated NIBRS error-check features are often misunderstood as comprehensive quality control tools. However, records management systems simply cannot decipher if the data entered into the report is correct to begin with, including:

- Whether offenders acted in concert or not (should there be 1 report or 2?)
- Whether all of the victims have been entered into the name section
- Whether one offense is a lesser included offense of another
- Whether a supplemental report should be created versus a new report
- The correct application of the Time and Place rule

Only a trained human reviewer—reading the report itself—can validate these elements.

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Special jurisdiction law enforcement agencies—like campus police, transit security, and tribal law enforcement—face complex public records compliance challenges. Ambiguous regulations and outdated technology can cause delays, errors, and diminished public trust.

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3. Mis-classifications Lead to Public and Political Consequences

Mistakes in crime reporting do not simply correct themselves. They accumulate and can eventually erode public trust.

In the article "**Crime Stats and the Hidden Unknown: Overreporting**", the Phoenix Police Department's 38% mis-classification rate for kidnapping reports led to national controversy, accusations of cooking the books, an internal crisis, and leadership fallout. The root cause? Reports were never actually read by those producing the statistical outputs. Analysts ran data queries without verifying facts in the police reports themselves.

The most recent public example of problematic data comes from the Metropolitan Washington DC Police Department. **Allegations have been made of manipulated crime stats**, resulting in a

lawsuit that was settled out of court. While this case appears to have been politicized, it also appears that **reports were manipulated**. Could this have been prevented with better quality control measures in place?

A two-tier review helps prevent these types of organizational failures by ensuring that someone—specifically, trained records personnel—evaluates each report at a granular level and is **empowered to resolve discrepancies**.

Quality Control Means Reducing Errors Before They Occur

Effective quality control doesn't happen only **after** a report is written. It requires reducing opportunities for errors in the first place through sound policy, sufficient training, and data-driven measures of error-rate tracking.

Streamlined workflows, reduced duplication, and well-designed systems and policy allow the review process to function as intended.

Grant Funding

Some grants include requirements for NIBRS compliance. Misreporting—whether over-reporting or under-reporting, and non-reporting, can influence eligibility and funding amounts. The NYPD experienced this in 2022.

Operational Preparedness

Investigative units rely on accurate data to identify trends, allocate investigators, and prioritize cases. Incorrect classifications distort reality and reduce organizational effectiveness.

Good data begins with well-written, accurate reports, and a two-tier review process is the foundation for producing trustworthy statistics. Records personnel are not optional—they are the agency's quality assurance mechanism, ensuring accuracy across all reporting systems and preventing future crises.

Accuracy Is a Daily Discipline, Not a Single Action

Reliable crime data doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen by accident. It is the product of:

- Trained officers writing clear, accurate reports
- Supervisors conducting the first-line review
- Records personnel performing a second, expert-level review
- Streamlined workflows that minimize delays in approving reports
- Clear, policy-driven quality control processes
- Ongoing **training in crime reporting and case management**

How PRI Can Help

Our vast training programs have been attended by over 36,000 personnel, helping them produce accurate and timely records and data. See more at policerecordsmanagement.com/training