Missing Persons Community of Interest (MPCI)

Best Practices for Missing Person Registries

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Purpose of this Guide

This guide summarizes essential best practices for designing and entering data into missing person registries. Its intended audience includes:

- Registry System Providers: developers and administrators of missing person registry systems (such as members of the Missing Persons Community of Interest)
- Registry Operators: aid workers, volunteers, and others who enter data into registry systems on behalf of missing persons

This guide is a work in progress by MPCI, a volunteer, ad-hoc group that meets to discuss and develop standards for missing person registries and their users. Future versions of this guide will clarify existing material and add new material.

Registry System Provider Best Practices

This section lists best practices that apply to the design and deployment of missing person registries by registry system providers.

Privacy

See Privacy Best Practices Document

Data Management

To promote the accuracy and usefulness of your data:

- Track the creation, update, and expiration times of all registry records
- Record the original source of the data (whether individual or organization) and parties that make subsequent modifications
- Prioritize searching by pre-disaster addresses or phone numbers over post-disaster addresses
- Reduce duplication of records (e.g., by checking for duplicates during registration, by allowing users to mark records as duplicates, etc.)
- Validate data (e.g. date and time formats) during entry to ensure that values are meaningful
- Store all dates and times in UTC or with an explicit time zone
- NTH: Ability to flag entries as spam
- NTH: Enable parties interested in a record to receive automatic notification when a relevant record is created or updated

Interoperability

To maximize the effectiveness of sharing data with other registries:

- Establish clearly-written terms of service with parties/registries with whom/which data is shared
- Revoke sharing access if terms of service are broken
- Update other registries when critical data fields change (e.g., when expiration dates change)
- Provide APIs or data feeds for use by other registries and organizations (with instructions on obtaining API key/access)
- Use PFIF, CSV with PFIF column names, or EDXL-TEP for data exchange
- Transmit all dates and times in UTC or with an explicit time zone (preferably RFC 3339)
- Use UTF-8 encoding when transmitting Unicode strings

Internationalization

To aid in multi-national, multi-cultural deployment and use:

- Implement a UI that is localized (see W3C: Internationalization) to the official, local, and diaspora languages for the affected population (the CIA World Factbook can help you identify which languages to support)
- Support a single full-name field (splitting names into fixed fields is unlikely to work for all names, even within one region)
- Accommodate the naming conventions of cultures where the system will be used (see W3C: Personal names around the world)
- Don't assume that addresses fit into a fixed set of structured fields
- Display all dates and times with a time zone or in a context where the time zone is obvious

Usability and Accessibility

To make it easy for users to enter and search for registry records:

- Use appropriate form elements and default values
- Mark required fields
- Support a range of commonly used devices, such as desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones (see [W3C: Mobile Web Best Practices])
- Use simple, non-technical language
- Provide separate flows for searching vs. entering data, and clearly distinguish which is which
- Make the purpose of data entry clear (e.g. registering someone as safe vs. missing, injured, etc.)
- Design for accessibility (see [W3C: Accessibility])
- Accommodate people with disabilities who may not have access to their assistive technology during emergencies

Preparing for Launch

To promote the adoption and use of your registry:

- Prepare a set of contacts ahead of time, to be notified on launch and at time of disaster
- Create elements (banners, HTML snippets, embeddable UIs) for others to put on their websites (e.g., design a widget that can be embedded now, then activated later during an emergency)
- Prepare process documentation: ready to use templates and checklists for specific tasks, preferably in several languages. This will help to quickly train and employ local staff.

Testing

To ensure the successful operation of your registry during a disaster, it's best to test it ahead of time:

- Run drills with public users
- Run integration drills with repositories and other registries

Registry Operator Best Practices

This section lists best practices for service operators: field workers, volunteers, and others who use the registry to input and access data. It also applies to users who self-enter data.

Entering Data

To increase the usefulness of entered data:

- Enter full name, nicknames, and other likely-to-be-searched names (may include ancestry names)
- Enter pre-disaster information (e.g. pre-disaster address)

Understanding and Improving the Registry

- Read registry training materials
- Use job aids (intake forms, templates, summary sheets, checklists)
- Understand the process and the use of the registry to help educate users as to benefits (and potential risks) of registration
- Provide process for feedback to maintainers if something cannot be recorded (better to adapt DB to non-compliant data than forcing it into fields and corrupting the database.