



A New Method for Assessing State Traffic Records

Background

Analyzing reliable and accurate traffic records data is central to identifying traffic safety challenges and designing effective countermeasures to reduce injuries and deaths caused by crashes. NHTSA's traffic records assessments can help States identify challenges and improve the timeliness, accuracy, completeness, uniformity, integration, and accessibility of their traffic records data. Specifically, the assessment addresses criteria set forth in NHTSA's *Traffic Records Highway Safety Program Advisory* and examines how the Traffic Records Coordinating Committee (TRCC) manages strategic planning, data integration, and data use and program management. The assessment also examines the management of the six major traffic safety data sets: Crash, Driver, Vehicle, Roadway, Citation and Adjudication, and Injury Surveillance. In order to qualify for §408 funding under SAFETEA-LU, States are currently required to complete a Traffic Records Assessment once every five years.

Current TR Assessment Process



Critical Issues

Recent reviews have identified a number of deficiencies with the current assessment process. In 2010, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported on the progress States have made in improving traffic safety data since the inception of SAFETEA-LU and recommended that NHTSA improve State traffic records assessments to ensure that they provide a complete, consistent, and in-depth evaluation of all State traffic safety data systems. NHTSA also received feedback that the traffic records assessment process was costly, cumbersome, and either too tightly focused or lacking in the prescriptive detail some States desire. In short, the current assessment process was not as complete and uniform as it should be, nor did it provide the programmatic assistance some States have come to expect. Finally, NHTSA also found the current assessment model to be unsustainable as the pool of qualified subject matter experts able to spend a week conducting an on-site assessment has been steadily diminishing.

The Way Forward

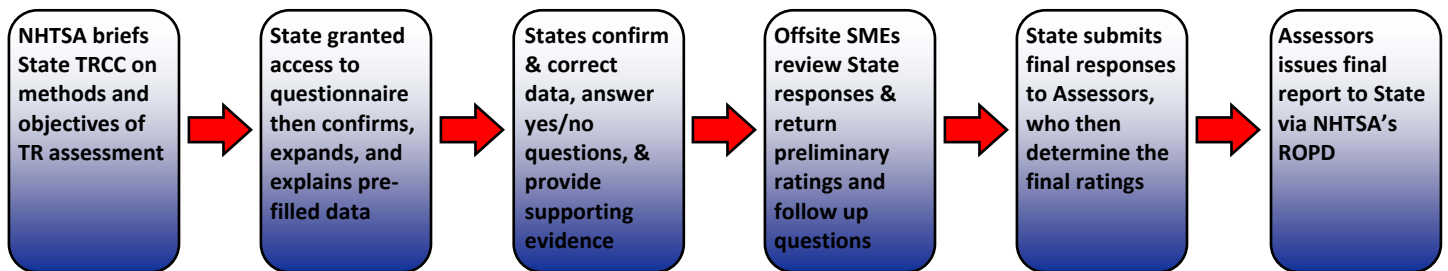
NHTSA is addressing these shortcomings with several initiatives. First, NHTSA will update the *Traffic Records Highway Safety Program Advisory* that describes the model traffic records systems and presents guidelines for assessing the different components of States' traffic records systems. The resulting guidance will document the ideal traffic records systems and provide the specific question, weights, and standards of evidence that will form the heart of the new assessment process. The *Advisory* rewrite effort will involve NHTSA staff, current and former assessors, and a broad spectrum of State traffic records experts.

NHTSA is also completely reorganizing the State traffic records assessments, dividing the current process into two distinct pieces: a uniform assessment process and expanded opportunities for State-driven, user-directed training and technical assistance. The web-enabled assessment process will produce a uniform, comprehensive status report on States' traffic records systems while enabling increased inter-rater reliability and deliver dramatically reduced costs to the States. Secondly, NHTSA will provide greatly expanded opportunities for training and technical assistance that is tailored to State-specific, user-defined challenges. The assessment will still be required to qualify for §408 funding; the technical assistance will be optional. In contrast to the current system, NHTSA—not the State—will fund the assessment and technical assistance functions.

Specific Changes to the State Traffic Records Assessment

NHTSA will replace the one-week on-site assessment with a three-month assessment undertaken remotely by a larger pool of assessors. Current traffic records information professionals who were previously unable to attend the weeklong assessments out-of-state will now be able to participate. Each data system will be reviewed by at least two SMEs and the process will be coordinated by a lead assessor and supported by the NHTSA Traffic Records Team. NHTSA will leverage existing data about State TR systems from TRIPRS and other DOT databases to pre-fill the assessment tool to the extent possible. States will then confirm and expand upon this existing data. The assessors will review State's responses to a set of yes/no questions set forth in the *Advisory* that detail the critical elements of a State's traffic records systems and examine the supporting evidence before determining whether the elements of a State's traffic records systems meet the criteria outlined in the *Traffic Records Advisory*. The reviews will occur iteratively, with communication between the assessors and state practitioners mediated through the assessment support system over the 3-month assessment period.

New TR Assessment Process



Advanced Solutions

NHTSA's Traffic Records Team, in conjunction with the NHTSA's Office of the Chief Information Officer, has initiated the development of the State Traffic Records Assessment Process (STRAP), the IT system that will combine document tracking and database functions with robust analytic capabilities to create a seamless data collection, management, and analysis system. The STRAP will serve as the foundation of the new assessment process, which will deliver cost-savings, clearer assessments, and improved technical assistance.

New GO Teams Deliver Training & Technical Assistance

NHTSA will also provide technical assistance to States requesting training or technical assistance with a specific traffic records challenge. NHTSA will dispatch a team of subject matter experts specifically chosen subject matter experts to help address the issue identified by the State. The team will work with the State to analyze the problem and develop a recommended course of action. GO Teams will also provide user-directed training. States who have identified, with the assistance of their Regional Program Manager, a specific training need will be able to request creation and delivery of a custom curriculum. In future, GO Teams may also be used to deliver assistance from established technical programs such as FHWA's CDIP and NHTSA's MIDRIS.

