

# 408 WEBINAR WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

**1. Can you share examples of how other States have successfully measured their traffic records systems' performance improvements?**

Response: Over 200 specific performance measures that the Section 408 review team has accepted from States as demonstrating current measurable progress during FYs 2008, 2009 and 2010 have been delivered to NCSA for posting. ([Section 408 Progress 2008 PT1](#) [PDF – 46KB] | [Section 408 Progress 2008 PT2](#) [PDF – 39KB] | [Section 408 FY 2009 Progress](#) [PDF – 36KB] | [Section 408 Measurable Progress FY 2010](#) [PDF – 87KB])

**2. I thought we had to show improvement from the day money is received, not since the date of the last application. Which date should we use?**

Response: Because no Section 408 grants can be awarded until the Section 408 Team determines all States, territories, etc. that qualify for award, typically two months or more elapses between the application due date and the date of award. To give States the maximum possible opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the current measurable progress needed to qualify for a subsequent year grant, we have since FY 2007 “started the clock” at the application due date. For example, if a State can demonstrate that some or all of the progress it reports for its FY 2010 application was achieved on or after June 15, 2009, the Team will accept that as current measurable progress.

To clarify the initial question, [suppose that] a new system is initiated, users write 2,500 queries for data, and the system processes the queries, develops reports and delivers those reports to the user. If the system records the number of reports that it delivers, can that be used as a measure, or do you still want user surveys?

The short answer is user surveys always add value to assessments of system accessibility. Until the owner / operator of a database gets verification from the customers (database users) that they are really getting the data they want and need there will always remain doubt that access to the database functions as it should. To take the example in this question, suppose we know that the 2,500 queries resulted in reports speeding to the requesters within mere seconds of the queries being received. How do we know they were the right reports? How do we know the requesters found the reports to be useful? Offering requesters of a database the opportunity to complete a brief, voluntary assessment of satisfaction is prudent practice for any database manager who wants to keep the customers happy.

**3. One of the biggest benefits of electronic data collection is improved efficiency, such as fewer data entry staff. Why is there no measure of efficiency in the attributes?**

Response: There are many aspects of database management that are of significant concern to the owners / operators. Efficiency and cost effectiveness are certainly two of those. Staff morale and retention are two others. But for the narrow purposes of qualifying for Section 408 subsequent year funding, our focus is on data quality improvement. Each year, the Section 408 Team examines each application, and the interim progress reports that precede the application, and asks this question: Has this State demonstrated current measurable progress in improving at least one of the core databases (Crash, Driver, Vehicle, Roadway, Citation / Adjudication or EMS / Injury Surveillance) with respect to one or more of the core attributes of data quality (accuracy, completeness, timeliness, uniformity, accessibility or integration)? We believe it is our responsibility to ensure that the Section 408 funds are spent to bring about those improvements.

**4. Question about Error 5: So can a State compare records entered from Jul-Oct 2008 compared to Jul-Oct 2009? Would that avoid the fallacy of late reports that haven't arrived yet?**

Response: Yes, one can always ensure a valid, reliable measurement of database timeliness by choosing comparable baseline and current time spans and examining the time spans between event occurrence (crash, issuance of a citation, an EMS run, etc.) and the entry of the event report into the database *for all event reports*

***that were entered into the database during those baseline and current periods.*** It doesn't matter if one compares the average values of the baseline and current time spans, or the median value, or the percent of reports that were entered within 30 days following the event, or the percent of reports that were entered more than 60 days following the event. All of those and similar calculations can provide a valid and reliable demonstration of improved timeliness. Why is that? Because the numbers can never change. Once the chosen baseline and current periods end, no more reports can ever be entered into the database during those times. But if one attempts to measure timelines, based on entry of reports on all events that occurred during the baseline and current periods, one commits Common Error #5, the Fallacy of Untimely Timeliness. Whenever one computes the values of the measure that way, there will always be the possibility that reports on additional events that occurred during those periods will arrive later. Calculating that way, the numbers are likely to change, especially for the more recent current period calculation.

**5. So the number of queries processed is not a measure of accessibility?**

Response: This is a great question. Standing all by itself, the number of queries processed can be strongly suggestive of improved accessibility, and it is very useful information to track, but as proof of improved accessibility it never meets the standard of mathematical certitude. There always remains the possibility, however remote, that some or many or even most of the "queries processed" were – to the requesting database user – unsatisfactorily processed. But consider this: Suppose as time goes on, the database owner / operator observes that the queries the database is receiving are steadily increasing in numbers. And suppose, as new users are granted access to the database, the number of queries received spikes again and thereafter remains high. After a while, reasonable observers are going to reach a reasonable conclusion that access to the database seems to be working as intended. Because if it weren't, and especially if it weren't on a large scale, frustration likely would set in and intended users would quit trying. But reasonable people will get to that conclusion more quickly and with more confidence if they see, along with a rising or sustained high level of queries processed, a high level of customer satisfaction expressed by a high percentage of the people who placed the queries. Both the user surveys and the counts of queries processed add value to our assessment of database accessibility.

**6. How do you show compliance with Common Error #4?**

Response: Avoiding Common Error #4 is easy. All the State has to do is confirm that the additional NEMIS-compliant or MMUCC-compliant or MIRE-compliant or any new data elements that have been incorporated into a revised reporting form are actually being entered into the database. Revising a reporting form, for crashes, EMS runs or whatever, is usually the first step toward achieving a more complete and/or more uniform database. But it is only the first step. There is no improvement of the database until the more complete and/or more uniform data elements start to get into the database.