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# Criminal Justice Interview Room Recording System Selection and Application Guide

**NIJ Guide-xxxx.00**

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**Special Technical Committee**

*Draft - Content subject to change*

## Foreword

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice (NIJ), has developed this document, NIJ Guide-xxxx.00, *Criminal Justice Interview Room Recording System Selection and Application Guide*, to provide guidance concerning the selection, procurement, use, care and maintenance, and other considerations related to interview room recording equipment used by criminal justice personnel.

NIJ Guide-xxxx.00 is a companion document to NIJ Standard-xxxx.00, *Criminal Justice Interview Room Recording System Standard*. NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 specifies minimum performance requirements that interview room recording equipment must meet and the methods used to test performance. Please refer to the text of NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 for the requirements, which text controls in the event of any discrepancy with this guide.

Nothing in this document should be understood to be a legal mandate or policy directive, or to represent the only course of action. This guide is not all-inclusive. Agencies may use this guide to help them in their procurements and with development of their own policies and procedures. Any actions that may be informed by this guide should be taken, after careful consideration, in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws, rules, policies and regulations, as well as local conditions and circumstances. Jurisdictional, logistical or legal conditions may preclude the implementation of particular recommendations contained herein.

NIJ standards are subject to continued research, development and testing, review and modification as appropriate on an ongoing basis. Users of this document are advised to consult the NIJ Standards and Testing Program webpage, accessed from <http://www.nij.gov/standards>, on a regular basis to determine whether the document has been revised or superseded.

Technical comments and recommended revisions are welcome. Please send all written comments and suggestions to: Director, National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC, 20531, ATTN: NIJ Standards and Testing Program.

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## Introduction

Digital interview room recording systems (IRRS) are widely being used by both small and large law enforcement agencies and in correctional facilities, detention centers and jails to record and store digital multimedia evidence (DME) from interviews with suspects, witnesses, victims, inmates and others. The purpose of *Criminal Justice Interview Room Recording System Standard*, NIJ Standard-xxxx.00, is to help ensure that DME captured by an IRRS provides as true and accurate a depiction of events as is reasonably possible for proper documentation and evidentiary considerations. For guidance purposes, in this document DME is briefly defined as data representing audio essence, video essence, metadata and any other information that is attached to a digital file. Further description of DME (along with different types of DME) can be found in detail in NIJ Standard-xxxx.00.

Because IRRS are operated across a range of different interview room environments, there is no uniform approach for system installation and use. Some larger agencies may have facilities with one or more dedicated interview rooms, and thus, may require a more complex, networked system with greater functionality and storage and viewing capabilities. A smaller agency may only have a multipurpose, single room for interviews and require a basic single-camera, single-microphone system. NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 does not (and cannot) mandate specific requirements for system setup or dictate the environmental conditions of the physical spaces being used. Requirements pertain simply to system performance and operation. Also, this standard cannot account for all solutions that are being offered by system manufacturers.

When implemented and operated properly, systems provide the following advantages:

- Interview room recording systems generally save a great deal of time. The exception is that they can become time intensive if no confession occurs during the interview. Thus, an agency should use an Excel spreadsheet to document what is said minute-by-minute for ease of use in court.
- Recorded interviews can provide a strategic advantage during a criminal prosecution, if used correctly.
- Training of interrogation techniques is critical for effective recorded interviews.
- Recorded interviews can show patterns of lying by the individual being interviewed.

This guide features leading practices and recommendations for interview room setup, camera and microphone placement, and other notable room considerations that may affect system performance. It is intended to serve as a guide to help agencies select, install and operate interview room recording systems for maximum effectiveness in law enforcement applications.

## Chapter 1. IRRS Anatomy

Section 4 of NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 defines the system-level components of an IRRS as, at a minimum, one color camera, one microphone, a DME recorder (e.g., digital video recorder (DVR), network video recorder (NVR)), recording media, software, a video monitor and an audio monitor. It must also have the capability to connect to a network and to interface with external systems and triggers. The system must also be capable of receiving two separate video streams and two separate audio streams. Figure 1 depicts system-level components of an IRRS.

Figure 1. IRRS System-Level Components

<graphic to be added>

### Camera

The IRRS camera is intended to: 1) Provide a view of all persons and activity within the room, and 2) provide a clear image of the subject of the interview. An IRRS may utilize two or more cameras to achieve these objectives. All IRRS cameras must be color (not black and white), and are subject to all applicable tests in NIJ Standard-xxxx.00.

### Microphone

The IRRS microphone should be strategically placed within the interview room to best capture all discussion between individuals and all other instances of audio DME. As with the IRRS camera, placement of the microphone is largely dependent on the unique conditions of the room being used. Placement considerations are later described in further detail. Some agencies may elect to procure a system with multiple microphones. All system microphones are subject to testing in *Criminal Justice Interview Room Recording System Suppliers Declaration of Conformity Requirements*, NIJ CR-xxxx.00. If the system only has one microphone, it shall be a stereo microphone.

### Digital Multimedia Evidence Recorder

The DME recorder is where DME is preserved or stored. If the DME recorder is a DVR, DME will be encoded at DVR. If the DME recorder is an NVR, the encoding is at the camera or elsewhere.

### Recording Media

Recording media is the location of the first instance and any subsequent storage of the DME; this could be a hard drive, server or other mechanical or solid state device.

### Software

The system software controls and manages access to the DME, manages all system components and provides a process to acquire the DME from active storage.

### Video Monitor

The system video monitor is a display screen device for viewing both live and recorded video from the IRRS. It is usually located outside of the interview room; networked computers may also function as video monitors.

### **Audio Monitor**

The system audio monitor is a device for observers to listen to both live and recorded audio from the IRRS. Often the audio monitor and audio playback functionality will be incorporated into the video monitor.

### **Single Versus Multiple-Room IRRS**

NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 defines performance requirements and test methods for a single-room IRRS system. As previously noted, some agencies will have more than one interview room and will elect to use an integrated, multiple-room system. Further considerations are outlined in Chapter 4 of this document.



## Chapter 2. Leading Practices for IRRS Selection and Procurement

### Needs Assessment

Although the basic functions of IRRS are similar across most law enforcement applications, each agency employing the technology should carefully consider its unique application. Laws governing the use of recorded interviews vary across jurisdictions, and local courts may have limited technical resources for the presentation of recorded evidence. Prior to the development of an IRRS request for proposal (RFP), an agency looking to acquire such a system(s) should perform a needs assessment to better understand why this technology is needed and ultimately how it should be operated. Issues affecting the choice of IRRS technology may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The agency needs to be aware of legal requirements and statutes regulating recording of interviews.
- The agency needs to be aware of local courts and what can be done with technology and presentations.
- Testing work flow — how is evidence redacted? How is disclosure produced?
- Evaluation of physical space for installation and security considerations.
- Evaluation of perceived use of interview space; is a single room sufficient?
- What does an agency want to accomplish with room and system?

Agencies should seek input from all stakeholders before issuing an RFP, including the courts, agency counsel, IT staff, and the officers and other personnel who will be performing the interviews and/or are responsible for the management of the DME produced by the IRRS.

### Suppliers Declaration of Conformity

As part of the NIJ IRRS standards development initiative, the Special Technical Committee (STC) also developed NIJ CR-xxxx.00. This document specifies requirements for compliance determinations under the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) *Criminal Justice Interview Room Recording System Standard*.

Procurement officials should procure only conforming products.

### Development of a Request for Proposal

Once an agency has identified its system performance needs and existing resources and capabilities, the next phase of the procurement process involves the development of an RFP. This document should clearly outline the minimum performance specifications desired from an IRRS and establish terms and conditions for possible contractors. The proposal should reflect the individual needs of the agency and not be written just to acquire the “top-of-the-line” system on the market.

Because of the technical nature of the RFP, NIJ Standard-xxxx.00, along with this document, should be a good tool for identifying desired system components and levels of system performance. Authors of an RFP should not simply cut and paste the NIJ standard as written for their own use; the specifications included in the RFP should reflect the individual needs of the agency. In drafting the RFP, purchasers are also encouraged to consult with neighboring and regional law enforcement and corrections agencies that have previously acquired systems. In speaking directly with them, viewing their interview rooms and systems, and reviewing their RFPs, an agency can learn from counterparts what worked and what did not.

Agencies submitting RFPs are strongly encouraged to request that, as part of a bid response, the supplier provide an assessment of the agency's existing interview room specs and characteristics, along with proposed recommendations for camera and microphone placements within such space.

## Chapter 3. Other Considerations

### Recording and Managing Digital Multimedia Evidence

IRRS technology yields digital multimedia evidence, which consists of audio, video and associated metadata. It is imperative for an agency to ensure that the capture and storage of DME is accomplished in a way that protects the integrity of this evidence. All recordings should be treated as potential evidence until it can be established that specific stored data are no longer considered to be part of a criminal, civil or administrative matter. NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 does not establish nor recommend a specific retention period for such data; rather, the onus is on the operating agency to be aware of any existing state or local statutes governing these recordings and to acquire the appropriate storage infrastructure for compliance. A purchasing agency should speak with its system supplier and consult with its IT department for a better understanding of storage needs.

The suggested recording method for IRRS technology is directly to a secure location on a hard drive or other solid state medium. Recording directly to removable media (e.g., flash drive, DVD) should be avoided because of file size limitations and potential loss and spoliation of DME due to defective recording media.

Data backup for IRRS DME is another crucial consideration; an agency must implement redundancy to ensure that the data are not lost during recording or while archived. Costs of various backup mechanisms (for both video and audio) should be examined during the needs assessment and procurement processes. Also, when reconstitution of DME from storage is needed (e.g., when video and audio are accessed months or years after recording to be used as evidence), it must be available for viewing in a player (possibly decades in the future). Such functionality cannot be overlooked, and an agency should consult with the system manufacturer for instructions on how it can be accomplished.

Copying lengthy interviews to removable media for backup or dissemination may require that DME be separated into two or more segments. In such cases, an agency must have procedures in place to ensure the DME is complete and reliable. For example, the recording of a three-hour interview may be split onto two DVDs, but the end of the first and beginning of the second segments should overlap to show no material was omitted during the copying process. The removable media should be appropriately labeled in a nondestructive manner to help ensure the complete interview is available for future use.

### Policy

Agencies using IRRS should develop written guidelines for system use, data storage, and retrieval and processing and duplication of recorded DME. Having an up-to-date policy in place can protect the officer conducting the interview, the agency at large and other individuals recorded by the IRRS system. Such a policy is also crucial from an evidentiary and prosecutorial perspective. Furthermore, an agency needs to conduct an analysis of all statutes, regulations and laws relevant to recording because such laws can vary greatly by state. Ideally, an early iteration of a policy should be outlined during an agency's needs assessment, when these statutes have been researched and documented.

This document is intended to aid public safety practitioners in developing policy by highlighting many of the important system use considerations associated with IRRS technology, but does not include an actual model policy. Practitioners are encouraged to consult with other agencies and professional organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Sheriffs' Association to identify leading practices and policies.

## **Training**

As with any technology operated by law enforcement practitioners, all appropriate agency personnel, including departmental technology practitioners, investigators and leadership should be trained in the operation and use of and the policy governing IRRS technology. In the same way that an agency can leverage the experience of other departments in developing RFPs and writing policy, training details can be best gleaned from others who have operated interview room recording technology. An agency should also consider including technical training from the system provider in the RFP.

## **Inspection, Care and Maintenance**

Every IRRS that complies with NIJ Standard-xxxx.00 is required to have instructions from the supplier for the inspection, care and maintenance of all system-level components. Such protocols should be explicitly noted in an operations guide and outlined by a representative of the supplier during the installation. Supplier recommendations should be followed to ensure that the system operates normally and effectively over time.

A detailed inspection of systems should be adopted by an agency and outlined in its departmental policy. Such a program should be similar in scope to inspection of other departmental technologies including vehicles, firearms and body armor. The agency has the ultimate responsibility to have IRRS systems inspected periodically to ensure that all components are operational. At a minimum, systems need to be checked daily prior to use by the officer for basic functionality and any visible defects.

Users should be advised that if system modifications are made without authorization of the supplier, the system may no longer meet the requirements of NIJ Standard xxxx.00. Such modifications may void system warranty and potentially interfere with overall system functionality.

## **Interviews of Juveniles**

If an agency intends to use a room for interviews of juveniles, it may want to consider having separate facilities. An interview room intended for use with juveniles may require specific design factors not addressed in this standard. An agency should consider consulting with other individuals or organizations with expertise in the field.

## Chapter 4. Interview Room Design Recommendations

The following is a list of interview room setup and design considerations that is intended to serve as an additional resource for a purchasing agency. It was developed by the IRRS STC tasked with the development of this standard; law enforcement practitioners on the committee identified these points based on their experiences operating this technology. The list is by no means comprehensive, and not all items will be relevant to all agencies. Also, not all of the recommendations will be appropriate for rooms dedicated to juvenile interviews.

An agency should work with system manufacturers and/or integrators to assess the design and installation specific to the agency's needs and the review the following:

### Overall System Considerations

- System controls (e.g. on/off recording activation switches, video/audio monitors) are best placed outside of the interview room.
- Recording switches outside of the interview room ideally should have a cover so that they cannot be bumped inadvertently.
- An inconspicuously positioned LED recording indicator light should be placed inside of the room to be seen by the individual(s) conducting the interview.
- Also, a similar LED recording indicator light ideally should be positioned outside of the room to clearly show that recording is taking place and should not be interrupted.
- During installation of an IRRS, camera and microphone cabling for power, data transfer and networking will likely need to be placed in room walls or ceilings. It is important that this wiring is rated and positioned as to avoid interference, which can result in system performance degradation. Proper wiring is also a safety consideration.

### Camera Placement Considerations

When designing an interview room, camera placement must be considered carefully to achieve optimal results. A viewer must be able to discern how many people are in the interview room and their actions, while still having a clear view of the subject of the interview. This can be accomplished with a single high-resolution camera or by using two or more cameras, one providing a wide view of the room and another with a close view of the interview subject. The close view camera is able to capture important, nonverbal facial and bodily expressions and movements. If only one camera is used, it must be capable of sufficient resolution to provide a close view of the subject through a picture-in-picture function of the IRRS.

If the camera is being deployed in a custodial area, its placement may be subject to specific jail standards for hardware installation; existing state and national standards and other recommendations (e.g., National Sheriffs' Association, Bureau of Prisons) must be taken into consideration.

## Microphone Placement Considerations

- The microphone(s) should be positioned to achieve optimal recording of the subject being interviewed and all other room occupants (e.g., the interviewer(s)).
- Interference from fluorescent lighting or other potential sources should be considered when placing the microphone(s).
- The microphone should be positioned so that it minimizes extraneous sounds from outside of the interview room. (e.g., from adjacent rooms and/or hallways).
- Room acoustics and potential sources of audio degradation should be carefully considered during an agency's needs assessment effort so that the best possible location for the microphone can be identified. It may also be necessary to consider a number of microphones to determine what type is appropriate for that particular space (e.g., omnidirectional, bidirectional, pressure zone (PZM)).
- When possible, noise suppression materials (e.g., wall coverings, carpeting, ceiling tiles) are recommended in an interview room to optimize the capture of audio.
- A microphone should not be placed on a table in the interview room.

## Wiring

- Camera wiring should be properly installed in the room and walls to avoid interference with existing infrastructure or other systems (e.g., HVAC).
- Microphone wiring should be properly installed in the room and walls to avoid interference with existing infrastructure or other systems (e.g., HVAC).
- NFPA 70: National Electrical Codes, NFPA 75: Standard for the Fire Protection of Information Technology Equipment, and other existing standards should be reviewed.

## Furniture Placement

- Furniture that is easily moveable could negatively impact the recording of interviews if the subject moves out of the optimal field of view of the camera. Shifting furniture could also create noise that interferes with the audio recording.
- The safety of all individuals is paramount; furnishings and layout of the interview room should be designed to prevent any potential safety hazards to officers or subjects.

## Lighting

- Lighting across the interview room should be even and bright to minimize shadows and provide a clear view of the subject's face. To accurately reproduce color on video, room lighting (and the resulting color temperature) is an important variable. Full spectrum lighting is recommended for best results.

- Automatic motion detection lighting in an interview room should be disabled.

### **Windows/Mirrors**

- An interview room outfitted with IRRS technology should not contain exterior windows. Windows allow light into a room, which impacts visual noise and disrupts color temperature. Extraneous light can greatly impact the performance of cameras.
- Often in popular culture, interview rooms are depicted with two-way mirrors for observation. These designs were features of the past, when cameras weren't being deployed, and can impact room lighting. Two-way mirrors may be considered distractions and security risks.
- Agencies should be aware of legal statutes regarding consent and interviewing if considering covert deployment of IRRS technology.

### **Other Considerations**

- Interviewers should ask subjects being interviewed to remove hats and/or other clothing that fully or partially covers facial features.
- Interview rooms should be generally sparse when it comes to furniture (exceptions may include rooms for juveniles).
- An agency should create a wiring diagram showing how the system is interconnected within the physical structure.
- An agency's system should have a backup, uninterrupted power supply.
- There will be times when portions of the interview will need to be edited to remove material that could be considered prejudicial or for other reasons. The agency must have the capability to perform redaction on a copy of the DME for court presentation.
- The original DME must remain unaltered.