

Tipsheet on **accessing local crime data**

Courtesy of **Jill Castellano**

Last updated on **Aug. 12, 2026**

Accessing local crime data can be straightforward, or it can be a challenging, multistep process. Staff Writer Jill Castellano breaks down strategies for determining who to speak with and how to gather the data.

- Large and well-funded agencies often have their own data portals accessible for free online with daily, monthly or weekly updates on crime incidents. They may also produce maps and publish summaries of crime trends. If these products don't contain the level of detail you're seeking, you can ask for the underlying datasets that are used to populate public dashboards, maps and reports.
- Speaking with the workers who build and maintain crime databases can help you to understand the scope of what is available online and if certain details or crime categories may be missing. For example, police may exclude incidents from public databases if they occurred at a crime victim's home address or if they involved undercover agents. You may be able to request a more complete dataset by contacting a police department directly and specifying that personally identifiable information about officers or victims can be redacted.
- Agencies often maintain separate databases for crimes reported in their jurisdiction, response times to crime scenes, and calls for service, which can include any time someone contacts 911 or the police for assistance. Make sure you understand what is captured in the data you're reviewing so you can describe it accurately in your reporting.
- Smaller police agencies may not have easily accessible data, but you can use public information requests to ask for crime data or summary reports on crime trends. All law enforcement agencies keep records about crimes, as it's essential for tracking case progress and measuring agency performance. Before submitting a request, consider speaking with a database manager or records custodian to better understand how the agency tracks this information. In your request, specify that you'd prefer to receive the information in a "native electronic format" and not in a PDF, which can be difficult to analyze.
- In addition to obtaining data directly from your local police agency, there are a variety of federal agencies, universities and nonprofits that collect and analyze crime data. As of 2026, around 90% of the U.S. population lives in a police jurisdiction that reports crime data to NIBRS, the FBI's program for collecting data on crime incidents across the U.S. Learn more about NIBRS and other national crime data sources in The Marshall Project's toolkit [here](#). Learn more about responsibly reporting on police crime data [here](#).