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FBI Aims for World's Largest Biometrics Database

The FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division, which is located in Clarksburg, West Virginia, has launched a \$1 billion effort to build the world's largest computer database of people's physical characteristics, termed "biometrics." These include digital images of faces, fingerprints, and palm patterns, and in coming years could be upgraded to include iris patterns, face shapes, scars, and even data on people's voices and walking patterns.

In an interview with the *Washington Post* published December 22, Thomas E. Bush III, assistant director of the FBI division implementing the system, described the new database, called Next Generation Identification, as, "Bigger. Faster. Better. That's the bottom line." The FBI's computer server is located in an underground facility the size of two football fields. The system currently matches up to 100,000 fingerprint records daily against its database of 55 million digital prints in storage.

Civil libertarians and others worried about privacy have expressed concerns about the new system. One critic cited by the *Post* was Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center. Said Rotenberg: "You're giving the federal government access to an extraordinary amount of information linked to biometric identifiers that is becoming increasingly inaccurate."



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