

Profiling Helps Improve Staffing

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This is the fourth of an indefinite series on staffing of jails. The first three articles appeared November 2005, and January and March 2006. The articles reflect the ten steps developed by the National Institute of Corrections.

Face it. Most of us pay attention to staffing when it becomes a problem. The methodology¹ developed by the National Institute of Corrections has proven successful, whether applied proactively or as a problem-solving technique.

Identifying and Involving Stakeholders

Developing and implementing lasting improvements in staffing practices requires the efforts and support of all who have a stake in jail operations, primarily the following:

- Sheriff, correctional director, or other official responsible for the jail.
- Jail administrator.
- Other jail command staff.
- Jail first-line supervisors.
- Line officers.
- Program staff.
- Contract service providers, such as health service or food service.
- Policymakers, such as commissioners, council members, and city managers.
- Budget analysts
- Personnel/human resource managers.
- Labor union representatives
- Jail inspection officials.

You might consider broadening this list to include those with an interest in the inmates and their success after release from jail. Re-entry efforts are gaining support.

Participants in a recent training sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections identified the following as stakeholders in jail operations:

- Jail civilian staff
- Jail service providers
- Community service providers

¹ **Staffing Analysis Workbook for Jails**, First Edition. Rod Miller and Dennis Liebert. National Institute of Corrections, Washington D.C. 1987. Second Edition published in 2003.

- Workforce/employment agencies
- Business community
- Inmate advocates and families
- Religious community
- Educators and training providers

At first you might wonder why some of these stakeholders are on the list. Religious entities, for example, are affected by staffing practices when they encounter difficulty visiting inmates, or conducting services at the jail. Also, faith-based initiatives in many communities work with inmates before and after their release. Advocates and families are acutely concerned with the overall safety of the jail. Connections between stakeholders and the jail must be identified and respected.

Many sheriffs and jail managers have found that it is not question of “if” stakeholders will weigh in on jail operations, but rather “when” and “how” they will weigh in. Involving stakeholders in the staffing analysis process provides an opportunity to:

- Educate them on the complexities of the jail
- Listen to their concerns and ideas
- Seek their support for acquiring needed resources

One jail manager grumbled about involving the union with the staffing analysis process, but admitted it was better to “give them their pound of flesh an ounce at a time” during the process, rather than creating a standoff at the end. A union official had a more upbeat reaction, voicing appreciation for the opportunity to be involved with the creative process rather than being confronted with a “take it or leave it” decision at the end.

Stakeholders should be given meaningful opportunities to shape the staffing plan. Participation may be secured by forming a team to conduct the staffing analysis, and by assigning the principal staffing analysis duties to a single person who circulates findings to a larger group for review and comment, or through other approaches. Whatever methods are used, you will not be successful unless the stakeholders have *meaningful* opportunities to participate and have their ideas seriously considered.

Profiling the Jail

Jail managers must adjust to change daily, often involving things over which they have little or no control, such as crime, arrests, bail and release, and sentencing. Creating a profile of the jail, one of the initial steps in the staffing analysis methodology of the National Institute of Corrections, helps cope with change.

It is tempting to skip this step-- after all, *we* already know about the jail context because we work with it every day. But remember that most stakeholders do not have the same understanding of the jail setting and its operation.

It is up to you to paint an accurate picture.

Only with an understanding of the jail context, will stakeholders be able to participate fully in the staffing analysis process and in the recommendations that follow.

Further, because jail operators experience the change in daily increments, we are less likely to appreciate the overall impact on the jail.

Jail managers and officials are often too close to daily operations to appreciate the magnitude of changes over time. We adjust our operations in smaller increments. Jail managers are invariably surprised when they step back and look back at the magnitude of change.

In a recent training workshop, one jail administrator suggested that he was “not seeing the forest for the trees.”

Fresh eyes, even those belonging to folks who know little to nothing about corrections, often offer clear perspective and promote creative change.

This article explores the Step One, which provides an essential foundation for the creative approaches that are implemented in the subsequent steps.

The first step in profiling the jail is to collect jail inmate population data, operational philosophy information (mission statement), floor plans of the facility, operational budgets, state and professional standards, and relevant case law. These need to be available during later steps in the process and need to be analyzed to describe the physical, operational, and human context of the jail at the time of the staffing analysis.

A detailed profile of the jail setting is essential in a comprehensive staffing analysis. The profile may be needed to justify requests to funding sources, or even in court. Also, subsequent staffing analyses should review and update the previous profile.

The profile should examine and record key features and characteristics of the jail setting, including:

- Facility rated capacity.
- Average daily population for the past several years broken into various groupings.
- Number of admissions and releases, time and day of week for admissions and releases.
- Length of stay-- not just average, but analyzed in more detail.
- Inmate characteristics such as age, race, sex, residence, charge, and judicial status.
- Number and types of classifications and housing separations.
- Mission statement.
- Facility design (floor plan).
- Location and condition of equipment such as closed-circuit television, and electronic detection systems.
- Organizational chart, span of control, management philosophy.

- Staffing plan, schedule, shift rosters.
- Number and type of critical incidents.
- Personnel agreements, union contracts.
- State and professional standards.
- Applicable court decisions.
- Latest inspection reports.
- Service contracts in effect.
- Recent problems experienced with facility operations.
- Issues to be addressed by a staffing analysis.

Collecting, analyzing, and logically arranging this information will lay the foundation for the staffing analysis. Consider asking middle management and line-staff to help present the information to the stakeholders. Their perspective and buy-in is priceless; and they may surprise you.

Be sure to document all information you have gathered. Keep this material for future reference and as a snapshot of the situation at the time of this staffing analysis. It may also prove useful for other activities, such as managing jail crowding.

Inmate Data

Many jurisdictions have used this step in the staffing analysis process to expand their analysis of inmate data. “Length of stay” is a good example of data that is often poorly analyzed.

Jail managers know that average length of stay is anything but average. When we attempt to describe our inmate population in broad terms, like average length of stay, we mislead the stakeholders and the public who need to have a clear understanding of jail dynamics.

Figure 1 describes a typical jail population in terms of length of stay, but it also compares the inmate admissions to the number of detention days accrued.

For example, nearly 65 percent of the inmates admitted to the jail spent one day or less in confinement, but these inmates accounted for only 1.2% of the detention days.

The numbers under “admissions” address the volume of inmates who are admitted, not the impact they have on jail beds.

But the numbers under “detention days” provide a view of the jail that is more like a “snapshot” of a typical day.

The *average* length of stay for the inmates described in Figure 1 is 11.6 days. Using this average without the detention day analysis, you might expect to walk into the jail on a typical day and find that the majority of inmates will be spending about eleven days in confinement. But Figure 1 demonstrates how misleading the average can be.

In fact, if you take a snapshot of this jail on a typical day, 94 percent of the inmates will spend 11 *or more days* in confinement and 87 percent of the inmates will spend more than 30 days.

Figure 1: Length of Stay Data for Typical Jail

Number of Days in Confinement	Cumulative Percent of Admissions	Cumulative Percent of Detention Days
Less than 1 day	47%	Less than 1%
1 day	64%	1%
2 days	73%	2%
3 days	76%	3%
4 days	77%	3%
5 days	79%	3%
6 - 10 days	82%	6%
11-30 days	88%	13%
31-60	92%	26%
61-90	94%	39%
91-120	96%	52%
121-150	97%	62%
151-180	98%	70%
181-365	99%	95%
366-548	100%	99%
549+	100%	100%

Figure 2 presents the data from Figure 1 in two graphs that compare and contrast length of stay in terms of admissions and beds used (detention days).

Figure 2: Comparison Charts Based on Length of Stay

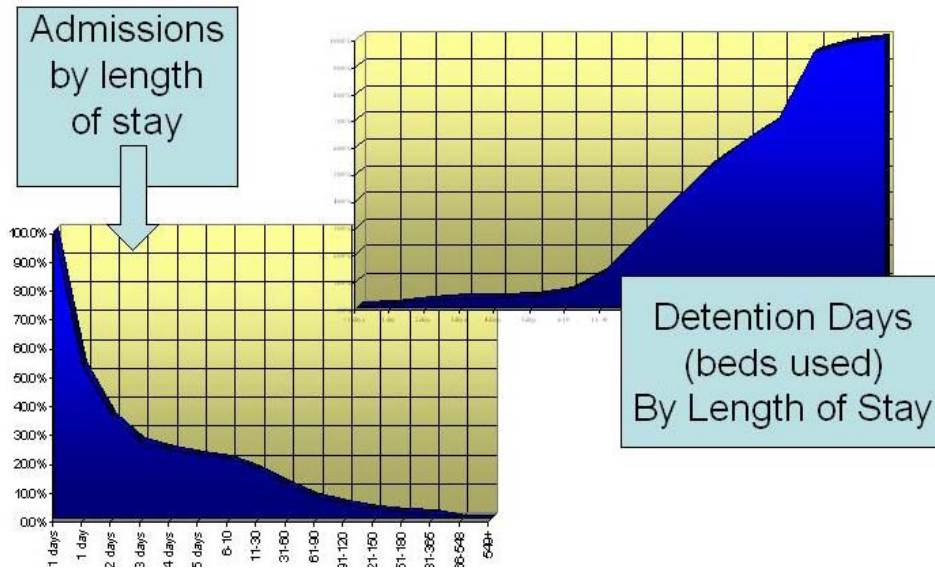
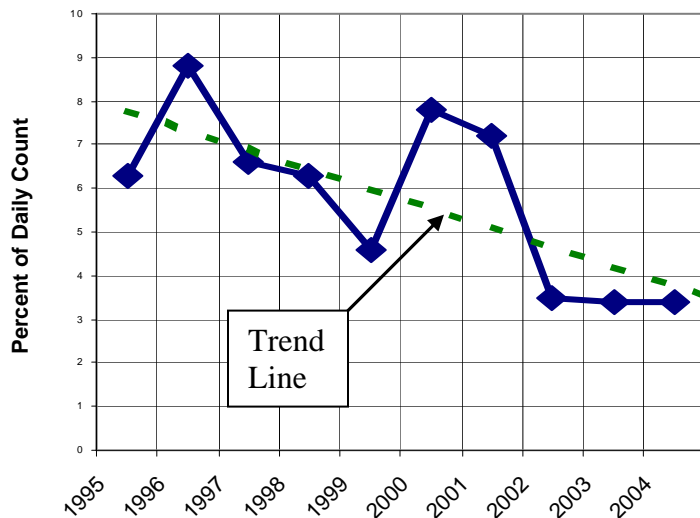


Figure 3 provides another example of the value of examining data during this early stage of the staffing analysis process.

In the process of assembling data for the staffing analysis, one county noted that the proportion of sentenced county inmates was dropping significantly in recent years, as shown by the trend line on the chart.

Figure 3: Percent of Daily Population Convicted of “County” Offenses



The insights in Figure 3 have many implications for jail operations. First, county-sentenced inmates are considered the lowest-risk offenders, having been convicted of relatively minor offenses.

These inmates requires less supervision. They also comprise the majority of the inmate workforce. County officials used this insight as an example of the steady hardening of the inmate population in recent years.

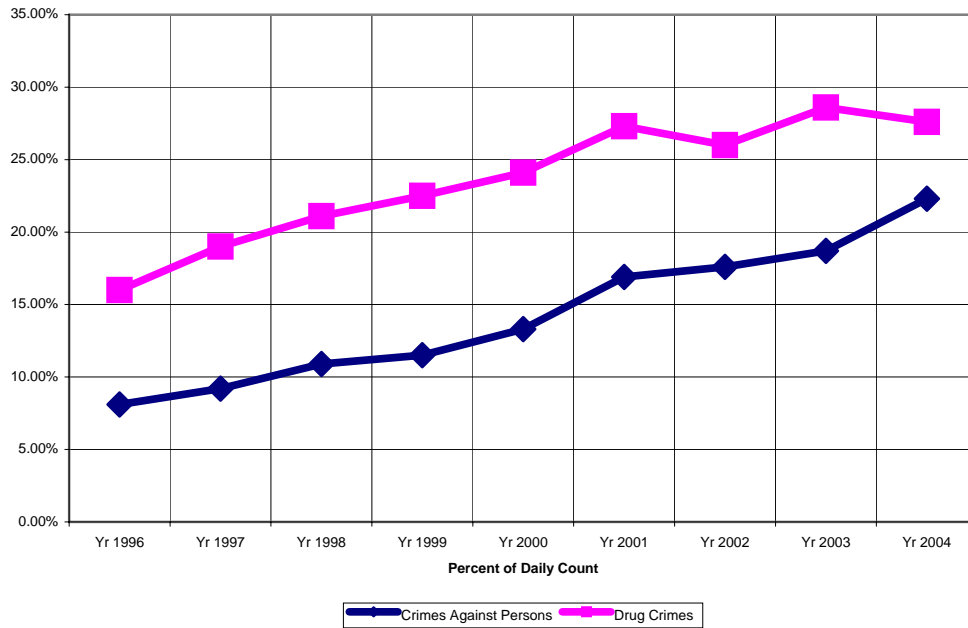
As the jail became more crowded, these low-risk inmates were an easy target for alternatives to confinement that would reduce crowding, such as day reporting, probation, and other community based sanctions.

Another staffing implication from this data is that the supply of inmate-workers is dwindling, possibly leaving tasks undone.

Nearly 20 percent of all jail inmates spend six or more hours each day working in our jails.² In order to maintain the inmate workforce, the jail will have to use less-desirable inmates, including pretrial detainees, who will require more supervision as they work.

Figure 4 provides another view of the trends in the sample jail’s population.

Figure 4: Type of Charge



Significant staffing implications may be derived from this data, including growing concerns about a more violent inmate population, changing contraband concerns and increased demand for medical services.

² *Work in America’s Jails*. National Institute of Justice, 1996. Washington D.C. www.jailwork.com

Summary

The combination of getting the right people involved in some manner and gathering accurate and meaningful information to inform them, will pay dividends as you improve staffing practices.

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