

Seven Steps to Plan a Better Jail

U.S. Department of Justice



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Getting Started

Decide Planning Group Roles

There are two contrary facts about systems planning to be reckoned with:

- Good correctional planning takes time
- You don't have that kind of time

Detailed information must be collected, meetings organized, telephone calls made, letters written - this all amounts to a lot of work over the next few months. You don't have the time, so what's the answer? Obviously, you give the job to people who can take the time and who can handle the assignment.

But there is one more fact about planning to consider:

- Planning should lead to action. The best plan is useless if it doesn't have results.

In other words, the plan must have your support. You must believe in the plan, confident that it's based on solid facts and figures. You must know the plan in detail and be comfortable with its major recommendations. Hopefully, you will be prepared to take the plan to your office and use your authority and influence to make the plan happen.

A recommended strategy is for two groups to be organized, a PLANNING GROUP and an ADVISORY GROUP. Qualified persons who have the time to ac-

tually do the work make up the Planning Group. The Advisory Group is made up of persons whose support is essential to implement the plan.

Persons who might make up the PLANNING GROUP include:

- City/county planning staff
- Sheriff's staff
- Community volunteers
- Other qualified staff
- Consultants
- Other community resources

The ADVISORY GROUP includes representatives from:

- Judiciary
- Sheriff/Jail Administrator
- County budget office
- Community Service
- Prosecutor's Office
- County Commission
- Minority/public interest groups
- Media

The Planning Group collects information, prepares reports, frames preliminary recommendations, and generally provides the resources needed for policy decisions. The Advisory Group receives reports, takes preliminary recommendations under advisement, and deliberates policy matters to the point where there is consensus.

Learn the Issues

As a first step, both the planning and advisory groups should see the community's criminal justice system in national and historical perspectives. Though each community has a strong sense of individual identity, problems in criminal justice services and facilities are rarely unique. To see a community's problems in a broad context adds objectivity to the exercise of preparing a preliminary list of the community's criminal

justice problems. This list, developed and discussed at the Advisory Board's first meeting, is the beginning for all planning to follow. At that same meeting, the Advisory Board should be briefed about the cost benefits of planning and learn, generally, the board's role in future planning activities. A timetable for planning activities should also be set.

Set Goals for Local Corrections

Systems planning helps a community do what it sets out to accomplish in its correctional services. It's not uncommon for a community to lack a corrections goal, so a first step in planning is for the board to agree on the community's correctional philosophy by preparing a corrections mission statement. It should state the community's long-range correctional philosophy, and specify why the correctional facility exists and how it supports the corrections mission.

Also, during one of the early board meetings at least preliminary decisions must be made about how the community's correctional services and facilities are to relate to surrounding counties and to the state. Especially for smaller counties, it is possible that great cost savings and service improvements can be achieved by joint county use of correctional facilities. If this appears to be the case, then the objective to study this issue should be stressed at the beginning.



Get Facts & Figures

Get Information about Local Criminal Justice

STEP TWO involves moving from general impressions about the problems in local criminal justice to a firsthand examination of what, precisely, is taking place in the criminal justice process and how these activities relate to the need for a jail.

To think of criminal justice as a process hits on the important fact that arrested persons are moved from the streets and into jail by decisions made by law enforcement and the courts. Police and Sheriff's Deputies make arrests. The prosecutor's office and the courts decide on the charges, bail bond, and the jail sentence, if any. Through it all, jail staff have little control over the process that puts people in jail.

For this reason, the Planning Group must examine law enforcement records to learn necessary information about crime and arrest rates, and about guidelines which help the arresting officer decide when to jail persons. The Planning Group must also get information about the court activities. After arrest, how do the courts decide who goes to trial and who doesn't, and who goes to jail awaiting trial and who may go home? As for the jail itself, the Planning Group must record how the jail deals with incarcerated persons. What services are provided, and how do people spend their time?

Equally important, the Planning Group must learn the

personal characteristics of the persons in jail. Learning the average time a person waits in jail for a trial will go a long way toward defining what kind of jail services are practical. For instance, if persons usually wait only a few hours for court appearance and a bond hearing, and if most persons are released on bond at the initial court hearing, then such matters as recreation and dental care can wait until after that decision point in the criminal justice process. By the same token, if the bond ruling typically comes days after arrest, then recreation becomes an issue, as well might emergency dental care. How long persons usually stay in jail, their age, education, physical condition and similar matters must all be known to decide on jail services and activities.

The Planning Group must also be technically qualified to get basic information about the jail structure. Do conditions meet codes? If not, what are the specific deficiencies? Has the jail staff the space it needs to do its job? The quality of the prisoners' living and activity areas must be surveyed, and the space requirements of existing services and activities compared with actual space allocations.

Finally, the Planning Group must go into the community and learn firsthand about existing resources which might support or replace the jail operations.

Learn about Other Ways to do Things

Beyond looking closely at local criminal justice practices, STEP TWO also includes studying national program and facility models in criminal justice, and becoming aware of emerging corrections standards and relevant court rulings. As a member of the Advisory Board, your exposure to successful operations should be as intense and direct as possible, hopefully

taking you on site visits to model facilities and programs in similar communities. Your Planning Group must make full use of existing state and federal information sources to make sure that you have a complete and updated summary of national standards and court rulings affecting correctional operations, procedures and facilities.

Decide on Performance Models

Thus far, the Planning Group has gathered a great deal of information about the justice process and, more specifically, about the jail operations and facilities. Similarly, you have been thoroughly briefed about national models and standards. A critical activity of this planning step is to decide on the criteria for evaluating all this information.

As soon as the collected information begins to point to problems or deficiencies, you must decide if that is an issue to pursue. If you have concerns about over-

crowding in the jail and about unsanitary conditions, and if you want to meet certain standards concerning such issues, then you must decide this now. The Planning Group must be sure it's asking the right questions in the right way, so that when all the information is in and analyzed it can relate to your concerns. Collecting data is deceptively easy, but it's a science to gather information that can help you make decisions. You must clearly explain to the Planning Group what you want to know and why. It is their job then to go out and ask the right questions.

3 Consider the Data

Evaluate Information about Local Criminal Justice

This is the point in the planning process when the Planning Group comes forward and reports its findings to the Advisory Board. STEP THREE is a critical point in your association with the Planning Group. Until now, there has been a relatively relaxed exchange of information between your two groups. Now the Planning Group must produce, and demonstrate its planning competence by presenting the information you collectively decided was essential for planning purposes.

As an Advisory Board member you must be alert, even wary, during the meetings when the planning data is presented and analyzed. The validity of data is critically important to your plan. Ultimately all the plan's decisions and recommendations rest on the data base you receive and accept during STEP THREE.

There are a few basic rules which may help you judge the merit of the Planning Group's data presentations:

- First, meetings concerned with planning data should never last longer than two hours. Figures and charts lead quickly to fatigue and, as the whole purpose of gathering data is to get exact information about specific justice issues, you want to avoid late afternoon situations where weariness tempts you to make inexact judgments.
- Be sure that all data presented and analyzed leads to some point. Don't accept the fact that just because data exists it has value to your plan. Also,

don't permit the volume of data to be interpreted as significant in itself.

- Always inquire about the validity of data. Was it obtained firsthand or taken from secondary sources? For instance, if information is given to show whether the jail building is in compliance with certain codes, it makes a difference how the data was gathered. If taken from a state jail inspection report, it has one kind of value. If provided by the jail administration, it has another level of reliability. If the building data was collected firsthand by qualified staff of the Planning Group, then the data would have still another level of credibility.
- Finally, do not permit the language of data analysis to interfere with your understanding of the issues. Some planners find it convenient to use specialized terminology. Insist that all presentations are written and spoken in clear, straightforward English.

How the Planning Group presents its findings depends somewhat on your community's size. Large counties have complex justice systems so written reports may be appropriate for findings about the justice system and, specifically, about the jail. In most counties a verbal presentation, supplemented by written summaries, may be more effective. Whatever the approach, be sure all written materials are distributed to the Advisory Board at least one full week before the presentation.

Compare Actual Practices with Adopted Models

There are two distinct activities in STEP THREE. First the Planning Group reports on the collected data. The presentations are organized to show how policies (the use of bail bond, for instance) affect the jail population. Those presentations should also inform you about the jail's physical conditions, its services and operations, and the existence and availability of human services in the community that might support or replace jail services.

The second main activity is to compare the existing justice practices and facilities with the standards and models adopted in STEP TWO. Perhaps on a visit to another community you saw a court scheduling program that effectively reduced the length of time persons were held in jail waiting for trial. Suppose also that during STEP TWO you on the Advisory Board decided a similar court scheduling program could be used in your community to reduce jail overcrowding. If so, you certainly would have instructed the Planning

Group to provide you with the figures showing the impact of implementing such a program.

You should receive those figures in the STEP THREE data presentations. Now you can compare what your community is actually doing in contrast to what it might achieve with action planning. You should do this for every major issue you identified in the earlier steps. You should compare the actual jail services and activities with service and activity needs identified by the Planning Group in its presentation of offender data. To take another example, you should compare the actual physical conditions of your existing jail with the criteria of the jail standard you decided to meet.

When you are finished with such comparisons, the Advisory Group will have the information it needs to make firm decisions about the plan's specific recommendations for change.

4 Make Decisions

Consider the Effects of Change

The spotlight was on the Planning Group in STEP THREE. They had the job of presenting the facts and figures needed by the Advisory Board to make decisions about improvements in criminal justice services. As for the Advisory Board, your task was but to probe for weaknesses in the data and to help summarize the difference between local criminal justice as it is, compared with how it must be in order to conform with newly selected criteria for improvement.

Now it's your turn. The Advisory Group has a series of important decisions to make.

It's one thing to know the discrepancies between your community's actual criminal justice practices and the selected models for improvements. It's a slightly different attainment for you to think through the specifics of how changes in justice practice might actually convert into better criminal justice.

You have all the information you need to think through these specifics, however. You know the deficiencies of your justice system in their actual settings. You know whether there are delays in court services resulting in long waits for bail bond hearings and jail overcrowding. You know how judicial policies affect decisions about who goes to jail awaiting trial and who is released with a notice to appear in court for trial. You know the jail's daily routines, its operations and services. You know the criminal charges, general health, and family and job status of the people held in your jail. You know whether there are existing com-

munity services that might support or replace the jail operation. Finally, you know the physical condition of your jail building and how it contributes to your justice problems.

To help you sort through all this, the Planning Group should prepare a series of brief, sharply focused reports that treat such issues one by one, showing both the immediate and long-range effect of each such planning option. To illustrate:

- Many persons are jailed because they are found drunk in the streets. The only persons they harm are themselves. It's expensive to hold such people in jail, and the jail staff doesn't know how to identify or respond to medical crises of acute alcoholism. What would happen if public drunks were taken to some type of community treatment center rather than to jail? Would it cost more, or less or about the same as putting them in jail? Would the treatment center reduce some person's alcohol dependence? Would using the community service affect jail overcrowding? Would taking such people out of jail reduce the size of the jail and the cost of building a new one?

The Planning Group should present materials which project the immediate and long-range effects of such specific changes in justice practices. Your role on the Advisory Board is to study such reports, balance the need for change with practical realities, and then to make decisions.

Choose a Course of Action

At the first meeting for these decisions, read the corrections mission statement that you agreed on at the start of planning, and see if your thinking about the community's correctional goal has changed. If so, as a group the Advisory Board must again agree on the community's long-range correctional philosophy and how the jail should support criminal justice. This re-examination of the corrections mission is important, because during the meetings when you decide on planning options you want your decisions to be totally consistent with your stated objectives.

For example, assume that your corrections mission statement includes the goal of promoting public safety and operating a humane and cost effective jail. In that case:

- When you discuss the issue of court policies affecting pretrial incarceration, you will want to be sure that the standards used to determine who must be jailed awaiting trial are based on the nature of the criminal charge rather than on the financial ability to post bond. It doesn't promote public safety nor is it cost effective to jail a person charged with his first misdemeanor simply because he is too poor to pay his bail.
- When you discuss medical services and staff training, you will recognize that it's not humane to jail drunks and then be unprepared to diagnose or to treat a person suffering delirium tremens.
- When you decide on how the jail, itself, should function, you will keep well in mind that there are national standards which define what is humane in terms of architectural design and other facility issues.

Once you have deliberated these issues and the Advisory Board agrees on both an objective for corrections and the changes that are needed to reach that goal, then the Planning Group has received its notice to prepare a written strategy, the corrections master plan.

5 Take Action

Make the Changes

It's best to be blunt about it. STEP FIVE is the hardest planning step of all. You are asked to take the planning document out of the conference room and sell it - almost from door to door. To repeat the point stressed in STEP ONE:

- Planning should lead to action. The best plan is useless if it doesn't have results.

You are on the Advisory Board because of your leadership and influence. You know the plan, its recommendations are yours. It's your plan to sell.

Obviously, some of the plan's recommendations are more responsive to your sphere of influence than others. For that matter, some parts of the plan may even require changes in the law. (If so, the plan should spell those changes out and provide a legislative strategy.) However, the most common barriers to implementing a plan for improved criminal justice are:

- Lack of money
- Public indifference

As for money, there are numerous problems to be worked through and you on the Advisory Board can help with them all. For instance, many of the recommended changes will undoubtedly require revisions of budget planning for the county, itself, and for departments and agencies. The most obvious example would be the decision to construct a new jail. Though the Advisory Board obviously cannot authorize such a project, the fact that the County Executive and the

chief fiscal officer are on the Board should indicate that the decision to build has sufficient merit to be seriously considered by the county commission. In addition, building a jail will require a total reordering of the jail's operating budget; there will be different services and different staff requirements. However, the fact that the jail's administrator is on the Advisory Board should assure that proper budgets will be prepared, and operating funds will have been requested when the new jail opens.

Ultimately, all budget questions must go to the voters and this raises another problem the Advisory Board can help solve. The general public knows and cares little about criminal justice - especially the county jail. The general public has never been asked to consider even the most rudimentary questions about local justice or the mission of the county jail. As a result, it is invariably an uphill battle to get a bond referendum passed for jail construction. But in your community things can be different. With representatives of the media on the Advisory Board, there should be newspaper and television coverage from the first days of planning. On a much more limited basis, of course, the public has seen the underlying issues of local criminal justice unfold just as you on the Advisory Board have. When the jail construction issue *comes* to a vote, the public will know something about the county's corrections mission and can vote from a broader perspective than law and order slogans. Also, the general public will be able to evaluate the expansion of community services for offenders on the basis of cost and service effectiveness.

If Needed, Improve the Jail

You've seen in the earlier planning steps that most "jail problems" have causes more basic and complex than merely an obsolete jail building. Courts management, policies affecting pretrial release, budgeting for jail maintenance and services - correcting deficiencies in any one of these can sometimes make "jail problems" disappear. However, if the corrections master plan shows the need to build a new jail, that decision must be made now. By STEP FIVE you've done all you can do to make the jail problem disappear, hopefully by reserving jail for only dangerous persons and by providing quality staff and services. But if the jail problem still hasn't gone away, then it's time to hire an architect.

Whatever other qualities you look for when you hire an architect, be sure the firm you select knows how to make you, the client, work hard. Avoid the architectural firm that wants to take all the problems off your hands and then will present you with a new jail in a year or so. That approach might result in a fine jail for architects, but it will almost certainly cause you grief

from opening day

You should hire the architectural firm that is willing to learn about your corrections operations and services.

- The firm must know your policies affecting participation in programs so they can know how much program space is required and where it should be located.
- The firm must know how persons are admitted to jail so they can design the intake area to support those activities.
- In general, you want an architect who understands that the new jail will be only one of the county's tools for providing humane and efficient criminal justice services.

The architect must be prepared to learn enough about your county's corrections mission to design a building that will support those goals.

6 Make the Transition

Identify what will Change

STEP SIX will only concern you if you decide to renovate or to build a new jail. You should be aware that the construction of a new jail will cause a chain reaction of changes in your justice system.

The most obvious changes involve jail operations. The number of staff required may differ, and moving from an old to new facility should certainly result in different operating procedures. You will probably need new procedures in jail intake, including methods of classification, assignment, and means of release of prisoners. You may also need new supervision practices and additional programs and services. In other words, an entirely new operating procedure will be essential.

Two crucial points about this period of transition should guide you:

- Begin preparations for the transition early, about the time that construction begins.
- Don't consider the transition complete until at least six months after moving in.

The first task in preparing to move is to carefully identify the changes that will occur in as much detail as possible. An important example is staff changes. Using national guidelines, the Planning Group can determine the number of correctional officers required to supervise each post and the number of administrative and command staff needed. Also, depending on what services you decided to make available in the jail, the Planning Group should determine the program staff requirements as well.

The Planning Group can now compare projected staff needs with staff currently available, and can select a schedule for hiring. Be sure this schedule permits staff training to be carried out before moving into the new facility. Planning staff should also develop job descriptions and locate resources for training of jail personnel.

Clearly the sheriff or jail administrator is a central figure in STEP SIX. If plans call for establishing the position of jail director for the first time, make this appointment early enough for the jail director to participate fully in all transition activities.

Open the New Jail

One person should be assigned the responsibility for coordinating the logistics of physically moving into the new jail. Depending somewhat on the size of the project, that person's duties begin well before the actual moving date. All details should be worked out step-by-step in a written strategy for moving, including checklists of major equipment to be relocated

When construction is complete the staff should become familiar with every part of the new jail. Advisory Board members, planning staff and other criminal justice and government officials should be given a tour.

A shakedown of the new facility is critically important before prisoners are transferred. Be especially sure that all construction materials and tools are removed from closets, pipe chases and air shafts, and other unlikely places. Also, make sure that representatives of the manufacturers of the buildings equipment (locking systems, communications, and so forth) are on site to make a final check and to demonstrate their proper use.

At this point, prisoners can begin to be moved. Plan this transfer in phases, gradually moving small groups of prisoners to the new building, allowing staff to shake out the bugs and minimizing risks to safety and security.

With all this careful preparation, the management staff must anticipate that there will be problems. All new buildings have operating problems when they first open, especially buildings that house and feed transient residents - like hotels, college dormitories and especially jails.

The jail management should expect problems and be ready to solve them. Some problems will involve building design and equipment, and others will involve procedures. It is for this reason that the transition period extends into the first operating year. Those persons involved in the jail's planning, design and construction should be readily available to help solve problems when they first appear



Follow-up the Plan

Decide Follow-up Roles

By working hard to get to STEP SEVEN, you're really back to STEP ONE again. There is no final step in criminal justice planning. Planning continues - after the master plan is printed and released, after the new jail is opened, after all the big and little crises have been met. Justice planning continues:

- for sound management.
- for budget analysis and planning.
- to measure departmental priorities against performance results.
- to remain aware of criminal justice as a total process.
- to avoid future jail crises.

Continued planning permits your community to know your criminal justice services even while they respond to change. It allows for corrective adjustments and avoids crisis.

When you first began planning for improved criminal justice, you saw that there were two planning roles - there was the need for qualified persons to do the work of planning and for an Advisory Board to make planning decisions. This division of labor was necessary because the persons needed to make plan-

ning decisions were not the same people, necessarily, who had the technical training or the time to keep the planning activities going.

In STEP SEVEN, you're faced with the same problems. Keeping track of the results of the plan involves most of the same skills and effort needed for the initial planning process. To be sure that actual justice practices conform with the community's corrections mission there must be continued review of arrest rates, jail admissions records and similar data. Fortunately, the Planning Group has already developed the reporting system to get such information; the mechanism is already in place for followup planning. Your task in STEP SEVEN is to formalize the sustained planning process.

Who makes up the Planning Group is again a brand new issue. If city or county staff were originally used, then they might continue. But if this happens, the budgets of the supporting offices must be increased proportionately. If consultants were used, the community probably can't afford a permanent service contract. However, the consultant can be paid to set up the reporting procedures for followup planning and train local staff to interpret the data.

In the first six planning steps, the Advisory Board made decisions about plans of action, but it lacked authority to define criminal justice policy or commit funds for services or facilities. The Advisory Board could convert recommendations into action only by gaining support of the voters and key elected officials such as the county commissioners, sheriff and judges. Followup planning activities require the same public

support. Precisely how it is obtained will depend somewhat on the size of your community, but some formal provision must be made for the Advisory Board to report to the key elected officials and the public. A suggested approach is for the Advisory Board to become a Criminal Justice Advisory Commission reporting directly to the County Board at each regularly scheduled meeting of the County Commission.

Learn the Results

The Advisory Board should meet regularly, once a month at least. The meetings will feature planning staff reports much like the sharply focused summaries presented in STEP FOUR. These reports will keep you current about the justice system and the jail operation. Regular briefings such as these permit you to work with problems when they are small and, hopefully, uncomplicated.

For instance, suppose your master plan states that your new jail can function safely at a maximum capacity of 100 prisoners, and yet records show that within the first six months of operations the jail maximum will be surpassed. So alerted, you instruct the planning staff to pinpoint what has gone wrong with the population projections. The planning staff turns up the fact that the judges are jailing people at a higher rate than expected. The planning staff report also shows that some people in jail meet eligibility requirements for probation and recognizance bonding.

You on the Advisory Board are now equipped to work the problem out with the judiciary. If necessary, you can formally report the problem and your recommendations to the County Board in a public meeting.

Keep in mind the purpose of followup planning is to keep informed about the real criminal justice activities in your community. You want to verify that criminal justice practices support your corrections mission. If not, then either the practices or the mission must be changed to avoid future crisis.

Changes in local criminal justice are certain to take place. Continuing criminal justice planning is the only way your community can respond to those changes. Good planning takes money, so a planning budget is necessary. As you have seen, however, the cost of planning is insignificant compared with the costs of not planning.