

Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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What skills, knowledge, and abilities do jail leaders need in order to be credible and successful? Beginning with the July/August 2015 issue of *American Jails*, we are exploring the 22 core competencies as identified by jail administrators across the country. Welcome to the 16th installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails*, we take a closer look at the core competency identified as “overseeing inmate and facility management” and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

22 Core Competencies for Jail Leaders

- Anticipate, analyze, and resolve organizational challenges and conflicts.
- Assure organizational accountability.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with external stakeholders.
- Build and maintain teamwork; mentor and coach others.
- Communicate effectively, internally and externally.
- Comprehend, obtain, and manage fiscal resources.
- Develop and maintain a positive organizational culture that promotes respect for diverse staff.
- Develop and sustain organizational vision/mission.
- Engage in strategic planning.
- Enhance self-awareness; maintain proactive professional commitment.
- Establish organizational authority, roles, and responsibilities.
- Leverage the role of the jail in the criminal justice system.
- Make sound decisions.
- Manage change.
- Manage labor relations.
- Manage power and influence.
- Manage time.
- Obtain and manage human resources.
- **Oversee inmate and facility management.**
- Oversee physical plant management.
- Reduce jail-related liability risks.
- Understand and manage emerging technology.

Overseeing Inmate and Facility Management into the Future

Description: Assure that inmates are receiving proper care, custody, and control according to professional and Constitutional standards, as well as appropriate treatment programming.

Rationale: This competency relates to the core mission of local jails. Everything else—from fiscal considerations to use of power, decision-making, team-building, liability concerns, accountability measures, etc.—essentially supports this endeavor. As such, it not only embraces the laws, court cases, policies/procedures, research findings, and industry standards guiding jail operations, but also the good faith of jail leaders to move the field forward in progressive directions based on evidence-based practices.

Knowledge of:

- Relevant State and Federal laws, court orders, case law, accreditation and healthcare standards, fire codes, and other policies and procedures governing facility management.
- How to translate legal/administrative regulations into operational practices.
- Evidence-based practices for jails.
- Inmate treatment and community reintegration needs, along with relevant response strategies.

Skills to:

- Synthesize information from a wide variety of sources.
- Keep current with relevant legal and administrative regulations.
- Engage in timely review and revision of policies and procedures.
- Establish accountability measures for operational functions.
- Assure that staff are educated regarding legal/administrative requirements.

- Mentor peers and subordinates in their roles.
- Establish evidence-based treatment programs to meet inmate needs.
- Acquire resources and develop external partnerships to meet inmate needs.
- Oversee successful inmate transition back to the community.
- Maintain relationships with community stakeholders and treatment providers.

Abilities to:

- Read, interpret, and analyze legal documents.
- Ensure organizational accountability.
- Translate complex concepts into operational procedures.
- Recognize the jail's role in reducing recidivism.
- Research and implement effective treatment programs.
- Demonstrate concern about inmate needs and transitional capabilities.

How did *you* acquire the skills, knowledge, and abilities to become the jail leader you are today? How do you assure that inmates receive proper care, custody, and control based on professional and Constitutional standards, as well as the appropriate treatment programming? Some of us learned from a great mentor; others via the school of “hard knocks.” Still others of us achieved leadership skills by acquiring a college degree or by deliberate self-directed learning. Or we learned by our mistakes from on-the-job training or some combination of these strategies.

Knowing how to *manage* jail operations is a different skill set than knowing how to be the *leader* in your organization. An effective sergeant does not necessarily translate into being a great division commander. A leader doesn’t perform the work to assure a safe jail—rather he must motivate, teach, vision, obtain resources, and leave a legacy of future leaders.

This article does not deliver the basics of how to achieve the elements of Core Competency 19 (that would require several books!), but rather it seeks to outline how the knowledge can be acquired using the materials currently available, and urging jail leaders to expand their personal search to improve themselves—and therefore their organizations. This article also briefly addresses the use of evidence-based practices in jail programming providing direction from the jail leaders who helped to develop the core competencies and who believe strongly in this direction. To that end, the Leader’s Library is enhanced to provide helpful resources.

Jail leaders, whether newly appointed or experienced, must stay current with what’s on the horizon and what will impact their facility—both staff and inmates. It is your job to ensure that your jail is aware of new and current research, changing priorities, new practices, court decisions, and trends.

Corrections organizations cannot remain stagnant and expect to survive. There are both external and internal forces that drive change—new rulings from the courts, a lawsuit, budgets, or the leader’s ability to be both visionary and proactive. It is important for jail administrators to stay current, but the question is how.

Learning the Basics

There is an abundance of resources that discuss the basics of jail operations. The Leader’s Library identifies some of these resources, but the listed documents and references are only as useful as your willingness to read them. These resources may not only open your eyes to your priorities as the jail leader, but they include advice from veterans in the field. Do not re-invent the wheel; use the information provided by your colleagues. In addition, the previously published articles about the core competencies in *American Jails* magazine are also sources of information to improve your jail (<http://cipp.org/index1.html>).

Keeping Current

A jail administrator’s responsibilities must include staying current about what’s occurring in their community as well as with what changes are on the horizon—region-

ally, statewide and nationally. Devoting time to “what’s coming next” should not be considered an interruption, but an essential part of your day. The scope of this daily exploration needs to include local and national events. For example, the impact of a closing local industry on the tax base of your county, shortages of mental health beds in your community, and State tax cuts will all, at some point, affect your jail and its operations.

To understand the real costs of being uninformed and unaware, you only need to reflect on the turmoil surrounding the emergence of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). Remember how unprepared jails were to address, not only the new law in 2003, but also the published standards in 2012. Staying informed of community and industry changes is challenging, as jails must be prepared to respond rapidly—from addressing the impact of opioid use on jail medical care to considering revisions to the use of restrictive housing.

Staying informed is facilitated by using the internet to bring local and national news to your devices. Setting up alerts on various search engines and subscribing to news aggregators are effective strategies. For example, The Marshall Project (www.themarshallproject.org) is a free nonprofit journalism site about

The “Surprise” Promotion

One day you are happily working in patrol, or the courts, or criminal investigations—and then your boss contacts you. He has a new vision for your future.

If you are surprised by your new assignment as the jail commander, don’t feel discouraged or intimidated. You cannot learn all you need to know about jails in a few weeks, or even a few years, but what you can bring to the new job is *leadership*—listening, encouraging, learning, and inspiring. You also have the best of resources—those working in the field who will welcome your questions, concerns, and angst about your new job responsibilities. Be sure to find mentors and friends who can help you in this challenging undertaking.

What Is the Meaning of Evidenced-Best Practice?

“The terms *best practices*, *what works*, and *evidence-based practice* are often used interchangeably. While the *buzz words* refer to similar notions, pointing out the subtle distinctions between them helps to clarify the distinct meaning of *evidence-based practices*. For example, *best practices* do not necessarily imply attention to outcomes, evidence, or measurable standards. Best practices are often based on the collective experience and wisdom of the field, and may be based on insufficient or inconclusive evidence; this type of tenet represents *received* rather than scientifically tested knowledge. *What works* implies linkage to general outcomes, but does not specify the kind of outcomes desired (e.g., just deserts, deterrence, organizational efficiency, rehabilitation, etc.). Specificity regarding the desired outcomes is essential to achieving system improvement. In contrast, *evidence-based practice* implies that

1. one outcome is desired over others;
2. it is measurable; and
3. it is defined according to practical realities (i.e. public safety) rather than immeasurable moral or value-oriented standards.”

Source: Clawson, E. Joplin, L., Bogue, B., Campbell, N., Faust, D., Florio, K., Keiser, G., Wasson, B., & Woodward, W. (2004). *Implementing evidence-based practice in community corrections: The principles of effective intervention*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/019342.pdf>

criminal justice that delivers relevant news into your inbox each day. Federal government sources such as the weekly National Criminal Justice Reference Service’s list of newly available research and data should also be added to your “to read” file (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/>).

Growing Professionally

Jail leaders must be “students,” continually learning about the newest concepts and emerging practices. This includes contacting peers not only locally, but also at State and national levels. The Leader’s Library provides a list of organizations for your consideration—but you need to check out your own local and State resources. For example, the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) would be helpful with any State and local

laws that could impact corrections located in the northwestern part of the United States.

Joining associations and attending conferences are two other ways to grow professionally. Conference attendance provides the opportunity to network with your peers and to discuss the unique challenges and opportunities others are experiencing. Association memberships, in addition to sharing information, can provide other benefits, such as:

- jail-specific training in areas that include PREA, use of force, legal issues, and mental health.
- certification programs for officers, jails managers, and trainers.
- standards and accreditations for jails.

Jail administrators receive an immediate return on investment with these memberships, and this investment can help to guide you toward emerging practices.

Keeping yourself and your jail “contained in a silo” won’t help your facility. Growing professionally means expanding your contacts, supporters, and knowledge *beyond* your jail’s universe (http://cipp.org/pdf/CC/12_JailRoleintheCJS.pdf).

It is also important to make time to *read* regularly. Set the example for your subordinates by:

- Sharing information with your staff as you receive it so they too can become educated.
- Creating a workplace where the expectation for your jail is to become a leader in the field.
- Meeting with your staff for educational discussions, which includes learning about emerging trends, setting aside time to discuss what you collectively have identified, and examining all the options.
- Encouraging your staff to join professional organizations, both jail and community-based.

Organizing Decisions

Not only is it critical to acquire the information and data you need to make a decision, but how you organize, analyze, and synthesize the information is just as important. Taking the time to ponder an important decision about jail operations is sometimes a luxury. Leaders are often bombarded from different directions—their boss, the staff, the inmates, outside stakeholders—to decide, set a direction, allocate resources, and *now*. Sometimes there is time for research, sometimes not.

While we cannot be prepared for every exigency that arises in jail operations, keeping current and having “practice” in thinking through decisions can help when

there is no time. Every decision has ramifications that ripple through the jail and into the community. Identifying those factors ahead of time can help you to make solid, operational, and hence important, leadership decisions (http://cipp.org/pdf/CC/13_CCDecisionMaking.pdf).

Establishing Accountability

Just as it is too late to build a relationship with the media during a jail's crisis, it is too late to establish accountability in your jail when an important operational decision is required. Placing blame is neither helpful nor effective—and worst of all, it demonstrates poor and ineffective leadership.

To hold your staff accountable for decisions and to avoid micro-managing, you first need to define their responsibilities and the measures that you plan to use for operational effectiveness. This requires knowledge of the jail basics, as well as case law, administrative regulations, and relevant State and national statutes. This is how the accountability occurs (http://cipp.org/pdf/CC/2_CCOrgaccountability.pdf).

Mentoring and Role Modeling

If your road to becoming an effective jail leader was first paved by a mentor (or mentors), then you need to reciprocate. How does a jail sustain the good work it has struggled to develop moving into the future?

With Baby Boomers retiring every day, knowledge transference is extremely important—and you need to ensure that it is a *positive* transference, not just leaving behind bad internal culture and dangerous practices. You cannot mentor everyone; but you can establish the practices and model the behaviors you want to see displayed by your staff (http://cipp.org/pdf/CC/4_CCMentoringCoaching.pdf).

Leader's Library

Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in Community Corrections: The Principles of Effective Intervention

Elyse Clawson, Lore Joplin, Brad Bogue, Nancy Campbell, Dot Faust, Kate Florio, George Keiser, Billy Wasson, and William Woodward

U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (2004)
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/019342.pdf>

Resource Guide for Jail Administrators

Mark, D. Martin and Thomas A. Rosazza

U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (December, 2004)
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/020030.pdf>

A Sheriff's Guide to Effective Jail Operations

Mark D. Martin and Paul Katsampes,

U.S. Dept. of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (January 2007)
<https://info.nicic.gov/nicrp/system/files/021925.pdf>

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization

Peter M. Senge

Doubleday (2006)

Focused Leadership: A Resource Guide for Newly Appointed Warden, Second Edition

Jeanne B. Stinchcomb and Susan W. McCampbell

U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (2017)
www.cipp.org/pdf/NICResourceGuide2017.pdf

Annotated Bibliography: Evidence-Based Practices in the Criminal Justice System

U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (updated 2017)
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/026917.pdf>

Restrictive Housing in the U.S.: Issues, Challenges, and Future Directions

U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (November, 2016)
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250315.pdf>

U.S. Department of Justice Report and Recommendations Concerning the Use of Restrictive Housing, Final Report

U.S. Department of Justice (January, 2016)
<https://www.justice.gov/archives/dag/file/815551/download>

Newsletters, Organizations, Research, and Subscription Services

(Note: The authors are not endorsing newsletters or subscriptions. The intent is to identify options for your consideration.)

American Correctional Association (ACA)—www.aca.org

Americans for Effective Law Enforcement—www.aele.org

American Probation and Parole Association—www.appa-net.org/eweb/

Civic Research Institute (CRI)—www.civresearchinstitute.com

- Correctional Healthcare Report
- Correctional Law Reporter
- Corrections Managers' Report

CorrectionsOne—www.correctionsone.com/news/

The Council of State Governments Justice Center—
<https://csgjusticecenter.org>

National Association of Counties—www.naco.org

National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies—
<https://napsa.org/eweb/startpage.aspx>

National Commission on Correctional Health Care—www.ncchc.org/

- Standards for Health Services in Jails
- Standards for Mental Health Services in Correctional Facilities
- Standards for Opioid Treatment Programs in Correctional Facilities

National Sheriffs' Association—www.sheriffs.org

North American Association of Wardens & Superintendents—
<http://naawsonline.org>

Southern Poverty Law Center—www.splcenter.org

Vera Institute of Justice—www.vera.org

Keeping in Real Touch with Your Own Organization

As you are learning and staying current with the jail trends, it is also important as a leader to stay in tune with the practices, behaviors, and culture of your organization. For those just stepping into a leadership position, there may be times when you must encourage organizational change, which may include altering the internal culture. You want to create a learning organization—one that anticipates and welcomes change—and is continuously striving to improve. Then possibly you can modify or undo some of the formal and informal habits that

might impede your jail from remaining proactive and innovative.

Here are two strategies:

- Help your staff to focus on new habits that will mirror the philosophies and practices you collectively strive to achieve.
- Communicate and model the behavior you expect.

That is why sharing the information you are learning is important: It helps employees to understand the organization's purpose and direction. Remember that you can influence the culture by your own actions and behaviors by the priorities on which you are focused. A

learning organization is a positive organization.

Using Evidence-Based Treatment Practices

The jail leaders who identified the 22 core competencies *deliberately* included evidence-based treatment (EBT) programs as an element of this “inmate and facility management” core competency. “Evidence-based policy and practice is focused on reducing offender risk, which in turn reduces new crime and improves public safety” (National Institute of Justice, 2013). The concern during the experts' deliberations was this: Too often the programs, services, and practices in our jails are being established with little or no foundation in any data or based on evidence.

While there is not a robust exploration of evidence-based practices in jails, the principles established in the last 20 years can be applied to today's decisions about jail treatment programs and policy and practice changes (Clawson et al., 2004). These EBT principles are:

- Assess Risk and Needs.
- Enhance Motivation to Change/ Intrinsic Motivation.
- Target Interventions.
- Skill Train with Directed Practice (Cognitive Behavioral Treatment Methods).
- Increase Positive Reinforcement.
- Engage Ongoing Community Support.
- Measure Relevant Processes and Practices.
- Provide Measurement Feedback.

For example, apply the EBT principles to your jail's use of restrictive housing:

- What are the risks associated with continuing restrictive housing as it is now?
- What are the jail's (staff) needs and the inmates' needs?
- How can staff gather information to design a mechanism that motivates change in the inmates who

are placed in restrictive housing (e.g., behavior contracts, increases in privileges), and employs cognitively based training to help change their behavior (e.g., engage mental health staff)? How about changing the staff's behavior (or training, or assignments) as they contribute to the problem?

- What about the use of positive versus negative reinforcements? Jails are usually good at negative reinforcements, but not very good at positive options.
- What other resources can be identified to provide support for change? Maybe access to an art class taught by a volunteer?
- What will signify if the new or revised practices are working?
- How can what is learned from the changes produce even more change?

This is just one example of how EBT principles can be applied—in total or even in part. EBT provides a framework for considering new programs or addressing difficult challenges.

Buyer Beware

As you assess the various publications and resources that might help you or your jail operate effectively, do so with a clear eye to any agenda or the author's distinctive point of view. This is not to suggest that you discard the advice or perspective. Rather whatever you do, be fully aware of the source. Beware of those offering "best practices." Consider "best practices" as good ideas, what works, or emerging strategies, unless the "practices" are clearly research-based, with documentation provided. (For additional clarification on these terms, see the box titled "What Is the Meaning of Evidenced-Best Practice" on page 36.)

Research ideas and concepts yourself—or ask subordinates to help expand their horizons and skills by doing the work. As we know, each of the Nation's 3,200 local jails is unique—one size does

not fit all—but ideas from diverse perspectives may give you a good option to explore.

Conclusion

You did not start the job as a jail leader on day one with instant knowledge on how to manage inmates, or operate a jail. Your journey to improvement is really that—a journey that does not become a destination where you are the perfect, all-knowing leader.

This core competency hopefully inspires you not to be frustrated or overwhelmed by your day-to-day responsibilities, but rather inspired by your jail's mission and by those with whom you work and lead. ■

References

- Clawson, E. Joplin, L., Bogue, B., Campbell, N., Faust, D., Florio, K., Keiser, G., Wasson, B., & Woodward, W. (2004). *Implementing evidence-based practice in community corrections: The principles of effective intervention*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nic.gov/Library/019342.pdf>
- National Institute of Corrections. (2013, January). *Evidence-based practices in the criminal justice system: An annotated bibliography*. Aurora, CO: Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nic.gov/Library/026917.pdf>

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Federal Government Resources and Websites

🔗 **Bureau of Justice Assistance**—Sign up to receive notices about grant funding, technical assistance, training, and programs.
www.bja.gov

🔗 **Bureau of Justice Statistics**—Learn about data collection efforts and reports about jail-based data.
www.bjs.gov

🔗 **Justice Technology Information Center**—Sign up for the newsletter about emerging technology, including corrections technology.
www.justnet.org

🔗 **National Center for Justice Involved Women**
<http://cjinvoledwomen.org/women-in-jails/>

🔗 **National Criminal Justice Reference Services**—Sign up for a weekly listing of recently available research findings and studies.
www.ncjrs.gov

🔗 **National Institute of Corrections**—Learn about NIC's training opportunities and publications, then sign up for list serves on your interests.
www.nicic.gov

🔗 **National Institute of Justice**—Sign up to receive updates on leading research in the justice system.
www.nij.gov

🔗 **Office for Victims of Crime**
www.ovc.gov

🔗 **National PREA Resource Center**
www.prearesourcecenter.org