

# Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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

In this issue of *American Jails*, we take a closer look at the core competency identified as “Comprehend, Obtain, and Manage Fiscal Resources” and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.



## Core Competency: Comprehend, Obtain, and Manage Fiscal Resources

**Description:** Understand the larger financial picture, as well as obtain the fiscal resources needed to achieve organizational goals, allocating resources in a manner that supports the organizational vision, mission, and values.

**Rationale:** Not only must jail leaders comprehend specifics of the budgeting process, but they must also assure that the jail has sufficient financial resources to fulfill its mission by obtaining stakeholder support. This includes not only assessing what resources are needed, but also managing them in a cost-effective manner by effectively prioritizing, eliminating waste and duplication, identifying alternatives to supplement the budget, and making reductions as necessary.

Requires knowledge of:

- Revenue sources and how to influence them.
- Budgetary process and related fiscal procedures.
- Current and projected fiscal needs of the organization.

Requires the skills to:

- Work with the local funding authority.
- Issue and monitor contracts.
- Obtain nontraditional funding (e.g., grants).
- Interpret the administrative regulations governing fiscal matters.
- Develop and justify the organizational budget.

- Monitor and amend the organizational budget.
- Use fiscal tools (e.g., electronic spreadsheets, accounting techniques, financial statements).
- Manage long-range planning.
- Identify factors that will impact future budgets.
- Distinguish between “needs” and “wants.”

Requires the abilities to:

- Interact with and influence “holders of the purse-strings.”
- Analyze.
- Be creative.
- Be persuasive.
- Interpret fiscal data.
- Objectively project fiscal needs.
- Think critically.

## Overcoming Budget Challenges

Jail administrators and aspiring leaders are generally ill prepared to effectively oversee their jail’s budget. It is only *after* they get the top job that many jail administrators become immersed and knowledgeable in the budget. The jail’s budget is more than just funding the operation; it should align with the mission, vision, and values of the organization, and promote the jail’s core purpose for its presence in the community.

The budget is a “multi-headed dragon,” and few work experiences focus on the skills and abilities needed to prepare, justify, and manage of the jail’s budget.

## 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.

Obtaining resources is a marathon effort. The jail is competing against other jurisdictional funding priorities, most of which are more attractive than the jail, as well as more publicly supported. In the last decade, the contraction of both the national economy and the budgets of local communities have forced jails into a precarious fiscal position, while the population of inmates with serious medical and mental health issues grew. In spite of funding difficulties, spending by counties on jails increased 74 percent between 2002 through 2012 (Ortiz, 2015).

Today's jail leaders are facing these fiscal challenges:

- Jails are the emergency room of the criminal justice system with the number and condition of in-coming arrestees not controlled by the jail—and the facility must literally be ready for anything.
- Although many new jails were built during the 1980s and 1990s to replace older buildings, underfunded and delayed physical plant updates and repairs will cost more money in the long-term, and building “emergencies” have become the norm. This does not even address the adoption of new technologies and/or jail information systems.
- The workforce costs in many jails comprise up to 80 percent of the budget. Staff issues, such as overtime, vacancies, or the impact of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), make simply getting through each day the goal, distracting leadership from long-term solutions. Inmate programs and services are largely unevaluated, and difficult to justify in tight budget times; yet are essential to a jail's safe operation.
- External mandates and pending legislative changes can financially impact the budget—for example, the requirements of the Prison Rape Elimination Act, adoption of inmate reentry initiatives, reductions in revenues from inmate phone systems, and decreases in the number of incarcerated non-violent offenders.
- Public support of the jail is not widespread in many communities, and advocates for adequate jail funding are often limited to the voices of the sheriff and/or jail leader, while advocates for homeless animals may receive more sympathy and financial support.

We know the challenges, so what are the potential strategies? This article looks at how a leader can:

- Master the jail's budget—preparation, justification, and management.
- Rethink workforce issues.
- Assess grants and other funding sources to accomplish the mission.
- Consider cost-benefit analysis and evaluation of inmate programs.
- Think about inmate health and mental healthcare costs.
- Create advocates for the jail's budget in the community and partnering with public agencies.

As with mastering any of the core competencies for jail leaders, becoming proficient in the jail's budget requires learning a largely unknown environment, with its own language, deadlines, and “politics.” But without achieving competency in the budget process, a leader may defer decisions to others in or outside the organization, and is ultimately held accountable for its failure. This article gives some highlights and plenty of resources for your professional development.

### **Master the Jail's Budget: Preparation, Justification, and Management**

A jail leader cannot be the master of the jail's budget without a high level of knowledge about the details of the budget, the required (legal and administrative) processes governing it, the due dates and deadlines, the justification for the requests, how the money is spent, and accountability for decisions (Martin & Rosazza, 2004). Too often organizations create next year's budget by adding (or deducting) 5 percent or 10 percent to what they spent the previous year, leaving those with little objective information to defend it.

### **Failure To Manage the Budget**

Consequences of failing to manage the jail budget may include:

- Over expenditure at the end of the fiscal year.
- Reduction in services.
- Staff layoffs.
- Loss of authority to spend money or to hire staff without prior approval of the budget authority.
- Requirement to begin the next fiscal year with a payroll or programs that the new budget cannot sustain.
- Difficulty in obtaining approval for future budget requests, resulting from reduced confidence in the administrator's ability to manage resources.
- Possible disciplinary action or job loss.

*Retrieved from <http://static.nicic.gov/Library/017628.pdf>.*

Asking questions, searching for data, critically examining costs, considering other ways to do business and/or changes in policies, as well as gathering information from other jails can help form the foundation for a budget (Clem, 2009). Involvement of staff in the process, transparency in discussions, and communication about the dollars sends the message that the budget is both a shared progress and a shared pain. Decisions made hour-by-hour by line staff—whether to come to work, how much toilet paper to distribute, deployment of staff in the facility—are seemingly unimportant, but have



“Personnel and related costs (e.g. benefits, vacation, sick leave, FMLA) are the single largest item in a jail’s budget.”

a cumulative impact on an agency’s budget. Examine the ways in which the budget information and expenditure tracking is accomplished. Ask for information in a format that supports leadership understanding with meaningful information.

In addition to the many resources provided here, leaders can look to local colleges for classes on budget preparation and management, accounting, and other ways to improve skills.

### Rethink Workforce Issues

Personnel and related costs (e.g. benefits, vacation, sick leave, FMLA) are the single largest item in a jail’s budget. This means that effective workforce management is critical to the budget. Effective management starts with assuring that the jail’s staffing is consistent with the mission, architecture, classification of inmates, and security needs. There is *no* substitute for a jail periodically conducting a staffing analysis. While sometimes seen as requiring too much data collection and causing conflict about staff responsibilities, an objective and data-driven appraisal of the need for each post and review of staffing alternatives, should be the only basis for the personnel budget (Miller & Wetzel, 2012). Discussions of whether posts should be “civilian” or “sworn” are part of this examination process. Like it or not, a leader’s responsibilities include asking the hard and often uncomfortable questions, and seeking the accurate, defensible answers.

Along with determining the correct number and deployment of staff for all shifts, the leadership team must create a work environment where people want to work. This means quality supervisors, attention to employees’ needs, and generationally-relevant management practices. A jail with constant vacancies and employee turnover does not contribute to a safe working environment and hurts the budget. Abuse of FMLA and sick leave also drains the budget, as well as demoralizing the staff who do come to work. The leadership team’s budget initiatives need to examine the entire range of workforce issues when preparing and managing the budget. Failing to manage your workforce, means you will have failed to manage your budget.

A significant and unavoidable connection exists between creating a quality work environment and the budget. Supervisors who avoid the hard work on staff issues are inviting continual “arm wrestling” about overtime and post coverage. The funding authority may then view the jail as capable of working with fewer staff—“because they do it every day”—and the outcome may be a demand for a further cut to staffing and budget.

### Assess Grants and Other Funding Sources To Accomplish the Mission

Searching for funding for new initiatives and program is an option many jails don’t consider. Whether it is because the idea of a grant is daunting, or the requirements of the application is not in the skill set of the leadership team, or the accountability requirements are substantial, jails are underrepresented in this realm. There are almost *no* opportunities via grants to fund the ongoing costs of the jail operations. Funding is often available for new programs and services consistent with the mission of the jail. It is important to remember that these dollars are never “free,” and the jail is required to account for the funding, and must produce the work promised to obtain the funds. Additionally, jails should not apply for grants where the purpose is inconsistent with the jail’s mission.

### Grant Funding Websites

[www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)—This is a one-stop site for learning what Federal grants are available.

<http://foundationcenter.org>—This site for the Foundation Center provides information about private foundations.

[www.cof.org/foundation-type/community-foundations](http://www.cof.org/foundation-type/community-foundations)—Many local communities have community foundations dedicated to improving their neighborhoods. Inquire about your community foundation.

[www.samhsa.gov/grants](http://www.samhsa.gov/grants)—This site provides information about mental health and substance abuse funding opportunities.

Jails that develop a prospectus describing plans for a new initiative or program—for example, mental health services, inmate reentry initiatives, gender responsive services—are ahead in this process. Such a prospectus can be shared with potential funders. Sometimes new jail programs are built with small dollars from community foundations or local businesses. But without a prospectus, the jail’s proposed program initiatives appear to lack gravitas or appear last minute and poorly organized.

### Consider the Cost-Benefit Analysis and Evaluation of Inmate Programs

Are services provided to inmates effective? How does the jail answer that question? Do expending resources

to support a GED program have tangible benefits for the inmates or the community? Should the funding authority continue the commitment? Evidence-based programs require measurable goals and objectives, and data is maintained to identify successes, failures, and the need for midcourse corrections. Does Crisis Intervention Training mean fewer uses of force? Do gender-responsive services result in fewer inmate/inmate conflicts?

The budget process is an opportunity to examine what is being accomplished, and whether such initiatives are worth the expenditure of time and resources. Sometimes all the data cannot be known, but justifying the operations of jails helps to assure that resources are appropriately allocated.

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## Maximize Your Jail's Budget

The budget is an everyday allocation of a leader's time—even if only for a few minutes. Here are some vital budget-related activities to consider.

### Physical Plant Assessment—

Using qualified professionals, review the entire physical plant, including doors, locks, water heaters, air handlers, exterior fences, security equipment, and food preparation equipment. Document the date purchased, the warranty, any service contract, when repairs are needed, and the life expectancy. Then request the appropriate budget allocations.

### Contract Management—

Review the specific language of all contracts, determine which staff member is assessing the vendor's compliance, ascertain the costs and the return on investments, and assure that the jail is getting what it is paying for. If contracts are up for re-bid or renewal, consider getting expert help to re-write contract terms and conditions, especially if you have time to determine if the vendor is giving the jail what it needs.

### Risk Assessment—

Conduct a risk assessment. The inability to identify and mitigate risks in a jail is a major leadership failing. Use the tools identified in this article and ask colleagues from an outside jail to assist. A fresh set of eyes are always welcome. Use this acquired information to inform the budget, as well as to identify any immediately needed actions to safeguard the jail and the community.



### Purchasing and Contracting—

Know the specific requirements in your jurisdiction for how items are purchased and how contracting occurs. Many novice budgeters go cross-eyed with these mandates, costing the leader's credibility and challenging their expertise. Find a knowledgeable mentor in these often highly legal areas to give advice and assess the jail's current process.

### Capital Budgets—

As part of the physical plant assessment, examine anticipated high price purchases for the coming years—whether vehicle replacement schedules, a new jail management information system, roofs, etc. and develop a capital budget within the jurisdiction's requirements.

### Important Data—

Identify and keep relevant data. Jails are data rich environments. Often jails don't understand the importance of relevant and meaningful data—not only for better management of resources, but to document and support inmate programs and services.

### Local Climate—

Assess the local climate continually. Knowing the scope of your community's economic conditions, the unemployment rate, creation or loss of jobs, sources of revenue to the jurisdiction's coffers, and emerging threats to economic stability is critical. These activities are not only important when considering future inmate populations. They also help administrators to anticipate how the funding authority will receive the jail's budget requests, or if it is the "time" to ask for budget or staffing increases.

### Opportunities for

**Collaboration—**Contact the jail's partners and stakeholders. Look for ways that small or large collaborations and sharing of resources might benefit all parties. Establish good relationships with the local chamber of commerce and local private business leaders. Identify any economies in contracts or purchases. (See the *American Jails* November/December 2015 issue for a discussion of core competency "Build and maintain positive relationships with external stakeholders.")

### Community Advisory Board—

Cultivate community input. If the jail doesn't have a community advisory board, consider starting one. Use community forums to talk about the jail, what is needed, gather input and enlist support. You know that the local animal shelter is assuring that their stakeholders are at their budget hearing, so identify and empower the jail's supporters.

### Your Crystal Ball—

Monitor emerging trends, new laws, changes in administrative regulations, and mandates to assess the impact on the budget. For example, consider the budget impact of meeting the requirements of the PREA standards, or consider the potential loss of revenue as the result the Federal Communications Commission's changes to how much profit a jail can receive from inmate telephones. Continually scan the environment for opportunities. Keep in touch with professional organizations and groups that can enhance the jail's mission, vision and values.

## Think About Inmate Health and Mental Health Care Costs

After personnel costs, inmate medical and mental healthcare costs will most likely be the budget's second largest expenditure—whether care is provided “in-house” or contracted. If there is a contract for services, dedicated and qualified contract management needs to assure the jail is receiving the services specified by the contract. Reviewing inmate grievances, expenditures for extraordinary medical costs, and examining litigation give the leadership team a perspective if the services are consistent with accepted practice and legal mandates. The Affordable Health Care Act provides an opportunity for some funding reimbursements (in States who adopt Medicaid expansion) and can link inmates to services in the community.

Examining costs may also lead to in-depth discussions with public health care providers about services and drug costs, with other local confinement facilities (e.g. juvenile facilities), or evaluating innovations such as telemedicine. Working to create or expand diversion programs, especially for inmates with mental illness, also has potential rewards for the jail on many fronts—above costs to inmate and staff safety.

## Create Advocates for the Jail's Budget in the Community; Partnering with Public Agencies

Without increased support from the community, funding for the jail will continue to be a struggle. Collaboration and improved understanding of the jail's challenges by the citizens does not guarantee more funding, but without it—nothing is likely to change. It is frustrating to think that the public doesn't understand and appreciate hard-working and dedicated corrections professionals. However without continual outreach, the public can lose the jail in the community's fiscal struggles. There will be always be “competition” among public sector agencies for limited dollars, and building partnerships with colleagues may lessen the negative impact of this annual budget tussle.

## Conclusion

Many resources are available to help emerging jail leaders embrace (and not run from) the budget process. These resources are cited in this article and provided in an extensive list for your library. It is clear from the research that budget literacy is an important element of success for jail leaders. The ball is now in your court. Learn your jail's budget inside and out. Find a mentor. Take charge. ■

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