

Evaluating the Coverage Plan

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This is the sixth of a series on staffing of jails. The articles explore the jail staffing analysis methodology developed by the National Institute of Corrections and enhancements that have been developed since NIC's latest workbook was published. The first five articles addressed the calculation of "Net Annual Work Hours," the development of a "Facility Activity Schedule," "Using Participation and Profiling to Improve Jail Staffing," and "Thinking Outside the Schedule: Determining Coverage Needs." This article examines the pivotal activities associated with evaluating coverage plans.

This series of articles builds on the pioneering staffing analysis methodology created by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and describes many enhancements developed since the NIC *Workbook*¹ was last revised. The NIC methodology has been embraced by jails throughout the United States and it has also been adopted by police, fire, transportation, health care and nursing home operations.

The methodology developed by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) promotes a proactive and creative approach that has proven successful in jurisdictions of all sizes. In previous articles we have addressed the first four steps that comprise the 10-step NIC methodology:

- *Step 1. Profile the Jail*
- *Step 2. Calculate Net Annual Work Hours (first and second articles)*
- *Step 3. Develop a Facility Activity Schedule (third article)*
- *Step 4. Develop the Staff Coverage Plan*
- *Step 5. Complete a Staff Summary*
- *Step 6. Develop a Schedule*
- *Step 7. Evaluate, Revise, and Improve the Plan*
- *Step 8. Calculate Operational Costs*
- *Step 9. Prepare a Report*
- *Step 10. Implement the Plan and Monitor the Results*

Step 5: Complete a Staff Summary. The fifth step in the staffing analysis process is by far the easiest. It asks you to step back and look at the magnitude of coverage needs you have identified and assemble your work products up to this point in the process. In some instances, it is necessary to go back with a sharper pencil and review the coverage levels because of budget realities. Completing Step 5 provides a "reality check" before spending the time and energy evaluating your work in the next step.

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.

A New Step 6. In the Second Edition of the *Workbook*, the sixth step involves scheduling. But based on our experience with dozens of jails of all sizes in the past few years, we have concluded that the scheduling step should be delayed. Schedules allocate individual staff members to specific time periods and days of the week. Coverage needs, as described in the previous article, represent what is really needed in the jail at a given time, and provides the foundation on which an efficient schedule may be developed.

Before taking the time and expense of developing a schedule, and possibly raising the concerns of staff, it makes more sense to thoroughly evaluate your coverage needs.

You heard it here first-- there's a new Step 6 in town.

Evaluating the Coverage Plan

This step is the most important one in the process. In many ways, the staffing analysis process requires a "trial and error" approach through which you test various operational changes, organizational structures, coverage schemes, and schedules.

The evaluative step is critical for both the veteran staffing analyst and the first-time user. It allows you to examine your work systematically up to this point and to identify problems before a schedule is developed, a report is written and before the plan is implemented. This step is the "equalizer" that puts the first-time user on equal footing with someone who has completed many staffing analyses. More important, it ensures that your expertise is central to the completion of the staffing plan.

As we move this evaluative step earlier in the process, we also resurrect some effective tools from the First Edition of the NIC workbook. The earlier edition provided a more thorough approach to the evaluative process, in three components:

- A. Evaluate "internal" efficiency and consistency
- B. Complete the Evaluative Checklist
- C. Complete additional checklists and evaluative procedures (optional)

Completing the first two components is considered essential in this process. The third offers additional resources for those who find it necessary or desirable to expand on their evaluative efforts.

The evaluative process identifies problems or deficiencies with your coverage plan. As these are identified, you will need to return to earlier steps in the staffing analysis process to revise your work:

- In Step 1 (Profile) you should consider changing policies and practices to facilitate staffing efficiencies. This might include changes in separation (e.g. which inmates are allowed to participate in programs together) or how your

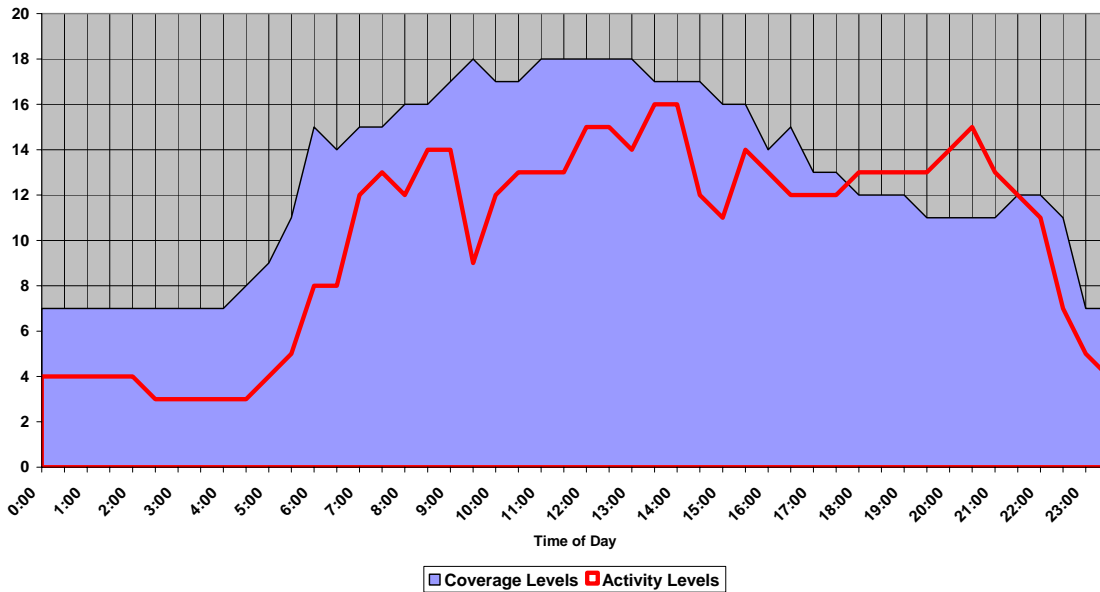
facility is used (e.g. which inmates are housed in specific areas) or many other refinements in how you operate the jail.

- In Step 2 (Net Annual Work Hours) you should consider ways to keep staff members at their posts, such as employing new training technology or reducing the use of sick time.
- In Step 3 (Activities) you should consider further refinements in your daily activity schedule to reduce the peak demands for staff, and you might want to move some activities to times when staffing demands are lower.
- In Step 4 (Coverage) you should identify additional efficiencies that ensure that staff are deployed only when they are really needed.

A. Evaluate "Internal" Efficiency and Consistency of Plan

The first component of the evaluation is to carefully review the work that has been recorded on several forms and graphs. The graph that you made in Step 3 of activity levels should be compared to the one you made of coverage levels in Step 4. While activities and coverage do not correspond on a one-to-one basis, comparing the two graphs helps identify inconsistencies.

Figure 1: Comparison of Activity and Coverage Levels



In Figure 1 you will note that from the hours of 1800 to 2200, the number of staff does not seem to correspond to the level of activities. This might suggest the need to modify either the activity levels or coverage, or perhaps a little bit of both. While it might seem easier to simply assign more staff, this will usually be the most expensive solution.

Modifying activities may be a bit more trouble, but it may produce new efficiencies. Changing an activity schedule may sometimes a “domino effect” in which a change might impact several other aspects of the activity schedule. But managers usually have more control over their operations than they have over their budget and finding ways to “work smarter” may pay off in many ways.

Figure 1 also suggests that coverage levels are significantly higher than activity levels for the first several hours of the day. This reflects the need for a minimum level of staffing to ensure the safety of inmates in the event of an emergency. Since activities levels are so low, there are opportunities to find ways to use the extra staff hours that must be deployed. This might involve moving more activities from the day and evening hours to the early morning, such as creating court lists, updating logs and records, and similar administrative tasks. It also offers opportunities for supplementing staff training through emerging technologies, such as computer-based learning. By training staff while they are on post, the Net Annual Work Hours (NAWH) would be increased.

The goal in this analysis is to provide enough staff at the right times, without maintaining higher levels of staffing when activities do not require them.

Many staffing plans will be deficient because too few staff are assigned. When this happens, tasks go undone, staff are overworked, and sometimes critical errors are made. Other staffing plans will be deficient because staff assignment does not drop when it can (based on activities). In these instances, all tasks are accomplished, but at a higher cost than might be necessary. Few jails have the luxury of assigning more staff than they need at any time of the day. When this happens, it usually means that there will be other times that are left with insufficient staffing resources.

If you have identified major deficiencies at this point, you may elect to correct them before you proceed with the evaluation. If you do, be sure to pick up this process where you left off.

B. Complete the Evaluative Checklist

The Evaluative Checklist provides a template for evaluating your staffing plan and its component parts from a variety of perspectives.

- Part 1 addresses internal consistency and plan efficiency
- Part 2 asks key questions concerning coverage
- Part 3 provides a method to assess operational adequacy
- Part 4 raises standards compliance issues
- Part 5 evaluates provisions for “backup”
- Part 6 suggests ways to secure broader review and comment
- Part 7 provides a summary chart for problems and an aid to diagnose the appropriate responses

Part 1 provides a format for comparing the consistency of your activity and coverage levels, such as the comparison graph in Figure 1.

Part 2 poses a series of key questions, such as:

- Does the plan present any conflicts with existing employee contracts or agreements?
- Does the plan pose any problems in terms of shift changes during key periods of the day?
- Is supervision provided for all staff at all times?

Part 3 applies a series of “scenarios” to your coverage plan to gauge its sufficiency. These ask you to “walk through” several operational procedures using the coverage plan. For each of the issues you should consider the steps involved with implementing the practice, with an emphasis on:

- Who is involved or responds?
- How long does the function take?
- What areas or functions are left uncovered?
- Are all involved staff qualified?

A shopping list of scenario topics is provided to get you started, including such activities as:

- Serving meals to all inmates under staff supervision
- Processing new arrivals
- Implementing inmate visiting
- Providing inmate exercise/recreation
- Conducting sick call
- Delivering inmate medication
- Conducting formal counts
- Implementing inmate programs
- Moving inmates to and from court
- Conducting staff meetings
- Exchanging inmate clothing and linen
- Distributing and collecting mail
- Conducting an evacuation drill

Part 4 examines compliance with standards. State standards provide one critical source of evaluation for coverage plans. More than half of the states have some form of jail standards. Professional standards have been promulgated by several organizations, including the American Correctional Association (ACA). A separate checklist has been developed around the ACA requirements.

For each issue that is identified in the standards, you will need to determine if your coverage plan allows you to comply with standards:

- At all times
- For every type of prisoner
- In all areas of the facility

Some of the issues identified through the standards include:

- Maintaining records and management information systems
- Providing continuing observation and around the clock supervision of inmate housing areas
- Providing enough staff to ensure prompt release from locked areas in the event of an emergency
- Maintaining a control center
- Providing assistance from another staff member whenever an officer enters a high security housing area
- Protecting inmates (from abuse, corporal punishment, personal injury, harassment)
- Implementing disciplinary procedures, reports, and hearings
- Conducting inmate classification
- Providing inmates with physical exercise

Part 5 asks you to look at your coverage plan in terms of the provision of “backup” for staff. To assess backup needs, you will be asked to consider a series of contingencies in various locations in the facility, such as:

- A disturbance in a cell area
- A combative prisoner in the booking area
- A fire requiring evacuation of the facility
- A planned use of force

For each of the contingencies you will pick a location, a day week and a time of day. You will consider how staff will react to the problem:

- Which staff will move to an area to provide backup?
- How long will it take?
- What areas are left uncovered as a result?

Part 6 guides you through a process of involving more people in the evaluation of the coverage plan. One of the best evaluative methods at this point in the process is to share the draft coverage plan with staff and officials and to solicit their comments and concerns. This will help to ensure that the plan is scrutinized from several perspectives.

You should consider seeking comments from:

- Line staff (including a sampling of those assigned to different posts)
- First line supervisors
- Mid-management staff
- Contract service providers (medical, education, counseling, etc.)
- Program and activity staff
- Administrative and clerical staff
- Support staff (maintenance, food service, etc.)
- Jail inspector

Some jails actually ask *all* staff to review and comment on coverage plans.

Part 7 provides a method for recording all of the deficiencies and concerns that have been identified, and analyzing each in terms of the potential solutions that should be considered. A "diagnostic" tool helps you determine which step(s) are needed to correct problems. Consider a "brainstorming" approach to improve your plan--assemble a team, put all the deficiencies on the table, and go to it.

C. Complete additional checklists and evaluative procedures (optional)

The Evaluation Checklist provides two additional evaluative resources as appendices. Each provides a more detailed and focused evaluation.

The ACA Standards Checklist converts elements of the professional standards developed by the American Correctional Association (Adult Local Detention Facilities - Fourth Edition) into a series of questions. Completing this checklist provides an indication of compliance with the professional standards and points to weaknesses with the breadth of services provided.

The Time/Task Analysis Worksheet is a more complicated tool. This worksheet offers a different perspective on the adequacy of the coverage plan. It requires delineating tasks to be completed at given times, determining the amount of time required to complete each task, and, after adjusting for "down-time," comparing required time with allocated staff. This tool has proven very effective in resolving disputes about the adequacy of staff at a specific post.

EVALUATE.... REVISE, Then EVALUATE AGAIN

The changes you make in response to deficiencies may create other problems. Evaluate revised coverage plans thoroughly. Use the results of secondary evaluations to guide further revisions. Continue with the "evaluate-revise-evaluate" loop until an evaluation yields satisfactory results. When your coverage plan receives a clean bill of health from an evaluation, you are ready think about scheduling.

Be sure to record all changes you make during the revision process, including changes in the jail setting (operations, facility). This will leave important "tracks" that will be helpful later in the process and in subsequent reviews.

Remember that developing a coverage plan is often a trial-and-error process, so be patient and persistent. Make a first attempt, step back and review the results, and then try to find improvements. The First and Second editions of the *Workbook* provide some helpful tools to remind you of the range of issues to be considered. New tools have been developed in the past few years. All of these tools are available at no cost at a new on-line staffing analysis clearinghouse, located at www.StaffingAnalysis.com. The clearinghouse is a service provided by CRS, Incorporated, a non-profit organization (www.correction.org).

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