

# Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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**What skills, knowledge, and abilities do jail leaders** need in order to be a 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 ninth installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

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



Human Resources

## Becoming a Full Partner with Human Resources

**Description:** Obtain the human resources (HR) needed to achieve organizational goals, then allocate them in a manner that:

- Aligns with the approved budget.
- Supports the jail's vision, mission, and values.
- Assesses employee strengths/weaknesses.
- Properly delegates authority.

**Rationale:** Because a majority of the operating budget of most jails are expenditures on staff salaries and benefits, the significant priorities are recruiting, retaining, and developing competent personnel. This requires insight into HR issues, both nationally and locally. Moreover, assuring a sufficient quantity and quality of well-trained and highly motivated staff is fundamental to safe and secure jail management, administration, and operations.

### Knowledge:

- Jail staffing needs based on objective analysis and relationship to the approved budget.
- Local, regional, and State employment/economic conditions.
- Laws, administrative regulations, bargaining agreements, and policies related to human resources (e.g., ADA, FMLA, etc.).

- Processes to evaluate employee performance and retention strategies to retain the jail's workforce.

### Skills:

- Effectively collaborate with HR functions (whether controlled by the jail *or* not).
- Understand staffing analysis, mandated posts, related staffing responsibilities, and associated training needs.
- Assess HR processes (e.g., hiring process, length of hiring process, screening) and the impact on hiring and retention.
- Determine the impact of employment markets on the jail's ability to recruit and retain staff.
- Collect and analyze the jail's employee data (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, generation) and develop action plans as necessary.
- Advocate for positions and staff salaries/benefits, as needed, with the funding authority.
- Align the organization's decision-making related to HR with relevant regulations and laws.
- Convey expectations and assess employee performance using valid job requirements.
- Align staffing with the budget, including use of overtime.
- Hold employees accountable and use remedial plans for inadequately performing staff.

## 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.

### Abilities:

- Objectively analyze and prioritize staffing needs.
- Maintain a commitment to staff training and succession planning.
- See the “big picture” in terms of the jail’s position as an employer of choice in the community.
- Make fair selection, retention, disciplinary, and other HR decisions on the basis of applicable legal rules and regulations.
- Match performance measures with job requirements.
- Uphold ethical standards (on and off the job).

Without a qualified, trained, and stable workforce, the jail’s current and future daily operations—and hence the community’s safety—are in jeopardy. Staff shortages are connected to inmate violence, inmate and employee injuries, inadequate care of inmates with special needs, the negative effects of mandatory overtime on people and the budget, and the resulting low morale.

It is often a downward spiral for the jail leader: fewer staff equals mandatory overtime, equals fewer staff. In most jails, employee-related costs comprise 80% of the total facility budget. Although articles and studies (Barrett & Greene, 2016) document the jail-staffing crisis, there are very few solutions offered—other than finding a way to book fewer people in jails! While a worthy goal, that solution is clearly not helpful when supervisors are trying to fill each shift every day.

Many jail administrators report a tense and unproductive relationship with their HR staff—those who are supposed to help with jail staffing. This often dysfunctional relationship may exist even if the HR function is part of the jail’s parent organization (as opposed to being a function within another local government agency).

### The HR Perspective

To be fair, just like the jail or organization responsible for the jail’s hiring and other personnel functions, HR has a budget and staffing set by a funding authority. And just like the jail, the required number of staff and budget to perform all the work is never enough. In addition, HR must also assure that the organization’s hiring and personnel actions are conducted within legal frameworks, laws, and administrative regulations. Therefore, the issue is how to make the jail a priority. How can HR be educated about the impact of their decisions and operations on the daily safety of the staff and inmates?

A majority of the shortcomings in the relationship between the jail and HR (as identified by jail leaders later in this article) are relationship/communication issues. Administration needs to establish exactly what the jail’s responsibilities are and then strategize on how to make this critical partnership work.

This article addresses how jail leaders can begin to actively partner with human resources and become better consumers of information, in addition to galvaniz-

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“Jails have traditionally been understaffed. If personnel are among the jail’s most precious resources, it is critical that they are deployed in the most effective manner.”

—ELIAS, 2007

ing HR functions to be part of the solution to the jail’s staffing crises. There are, no doubt, excellent HR organizations that are dedicated to and understand their role in the jail’s operations. This article is *not* for those jails or professionals.

### Human Resources 101: The Responsibilities of Jail Leaders

The first critical step for jail leaders to become full partners with HR is to develop objective, supportable data that accurately identifies the jail’s staffing needs. This data is the foundation of the jail’s budget, hiring process, and retention initiatives. The number of employees needed to operate a jail—no matter the physical layout—is a “knowable” number. While there may be arguments about the *costs* of the plan, a number is a number. To be an effective partner includes knowing the relevant and current data about the jail’s needs. The following is critical data that jail leaders need to know.

**Staffing Analysis.** Determine when the most recent staffing analysis for both sworn and civilian staff was conducted. If it is longer than five years ago, then you have work to do (Miller & Wetzel, 2012).

- Conduct your own staffing analysis or contract with a qualified and credible outside vendor. The data needed for either option is obviously the same no matter who does the work. Perhaps the funding authority may be more inclined to “believe” a contractor’s numbers, if they are expecting the jail to argue for too many staff. At the end of the day, no matter who does the staff analysis, the data will speak for itself. If using an outside vendor, assign a competent and knowledgeable staff member to coordinate the data collection. Be sure you are included with the review of findings as the project moves forward.
- Involve the funding authority. Assure that the funding authority is aware of the methodology, the data to be used, and how the process will unfold. Having a liaison from the budget office throughout the process

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[www.justice.gov/dag/file/815551/download](http://www.justice.gov/dag/file/815551/download)

will reap rewards. Again, at the end of the day, there still may be a strenuous give-and-take on the dollars that a plan will cost, however, the jail will be able to demonstrate good faith by identifying its needs objectively.

- Actively seek input from staff about how to improve operations. Don’t miss the opportunity to capitalize on turning naysayers into “brain-stormers.”
- Learn the perspective of advocates. Those whom you may meet across a table in a courtroom may also be willing to help identify issues and develop alternatives to staffing.
- Involve external stakeholders. Keeping the community informed, using resources available from the business community to inform them about issues and to ask for support is critical. If the jail could do it alone, the jail would do it alone. Remember to consider all options and partners.

**Staffing Implications.** Identify the staffing implications of emerging mandates and trends.

- Conduct a staffing review based on PREA standards.
- Consider the staffing impacts of the recent initiatives to curtail the use of restricted housing (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2016).
- Develop an environmental scan to identify other emerging issues (e.g., reentry initiatives, proposed changes in State laws).
- Identify critical regional economic factors, such as the unemployment rate, and consider that information when developing staffing initiatives. If the jail’s data is unconnected to the local economy and business community, the results of any strategic planning will have dubious reliability.

**Staffing Options.** Identify and analyze *all* staffing options. These discussions can be uncomfortable because they will break the mold of how *things have always been done*, and must involve collective bargaining units and/or employee groups. Nonetheless, these examinations are essential to creating and defending a staffing plan before a funding authority and your own employees. The staffing analysis process noted previously can provide guidance on how to look at jail functions by time of day and day of week for potential cost and staff savings. But there is more work to do. The jail leadership needs to answer these questions:

- Are there tasks/jobs/posts that can be performed by trained civilian staff? Has staff deployment been analyzed?
- Are there functions that can be performed (cost neutral or less) by contractors (for example: maintenance, food service, medical care, and information technology)?
- Are there job tasks that can be consolidated?





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“Adequate staffing is essential to effectively managed, safe, and secure jails. Jails with staffing deficits are more vulnerable to litigation, compromise community safety, and place both inmates and staff at higher risk for harm.”

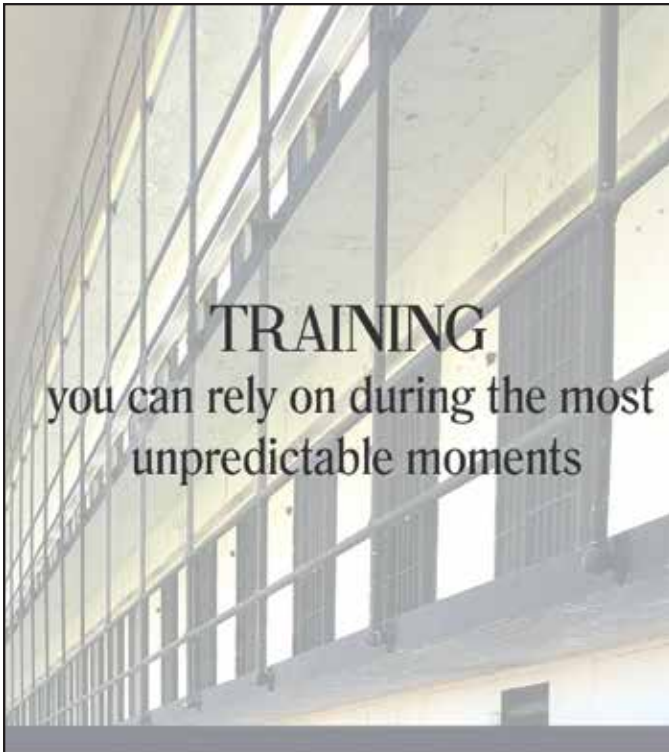
—MARTIN & KAPSAMPES, 2007

**Job Descriptions.** Create and update your jail’s job descriptions.


- Assure that the job description accurately describes the skills, knowledge, and abilities (SKAs) needed to do the work. For jobs that are considered as “entry level” (such as corrections officers/deputies positions), the SKAs are often minimal—just the very basics. This traditional approach is especially prevalent in local government, and it is the jail’s responsibility to document what SKAs are needed. In addition, the SKAs must be reflective of the communication and requisite skills needed for that particular job. For example, what are the SKAs needed to manage direct supervision housing units? In other words, these skills may not always be “just the very basics.”
- Review the research and findings regarding jail operations (particularly direct supervision) and then update the SKAs. These updates help HR to advertise the job and screen candidates.
- Ask HR for help to perform what is called a “desk audit” to validate the SKAs.
- Link the SKAs of jail jobs to others in the local government sector and in private industry.

**Jail Data.** Know your jail’s data. You may need to ask HR about the data derived from the hiring process if it is not readily available. Jail leaders need this data in order to engage HR and their funding authority. You should have current information regarding:


- Number of employees who are leaving jail employment each month. What was their length of service and where are they finding other employment?
- Number of applicants who come in the “front door” until one employee is hired.
- Length of time for the average hiring process. How does that compare to the jail’s competition? If the length of time between application and hire is longer than 4 to 6 weeks, ask why and then find ways to shorten the process without compromising quality.
- Feedback from new employees about the hiring process. Is it too long, too short, or too complicated? Sadly, a finding from a survey of corrections employees revealed that more than 50% believed no one cared about them during the hiring process (Stinchcomb, McCampbell, & Leip, 2009). This is easily fixed when applicants are a priority.
- Strategies that provide the best results for your jail’s recruitment. That is, what is the most cost-effective strategy for getting applicants in the door? Most likely, you’ll find it is word-of-mouth and the agency’s internet presence. Analyze the agency’s website to learn how informative and useful it is to applicants. Can applicants apply on-line?



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- Effectiveness of your hiring steps. Critique the steps in the hiring process: what is the number of applicants who drop out at each step and why? Ask the purpose of each step in hiring process.
- Date when the hiring process was last examined and modified (if at all) and the changes to the process.
- Comparison of your jail's salary and benefit structure to other public safety organizations in the region. What are the trends? What are the differences?
- Usefulness of the exit interview process, and how this information gained is shared and used.

**Workplace Diversity.** Understand the strength of workplace diversity, and examine the gender, race, and age make-up of your workforce. Is it reflective of the community and the inmate population? If not, perhaps you need to develop recruitment and retention plans to gain the strength provided by a diverse workforce.

**Partnerships.** Create partnerships with stakeholders, the community, and HR.

- Don't ask why there is trouble recruiting if your jail's staffing needs are unknown or the quality of the applicant pool is lacking.
- Examine and update all recruitment materials to accurately reflect the job.
- Assure that HR staff tour the jail often, and encourage them to talk to staff and inmates. This puts a human face on the impact of HR's actions or inactions. If they won't come? Don't give up; find a way to make that happen.

**Regulations.** Learn the rules. Become an informed consumer of the rules for FMLA, ADA, etc. Ask questions, analyze problems, communicate with HR, and apply what you have learned. While being respectful, challenge conventional wisdom about why you can or cannot take action. The internet is a great resource for clarifying issues and starting conversations.

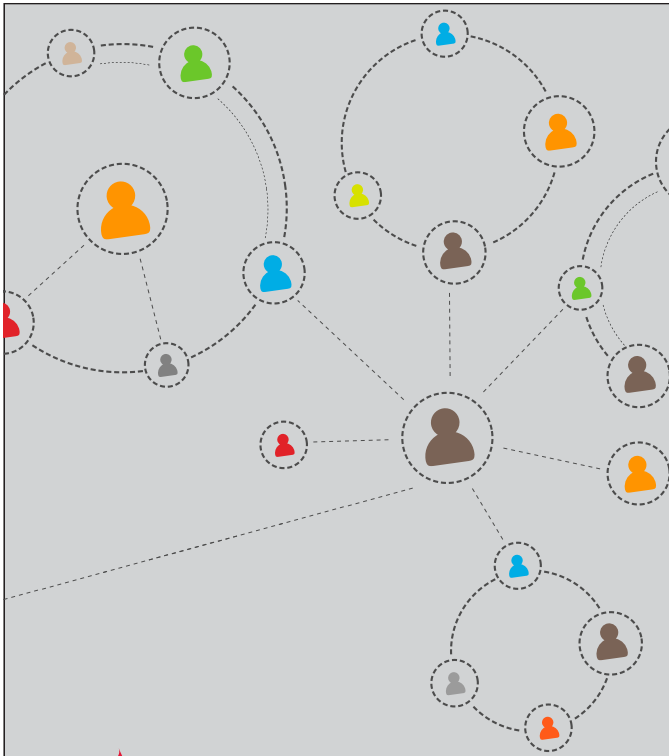
**Action Plan.** Develop a plan of action.

- When you have the data, facts, and information, plan the next step. Without a plan, no progress can be made nor can options be considered and re-considered. Involve the jail's managers in the development of the plan and its implementation.
- Find allies in other public safety agencies, the business community, and among stakeholders.

Jail leaders cannot afford to sit back and allow other organizations to negatively impact the jail's operations, especially when those agencies are supposed to be *helping* the jail. Jails need to respectfully gain information, create strategies to get what is needed, and then develop

## The Jail and Human Resources: Point and Counterpoint

Jail's Complaint	HR Considerations	Solutions
HR is generally indifferent to the jail's needs and doesn't understand the impact of vacancies and insufficient staff.	HR has obligations to all user agencies and the workload does not match HR's current resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the data.</li> <li>• Learn about HR's budget and resources.</li> <li>• Help HR advocate for resources.</li> <li>• Ask for monthly in-person meetings to discuss issues.</li> <li>• Determine how to work "smarter."</li> </ul>
HR staff haven't toured the jail and won't come to the tour even if asked.	We have a challenge with multiple priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep asking, find sympathetic staff, target new staff.</li> <li>• If all else fails, go to HR's boss and ask for their help.</li> <li>• Make the tour attractive: timeline, agenda, lunch?</li> </ul>
HR uses recruitment strategies not targeted to the jail's needs, just not attracting the "right people."	We have multiple end users that strain our resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review/update all posts.</li> <li>• Identify minimum SKAs for positions.</li> <li>• Provide data regarding hiring/retention for the jail, including why people say they are leaving.</li> <li>• Be sure that jail supervisors and leaders are not contributing to turnover; update their skills.</li> </ul>
HR is slow to advertise vacancies and doesn't leave position vacancies open, resulting in a lack of steady flow of applicants.	We have multiple priorities and need to sequence our work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the data, the time it takes for hiring decisions to be made.</li> <li>• Identify the impact of vacancies on morale and the budget.</li> <li>• Offer to help.</li> </ul>
HR operates in a "because they've always done it this way" mentality and are not open to new ideas or input from the jail.	We are understaffed with increasing demands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather information for HR to support the jail's needs.</li> <li>• Present the information non-judgmentally.</li> </ul>
HR moves at a glacial pace when processing applicants; good applicants are lost because of the time to hire.	There are required steps in the process to meet legal and administrative regulations; we have limited resources to process applicants and don't want to do it incorrectly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the number of vacancies anticipated in the next 3 to 5 years, including promotion openings.</li> <li>• Identify the number of applicants lost during the hiring process and why (e.g., got job elsewhere).</li> <li>• Examine all steps in the hiring process and identify what can be changed without endangering quality hires.</li> <li>• Examine options for outsourcing parts of the process (background investigations, polygraph, etc.).</li> </ul>
HR fails to provide evidence or data to support using—or not using—the steps in the current hiring process.	This data is not shared with user agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather the data through collaborative efforts.</li> <li>• Identify legal, administrative, or "traditional" reasons why data isn't collected, analyzed, or shared.</li> </ul>
HR is unhelpful in staff retention and/or the promotional process and/or leadership development.	Retention is not a priority given our resources and mandates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the jail doesn't have a retention plan or a leadership development strategy, don't ask why HR can't help.</li> <li>• Develop the plan, ask how HR can help.</li> </ul>
HR provides incorrect advice regarding critical employee issues such as FMLA, FLSA, ADA.	Our advice is correct based on our information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an informed partner and learn the information yourself.</li> </ul>
HR does not share the information, or act on the results of exit interviews.	We use this information for our uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out how the process works.</li> <li>• Learn if the jail's leadership is entitled to the information legally.</li> <li>• If the jail receives the information and does nothing with it, then this is a problem.</li> </ul>



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### What's with Human Resources?

Although vital to the jail, HR operations often appear out of the control to the jail leader; either because the function is embedded in another local government agency or there is an absence of meaningful collaboration—even if HR is part of the jail or the sheriff's office. The table on page 47 highlights the complaints that jail leaders often have about HR, and also provides possible solutions.

These snapshots of what may not be working in the jail/HR continuum are not meant to be all-inclusive, and admittedly don't include examples of those places with a good HR relationship. The goal of this discussion is to highlight how critical it is for the jail's leadership to accept their responsibilities, to identify problems, and then seek solutions. This is not to naively suggest that the issues come with easy or ready-made solutions. But if the path toward problem-solving is not taken, nothing is likely to improve.

### What's Next?

Many jails suffer from having uncompetitive salaries, as well as the public's negative perceptions of working in a jail. These are tough to overcome, but not impossible. If the capabilities of HR need to be increased to assist the jail, extra resources may be needed. Overwhelming tasks or unsuccessful initiatives are not reasons to abandon this important work.

Jails need to engage in an internal self-critical analysis to assure that the organization's internal culture is not why people are leaving (as opposed to salary). If increasing salaries is not an option, plan for what's next. Develop partnerships and get the data. The relationship with HR may need to be re-established or mended.

Don't wait! Develop your plan now. Work with HR to gain an agreement, in principle, that the jail is a vital part of the community's safety, and that staff deserve to be paid fair wages and be supported by supervisors and managers who share the vision.

Send a copy of this article to the head of your HR function. Invite them to lunch to discuss their perspective, and begin to gather their support for your shared responsibilities. ■

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