

# NEBRASKA

# JAIL BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER 1996

NUMBER 129

The *Jail Bulletin* may be used as a supplement to your jail in-service training program. If officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz, they may receive **one-half hour of credit**. The bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for staff use as necessary. ***We welcome any material you would like to contribute to the "Jail Bulletin".***

## INMATE CLASSIFICATION PROGRAM PART I

### INTRODUCTION TO CLASSIFICATION

#### FORWARD

Inmate classification is one of the most effective tools available to corrections staff for the successful management of jail populations. Part of the reason this Bulletin was prepared is to explore why this is true and to examine the ways in which classification is an integral part of operations within a jail setting.

It is also intended to provide detailed information and instructions regarding all phases of a classification process. It is, therefore, both a resource and a manual of rules and suggested procedures.

Since the classification process involves, at some point, nearly all staff, it is important that everyone has a sound understanding of the system and is able to contribute to it. This bulletin is intended for use by staff at all levels within the facility.

The contents of the *Jail Bulletin* represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect official views or policies of the Nebraska Crime Commission or the Nebraska Jail Standards Board.

## I. WHY DO WE CLASSIFY INMATES?

The simplest answer to this question is **in order to make an appropriate housing area assignment**. But is it necessary to use a formal classification system just to make housing assignment? Couldn't a supervisor or booking officer just make the assignment based on his/her knowledge of the inmate?

Obviously they could, and for many years that was the traditional way of making assignments in jails nationwide. But doing things that way has serious drawbacks. For one thing, it is highly subjective. One staff member may see an inmate as being a particular kind of person, and another staff member may see the same inmate in a completely different light. The inmate could be housed in any one of several areas, depending on which staff person was on duty and making decisions. And in the process, important factors which should have been taken into account may be overlooked.

Another problem is that inmates can easily manipulate such a system and be moved from housing area to housing area as they choose based on their ability to be persuasive with staff. This can result in large numbers of inmates being constantly moved and also in some very inappropriate housing assignments.

Perhaps the major problem is that such an informal system can be viewed as being inherently unfair. In order to insure that all inmates receive equal treatment, it is necessary that the same criteria be evaluated in the same way for each inmate.

A more effective method of making placement decisions is one which:

- C uses a small number of trained staff, who
- C make classification decisions based on clearly identified, objective criteria
- C which are believed to be useful in predicting future behavior.

And that is the essence of what a classification system is -- a way of anticipating how each inmate is likely to behave based on how he or she has behaved before, and then using that information in making housing decisions. We base our judgements on the fact that one of the most reliable predictors of future behavior is past behavior.

But why do we place such emphasis on where we house a particular inmate? Because it is our best tool in preventing escapes and maintaining security. It allows us to identify the high-risk inmates and house them in areas where there is a greater degree of security and control. We can also group inmates with common characteristics together in such a way that disruptive behavior can be minimized and the safety of individual inmates and staff can be maximized.

## II. OTHER BENEFITS OF CLASSIFICATION

A systematic classification process does more than just guide staff in making housing assignments. Through a system of interviews with each inmate, periodic reviews, and referrals a number of other goals are achieved. Among them are:

- C **Management Information.** Through timely documentation, supervisors, program staff and administrators are made aware of potential problems.
- C **Providing for the safety of certain vulnerable inmates.** These may be inmates who lack the skills or sophistication necessary to adapt to a regular housing area, have medical, mental or emotional needs, may be easily victimized, or require protective custody.
- C **Identifying inmates with serious adjustment problems whose behavior cannot be successfully controlled in regular units.** Such inmates may be housed in specialized areas.
- C Enhancing short-term behavior control and longer-term treatment goals by rewarding inmates for following rules and regulations and attending programs.
- C Safeguarding inmates' rights to due process and equal protection.

## III. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

As with all programs and functions of a jail facility, the classification system is promulgated by the sheriff or jail administrator who has overall responsibility for its implementation and operation. Within the classification system a number of positions share responsibilities.

### **Program Staff**

Direct administrative control of the classification program should lie with the program staff. Depending on the level of staffing and chain of command, this includes responsibility for:

- C overseeing the day-to-day operation of the program;
- C arranging for initial and on-going training;
- C supervising the activities of the classification officers and making daily assignments, if needed;
- C recommending changes;
- C chairing the Classification Review Committee.

The Program Staff should also be responsible for approving all placement in the removals from Special Needs Housing.

**Classification Officer**

Classification Officers are the primary staff authorized to perform initial classifications or classification reviews. Classification Officers must be both:

- C designated by the Sheriff or Jail Administrator, and
- C specially trained.

Staff who do not meet both of these qualifications should not perform classifications.

**Jail Managers**

Jail Managers share with the Program Staff an interest in the over-all operation of the classification program. In addition, they:

- C may temporarily relocate an inmate to a different housing location if there is a problem with the inmate's classification;
- C approve/disapprove all placements into Administrative Housing;
- C approve/disapprove all over-ride recommendations. Jail Managers may also originate an over-ride in the absence of a classification officer recommendation for such.

**Shift Supervisors**

Shift Supervisors are not expected to perform initial classifications or classification reviews (such a practice may lead to a conflict of interest). However, due to their role as supervisors, they are an integral part of the classification process and must be completely familiar with all aspects of it.

Shift supervisors may make referrals for Special Needs Housing or Administrative Housing, and are responsible for insuring the correctness of classifications performed by Classification Officers under their supervision.

**IV. MEETINGS AND PROGRAM REVIEWS**

Classification is a process that involves many people working 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Lack of communication under such circumstances leads to confusion and inconsistency.

To facilitate communication, all Classification Officers will be required to attend periodic classification meetings. These meetings will focus on clarifying procedures, answering questions, discussing difficult cases, and exploring improvements to the classification system. Meetings will be

held as often as necessary, but must be held at least once per month.

Policies should provide for a systematic review of the classification system by administrative staff annually. This review is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the system. It is intended to insure that the system is being properly, fairly and efficiently implemented at all items.

The next bulletin will provide an overview of a mode disciplinary system.

The "Inmate Classification program" was adapted from material contributed by the Lancaster County Department of Corrections, Lincoln, Nebraska. We greatly acknowledge the contributions of Administrator Mike Thurber and his staff for this and other material. If you or your agency wish to contribute to the Jail Bulletin or have a special subject to be addressed through the bulletin, please contact: Jail Standards Division, P.O. Box 94946, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-94946, Telephone 402-471-3710, FAX 402-471-2837.

## QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in service training if an officer studies the bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspections.

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**SUBJECT: Inmate Classification Program  
Part I****NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. From the material, which of the following are problems that can be encountered by operating an informal classification system? (Circle those that apply)
  - a. It is highly subjective.
  - b. It requires expensive overtime.
  - c. It requires excessive documentation.
  - d. It can be manipulated by inmates.
  - e. It is inherently unfair.
  - f. It is difficult to obtain enough information.
2. A more effective method of making placement decisions is one which: (Circle one)
  - a. makes classification decisions based on clearly identified, objective criteria.
  - b. takes into account where bed space is available.
  - c. considers how long the individual will be in custody.
  - d. evaluates the tentative release date.
3. Why do corrections administrators place so much emphasis on where a particular inmate is housed.? (Circle those that apply)
  - a. It is the best tool in preventing escapes.
  - b. It allows for the identification of high risk inmates.
  - c. Inmates with common characteristics can be placed together.
  - d. It is a tool for maintaining security.
  - e. All of the above.
4. Classification goes beyond just making housing decisions. List the additional correctional goals that can be achieved.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
5. Direct administrative control of the classification program should lie with the program staff. (Circle one)
  - a. True
  - b. False

6. Classification officers are the primary staff authorized to perform initial classification because:  
(Circle one)
- a. they do it frequently
  - b. they are specially trained
  - c. they are on duty during peak admission periods
  - d. they are designated by the jail administration
  - e. a and d
  - f. b and d
7. Shift supervisors do not need to be familiar with classification because of their limited role. (Circle one).
- a. True
  - b. False

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**CREDIT:** One Half Hour credit for jail in service training requirement.

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## (Answers)

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  - d. **Enhancing short-term behavior control**
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**Answer sheet should be retained by the Jail Administrator.**