

69 Ways To Save Millions

CONNIE CLEM



Jail funding has been an issue as long as jails have existed. When economic times are good, jail leaders focus on getting the most impact from a workable budget. When the squeeze is on, the question becomes how to continue to operate, and operate safely.

The U.S. recession has affected county governments in different ways. Some jails are being held to zero percent budget growth, though they are obliged to meet cost-of-living wage adjustments. Other jails must actually cut their budgets. Actual or anticipated budget pressures create the need to find new solutions.

To learn how jails have responded to the recent economic downturn, the author contacted jail administrators from across the United States. This article summarizes the ideas and strategies that are enabling them to deliver on their commitment to public safety. Two themes that emerged involve reducing services without losing what's essential, and preserving those line items that actually create savings. These savings may be seen within the jail itself, in the broader public safety system, or elsewhere in government.

As Chief Jailer Jim Coleman (Shelby County, Tennessee) notes, budget crunches only reinforce

existing problems with jail funding. By helping people understand the value of jail work, jail leaders can turn around those perceptions and improve their position for funding requests. Director Stacy Sinner (Olmsted County, Minnesota) says she looks at cost control at four levels of focus—jail operations, jail administration, the county board, and the State legislature. The key is seeing the jail from both inside and out—that is, seeing the jail's relationship with local justice, county government, and statewide policy on law enforcement and public safety.

The author would like to thank the following jail leaders who provided interviews or written material for this article:

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Timothy P. Ryan, Director, Miami-Dade County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Miami, Florida.

Aaron Shepherd, Administrative Lieutenant, Ada County Sheriff's Office, Boise, Idaho.

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Scott Story, Sheriff, Waldo County, Maine.

A. T. Wall, Director, Rhode Island Department of Corrections, Cranston, Rhode Island.

Art Wallenstein, Director, Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation, Rockville, Maryland.

Tara Wildes, Chief, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Jacksonville, Florida.

Agency staff and allies outside the jail can all be sources of good ideas and support in the face of budget pressure. Jails may also be able to raise revenues in various ways. Overall, handling budgetary challenges takes professionalism, engagement, and leadership, coupled with demonstrated good stewardship of public resources.

Specific cost-cutting strategies can focus on five main cost areas: physical plant, operations, programs and services, personnel, and population management.

Physical Plant

Running a jail facility is unavoidably expensive, but energy is one area where jails are finding ways to reduce their costs. No-cost energy use audits may be available from a local utility. The jail in El Paso County, Texas, does its laundry at night, during off-peak hours, when energy costs are lower.

Jails can add motion sensors to control lighting use, where appropriate, and to turn off televisions when no one is present. Some jails may be able to take advantage of energy-saving features in their facilities' control systems. One jail learned that its light fixtures could be programmed for control and activation by the shift supervisor.

El Paso County saved money when it found the jail's dayrooms had adequate natural light from skylights. Olmsted County decided to reduce the jail's lighting by one-third after business hours—after confirming that the security cameras would continue to work at lower light levels. In addition, simply asking the jail staff to turn out the lights in empty rooms and in storage spaces also can add up to savings.

Solar energy offers significant potential for energy cost savings and earned income for jails. El Paso County is installing solar photovoltaic collectors in a planned facility expansion, in a partnership with the local electric company. Much of the power generated in summer will

offset air conditioning costs. Delores Messick (retired chief deputy, El Paso, Texas) says, "Long term, we're talking about a lot of money." If excess generated energy can be pushed out to the electric grid, the jail will also gain income. The agency is also restoring a solar hot water system that had been idle for many years on the roof of a downtown high-rise facility.

Operations

Jails are finding many ways to reduce costs in their basic daily operations. Capt. Pat Hunton (Monterey County, California) says detailed oversight of expenditures in service and supplies accounts is essential. It is also important to distinguish between the nice-to-have and the must-have. Agencies can get more mileage out of items such as bedding and inmate clothing. A new laundry system in Boulder County, Colorado, has reduced the use of chemicals.

Olmsted County found that it could limit inmate television to basic cable while providing patrol staff access to channels including necessary weather information.

Transportation partnerships may be an option for some jails. Maine's counties use a unified inmate transportation system, with certain counties acting as hubs. The Transports Across Colorado cooperative had saved the Boulder County jail nearly \$60,000 in salary costs alone by mid-2009.

Director Art Wallenstein (Montgomery County, Maryland) recommends that jails find opportunities for contract bridging, in which county or State agencies become party to other publicly bid contracts on services such as telephones, pharmacy, and food service. Jails cannot only find the best deals but also eliminate months of staff time otherwise needed to manage the contracting process.

Participating in the State purchasing system has turned out to be an advantage for some items such as cell phones and vehicle purchases,

says Sheriff Glenn Ross (Penobscot County, Maine). But for some other routine purchases, such as bread, his agency finds better deals by shopping day to day.

The Tulsa County Jail came out ahead when the administration aided a new partnership between the jail's food service vendor and commissary contractor. The food service vendor gets cheaper pricing on items that are sold by the commissary. Placing vendor-provided commissary purchasing kiosks in the housing units has also increased sales and revenues.

Tulsa County also sells prepaid phone cards to inmates. Because they can be used to call cell phone numbers, the cards are quite popular. Chief Deputy Tim Albin (Tulsa, Oklahoma) says that the jail not only receives revenues, but bed use is also down because it is easier for detainees to reach family and friends to make bail. The phone system also yields intelligence that has proven useful for jail security, law enforcement, and prosecutions.

In food service, jails often can find lower-cost ways to meet dietary standards. For example, as Director A. T. Wall (Cranston, Rhode Island) points out, fresh fruit is less expensive than juice. In Boulder County, the jail grows most of its own produce on a one-acre garden overseen by master gardeners, the jail's nutritionist, and the food service manager. In El Paso County, the jail bakes its own bread and deserts, and graduates of its 720-hour training program are well placed for employment after release.

Medical care also takes a big bite out of budgets. Oklahoma counties partnered with the State sheriffs' association and a medical care provider to ask the legislature for help on paying for care of indigent inmates with pre-existing conditions. Jails often receive inmates, such as methamphetamine addicts, who need hospitalization. New legislation made inmates responsible for payment, and hospitals can file for

Medicaid or Medicare reimbursement at State rates.

The Boulder County Jail has negotiated to pay Medicare rates for hospitalizations and is collecting Medicare and Medicaid payments for inmate care. To reduce pharmacy costs, jails can use formularies and switch to generics where possible. The jail in Kent County, Michigan, provides incentives for the medical care contractor to find cost reductions.

Technology innovations also can lower the jail's operating costs. Electronic kiosk cash systems reduce labor costs while making services more convenient for the public and inmates. The jail in Jacksonville, Florida, was able to eliminate a number of paper forms and distribution of copies by substituting an electronic process, all at the suggestion of line officers.

Jails are expanding their use of video conferencing for court appearances and cutting officer and transportation costs. The jail in Ada County, Idaho, uses video conferencing for arraignments other than for district court and is looking into doing the same for State prisoners, whom the jail must otherwise transport to the court.

Ada County also is implementing an electronic facility management system that will centralize data ranging from special diets to work program participation to court dates. Commander Bill Black says his staff in Boulder County, Colorado, are impressed by the scope of the information they obtain from their facility management system. Monthly team reviews of system data go a long way toward helping control costs throughout the agency, from purchasing and maintenance to overtime control.

Inmate Programs and Services

Historically, inmate programs have been an easy target for cuts. When budgets come down to the wire, essential services must take priority. Keeping a security position

inside the jail can be more important than a supervisor position for an inmate work crew, and people will adjust to seeing longer grass on the facility grounds.

But not all programs are optional. Regarding essential mental health care, Sheriff Ross says the public and decision-makers seldom understand the precariousness of the jail's situation. For example, if his jail loses funding for a mental health care contract through the local hospital, the jail will lose access to some 1,500 mental health screenings per year. These screenings are crucial for reducing jail suicides. Ross says, "If you're a trucker, you're going to have to have tires. If you're in the jail business, you're going to have to have mental health care and a pharmacy."

While helping to reform juvenile justice in Nebraska, jail consultant Mark Martin learned how to tap into a range of Federal funding sources with potential relevance for corrections. Jails may find funding for mental health care, vocational rehabilitation, and other social services programs for which States receive support that seldom finds its way into corrections. To explore funding options that will assist jail inmates, Martin recommends building relationships with other agencies and systems of care.

Even with non-essential services, jails need to be careful not to make program cuts that have unintended consequences. More than one jail has cut a program to eliminate a position, such as a work release supervisor, and found itself with more beds filled as a result.

Some work programs are valuable for their public relations benefits. Sheriff Ross directs work programs that generate goodwill plus cost savings. Inmate work crews salvage material from overturned tractor trailers on icy winter roads. Salvaged cargo sometimes is donated to the jail.

Director Tom Merkel (Hennepin County, Minnesota) emphasizes

that jail leaders need to understand evidence-based practices. They need to know what works and what does not in terms of inmate programming and outcomes. Decision-making needs to be data-driven. Director Roy Mueller (St. Louis County, Missouri) expressed concern that budget cuts could mean eliminating the case managers who provide services on the housing units and are important in supporting successful reentry. Sheriff Scott Story (Waldo County, Maine) describes a restorative justice program in which volunteer mentors work with inmates before and after release. The Boulder County Jail reentry program has cut recidivism from around 65 percent to just 15 percent, and El Paso County also has a reentry program with less than 15 percent recidivism.

Lower recidivism brings system-wide cost savings plus good public relations. Chief Jailer Coleman points out that the staff benefits when their work is perceived more positively by the public. Coleman also notes that assessments conducted in jail could jump-start inmates into academic and vocational programming after conviction and save system resources.

In El Paso County, inmates in a worker training program transformed the agency's headquarters landscaping at nearly no cost to the county. The master gardener, sprinkler/irrigation system, horticultural design, and planting tracks came together in the project for hands-on experience. Cactus, other plants, and rocks were salvaged from an expansion site at nearby Fort Bliss to create a botanical display garden.

Personnel

Personnel expenses are one of the main targets for reductions. When budgets need to be cut, Director Mueller says, "That means people." Chief Deputy Albin agrees, observing, "Everyone's number one cost is personnel." Attrition and retirement incentives are often cited as tools to save on staff costs. Yet whatever the personnel cost pressures may be, the

need for safety and security is absolute—for staff, inmates, and others who enter the jail, as well as for the greater community.

It can be illuminating to look more broadly at what forces drive a jail's need for personnel. Simply cutting positions may be counterproductive. Salary and benefits are the both the largest cost item and a key element of attracting, rewarding, and retaining staff. Administrators constantly need to balance agency budget needs and the effects of job cuts on staff morale. Too thin of a workforce also makes the remaining staff compensate in ways that may be too stressful to maintain over time.

Commander Black says, "The mental health of the staff is worth quite a bit." In Boulder County, Colorado, county staff received a smaller salary increase, and the jail was able to cut work days and reduce staff work hours. Staff were willing to accept these changes because they did not lose health care benefits or pay more in insurance contributions.

In Olmsted County, Minnesota, the employee bargaining units all agreed to furloughs. All staff will have their work days reduced by 9 days per year, though non-contract staff could have been required to take as many as 12 days. This saving has enabled the agency to continue giving annual cost-of-living allowance (COLA) increases. The COLA element is powerful leverage, because retirement pay is based on the employee's five highest-earning years.

Operating with fewer personnel can work, says Chief Deputy Albin, but it takes careful oversight from management. "If a problem develops in the jail, the response within the first hour is what matters. That means supervisors." Some jails are dual-tasking their supervisors and managers. Aside from the vacancy savings, the agency can benefit as staff gain cross-training and expertise in more functions. But demands

must be monitored carefully and kept in balance, to prevent staff from reaching burn-out.

Director Mueller has made one unit manager responsible for two housing units of four pods each. Operating at this level is not easy, he says, and unit managers are on a one-year rotation. In the same jail, a county-wide hiring freeze has meant that some posts are now staffed completely via overtime. Approved new unit manager, case manager, clerical, and correctional officer positions went unfilled, and the classification unit is handling growing numbers of incoming inmates without the help they had been expecting.

San Diego County closed a minimum-security camp rather than freeze hiring at all eight of the county's jail facilities and operate them less safely. The closure saved direct operating costs, and by reassigning staff, the department also eliminated vacancies and reduced overtime at other sites.

Agencies facing personnel cost pressures can also step back for a broader perspective on the jail's role and the role of staff positions within the operation. A review of jails in Maine suggested that several smaller county jails could be closed, but officials realized arresting officers would spend many more hours transporting detainees. The Ada County jail sought help from the court in getting at least the high-security cases scheduled first on the day's docket, to keep inmates and their officer escorts from spending all day at court or experiencing case continuances.

Examining officer assignments can uncover opportunities to shift tasks and save on personnel costs. Director Marilyn Chandler Ford (Volusia County, Florida) recommends that jail managers look at their posts from two perspectives. First, they can identify which posts the jail would keep filled at maximum staffing levels and ideal budgetary conditions. Then, they can look at their essential threshold

posts that are necessary for keeping the jail functional on a safety and security basis. This review process shows what posts can be cut back safely if budget pressures dictate. Performance indicators such as disciplinary reports, staff and inmate injuries, and assaults provide useful data.

Director Wall suggests listing the tasks that must be performed, then examining what staff positions can perform them. A jail may be able to reconfigure posts, consolidate posts, or close a post at a particular time of day. The Ada County jail created an 11:00 to 11:00 swing shift to increase staffing for the busiest times and reduce staff for the slower times.

Correctional officers may not be needed to perform certain tasks. Jails can look at who handles the control center, who is directly supervising inmate workers in food service, who handles commissary activity, or who is doing data entry in booking. Chief Patricia Mundell (Jefferson County, Colorado) was able to convert overtime funds to create 15 full-time equivalent civilian detention specialists in the jail.

Creating a detention officer classification is another option. New recruits in Arapahoe County, Colorado, complete a 9-week detention officer academy rather than the full 16-week POST certification. Graduates are weapons-qualified, but their law enforcement authority is restricted to their duties in the jail. Bureau Chief Phil Spence (Arapahoe County, Colorado) says the new track also helps the jail hire people who are interested in a corrections career path rather than patrol.

To say overtime is a money pit for many jails is an understatement. Though overtime may seem to be a fact of life, there are ways to tame it. The first step is to determine where overtime money is going. A review of overtime in Monterey County, California, revealed a steady increase over three years, though minimum staffing levels had not changed. Supervisors had increased

staffing levels without authorization, misunderstood the shift minimums, or had requested and approved supplemental staffing.

Agency culture can be a factor in overtime use. Director Sinner says, "High performers make it in to work." Olmsted County monitors staff with three or more unscheduled absences, and those who reach six absences lose their opportunity to bid for preferred shifts. Sinner continues, "As public servants, we need to look at performance issues as it relates to things like overtime costs. We have to be responsible to the taxpayers."

Chief Mundell notes that the Jefferson County Jail implemented a new shift plan in January 2008 that reduced overtime in the detention division by more than \$500,000. Director Wallenstein recommends that jails should avoid letting posts go vacant, to avoid the overtime needed to cover them. He says, "Recruit 'til you drop so you have positions in the drawer to fill vacant posts."

The keenest tool for understanding staff deployment and reducing overtime is the net annual work hours analysis. This process helps the jail calculate the positions needed to fill its budgeted posts and avoid using overtime to fill incidental vacancies or permanent positions. The analysis factors in every category of leave that can keep staff away from their posts, including smaller categories such as injured on duty leave, leave for injuries while not on duty, and medical review status.

Training costs are another common target when budgets need to be cut. A slower economy can mean less staff turnover and fewer staff needing entry-level training. Director Ford says jails can cut some positions, but, "You don't want to lose all your trainers. The continuity is valuable." Olmsted County is utilizing its training staff and resources to improve the agency's performance in areas such as gang management and information technology.

Population Management

Jails exist because people are detained in or sentenced to them to achieve public safety ends. The steady supply of inmates creates a steady demand for jail beds. Understanding who is in the jail, and why, can lead communities to cost savings and a more effective justice system. Jails can actively lead this process to arrive at better public policy solutions.

Admissions and length of stay drive jail populations. Regarding crowding, Sheriff Story notes, "The problems are very systemic. ... At the end, there's a prison warden or a jail administrator standing at the door to take these people. They are the last ones to have any say in who comes here."

Director Wall concurs, saying "Jails can never say 'no' to an admission." Controlling admissions and releases can be done only through cooperation with police, prosecutors, and the judiciary, and the solutions take a lot of analysis and planning.

In jails where the population tends to fluctuate, units may be able to be closed. Wall says that, even if a unit remains closed for just a day or two, this saves money and reduces the need for overtime as unit staff are redeployed elsewhere.

Seemingly small changes can cause population jumps. Director Mueller says that as result of bonds being set a bit higher for two felony classes, fewer detainees are able to make bond. Maine analysts looked at consistency in pretrial practices throughout the State—for example, in the use of assessments to avoid needless incarceration. It made no sense to jail offenders in some locations only because they could not come up with \$40 for a bond fee or \$250 for bail.

Relationships with local criminal justice actors can be very important—judges, the State's attorney, the public defender, and public safety coordinating councils, and even with local police. Director Ford says it's helpful when these actors under-

stand how their actions affect the jail. Street sweeps, no-tolerance policies for probation violators, charging practices, and new laws all have population impacts.

At root is the question of the jail's mission. In Ada County, the sheriff led a dialog on the role of the jail in the community—who needs to be in the jail because of risk? One result of the county's policy reviews is that offenders who were once released on \$50,000 bond are now released on \$5,000 bond plus electronic monitoring.

Chief Mundell described how agencies in Jefferson County joined in adopting a jail-use plan that documents a commitment to effective jail use by the sheriff, the chief judge, and other policymakers. The mission of the detention facility is specifically defined, and all criminal justice officials are engaged in regulating the jail population. Keeping beds open is a stated goal to deter the commission of new crimes and noncompliance with court orders.

The jail population in Boulder County has gone down over the past few years, after only one small expansion since 1988. Commander Black attributes this to local justice system collaboration, dating back to the 1993 establishment of a criminal justice management board and a range of alternative sanctions. He says, "There are too many other needs in our society to be building jail cells." The board implemented a plan in which a person mandatorily sentenced to work release will serve that time in a placement determined by the jail—a weekender program, home detention, or a jail-based program.

Though admissions are one driver of jail populations, average length of stay has a greater impact on the average daily jail population. Analysts in Montgomery County have studied pretrial population dynamics closely. With half of jail inmates being in pretrial status, any



way to safely reduce pretrial length of stay is good strategy.

Director Wallenstein notes, "We have found that the more aggressive we are in understanding and engaging pretrial process, the lower we can drive the count." Montgomery County has been able to keep one unit closed for three years, for savings in operating costs and new construction. The county created a pretrial section that assesses new arrivals for bail review and the court, and it developed an assessment matrix that provides a structured rationale for recommending pretrial release. Recommendations for pretrial release (for those not bailed out immediately) rose from 17 percent in 2005 to 45 percent in 2009. The failure-to-appear rate has remained below 4 percent.

Montgomery County also created a new pretrial expediter post that establishes release eligibility for detainees who were not immediately released on bail, recognizance, or pretrial supervision—for example, by identifying an address or a family member to assist. This has cut several hundred bed-days per month.

Case continuances or "trailing dockets" are a problem for many jails. Delays can occur at trial, between conviction and sentencing, and after probation and parole violations. Sometimes jails can help examine these processes. Director Mueller's agency is studying pretrial options that will cut case processing time. The expedited approach in use in Washington County, Oregon, and elsewhere is of interest. This concept involves meetings of the defense and prosecution before arraignment to see if the case is suitable for a quick resolution. If the defendant agrees to the offer, a guilty plea is entered and the inmate begins serving a sentence in prison, jail, or the community rather than remaining in pretrial status for some length of time.

Montgomery County jail officials began meeting regularly with the courts and judicial system agencies to address court process. Taking a collaborative approach, the jail advocates for prompt scheduling of sentencing and encourages line prosecutors to argue against any continuances. A focus on pretrial process requires analysis across the entire system to identify efficiencies, and it raises—and attempts to answer—tough questions.

Unfunded mandates also fill jail beds. Jail officials in Olmsted County, Minnesota, are working with legislators to identify unfunded mandates that could be modified or repealed. They succeeded in repealing the State's Short Term Offender (STO) statute, which required that prison-sentenced inmates with less than six months to serve be housed in jail. This equated to about 20 inmates per day in Olmsted County, which is sometimes the difference between the jail operating at capacity and needing to buy beds elsewhere. Hennepin County analysts found the STO statute would shift about \$1.5 million in costs from the State to Hennepin County.

When a new law goes into effect that will involve the jail population, Director Ford recommends that the jail review its impact with the local criminal justice coordinating council and justice system. Past data can be used to forecast added admissions or jail sentences, plus lengths of stay.

Jails have found different solutions to their own specific population pressures. The Arapahoe County Jail in Colorado created a trustee program to handle a significant population of inmates with misdemeanor sentences and an U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement (ICE) detainer. Trustees earn 10 days of good time per month, which allows the jail to move them out faster. Tulsa County officials observed that, after 18 months of operating the 287(g) Program with ICE, the jail's inmate count was down about 100 to 150 inmates per day. The change was traced to lower

numbers of aliens cycling through the jail, as a result of deportations.

When the jail in St. Louis, Missouri, closed a work release program to cut staff costs, it turned to electronic monitoring to reduce bed needs. Judges who want to get tough on parents who fail to pay child support are encouraged to use electronic home detention or a weekender program instead of jail time.

Jefferson County operates a court date notification program to reduce bed use related to failure to appear. Callers provide court date notification to mainly misdemeanor defendants, provide other information, and answer questions.

Mentally ill detainees present special issues. Olmsted County uses the “Memphis Model” of crisis intervention, with patrol officers identifying mental illness issues on the street and diverting people to mental health facilities rather than jail. Montgomery County created a dedicated space for competency assessments in the jail, which are performed by State psychiatric hospital staff. This is saving the jail staff time, transport costs, and hospital bed-days. Jefferson County has a transition planner that acts as a liaison with the mental health department and helps arrange housing, job, and other services for inmates before they are released. A pilot project has the county probation and mental health agencies paying for 30 days of medications for releasees.

The jail in Arapahoe County operates a program that moves mentally ill offenders into the community for services. Arapahoe Diverts the Mentally Ill for Treatment (ADMIT) is a 26-week day reporting program for qualified jail-sentenced offenders. ADMIT provides treatment and medications, plus housing for participants who lack a suitable family residence.

Revenue Options

Jails may also decide to take advantage of, or expand on, opportunities to charge for jail services.

Many jails receive significant bed-space revenues for housing U.S. Marshals prisoners, ICE detainees, State inmates, and/or detainees brought by law enforcement officers outside the jail’s normal range. Boulder County is participating in the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), with revenues helping to fund reentry programming. Program revenues also fund a contractor position to manage the paperwork involved. Chief Deputy Albin notes, “You’re never going to make a profit running a jail. But you can make sure everyone who uses the facility is paying their fair share.” [*Editor’s Note: Jail facilities considering the housing of ICE detainees should be aware they will be required to meet various Federal requirements that may be beyond their respective resources.*]

Making a Plan

When asked where they get ideas for cost savings, the administrators noted in this article shared these strategies:

- Get your staff engaged and reward them when they contribute.
- Network with other jail professionals—at national and regional conferences and meetings, and in online communities.
- Look outside the jail community to other government sectors, the business community, and vendors.
- Read, stay current, and continue to scan the news media to anticipate new issues.
- Use the National Institute of Corrections as a resource.

Deputy Chief Leroy Kirkegard (Las Vegas, Nevada) and others emphasize that communication with staff is essential in times of fiscal trouble. They need to understand what is happening with the jail’s budget and how it will affect them. After the sheriff made it clear that no officers would lose their jobs as a result of the downturn, the Las Vegas jail staff stayed committed and

engaged in solutions. Capt. Hunton concurs that line staff need to know how reductions will impact them, and supervisors need to know what role they will play in reducing costs.

Director Merkel states, “It goes without saying that the folks are your most valuable resource, so don’t avoid the hard conversations about program redesign, staffing patterns, and hiring freezes.” He suggests having as many face-to-face conversations with staff as possible and keeping communications open between management and staff.

Undersheriff Jon Hess (Kent County, Michigan) says staff need to be heard, not talked to. Director Sinner encourages staff to bring up ideas and talk with their coworkers. “We ask line people to do their best, and to let us know how we can save money.” A steering committee made of line staff has been “on fire” with ideas. The county government has used café-style meetings where staff from all levels in each department have “speed-dating” conversations to brainstorm on issues including criminal justice.

Director Tim Ryan (Miami-Dade County, Florida) adds that a jail leader should “constantly listen to his/her staff, for they seem to always be watching how we can we do better.” Chief Tara Wildes (Jacksonville, Florida) says staff “appreciate being consulted for their thoughts, which assists in the maintenance of good morale.”

Engaging with the profession also is key. Director Ford says that she gains both immediate and long-term benefits from professional meetings and programs. Some ideas can be instituted immediately, and other ideas help her form a long-term strategy. Some jails may be allowing staff to travel to conferences if they use vacation time or pay their own travel costs. Jail consultant Mark Martin observes, “My ideas for cost management came from research, direct experience, and long involvement in working with a group of the most creative, innovative, and

efficient folks around. ...Small jail administrators have always had to get what they need through creative and innovative means and somehow make it work."

Jail administrators also need to engage with the jail's funding body and county leadership. This means doing your homework to make sure your budget requests are justified. Director Merkel advises jails to package their data—"Now more than ever, you need to be able to quantify the work you do." Capt. Hunton outlines the flow of information this way: "The sheriff needs to hear how reductions will affect overall operations. The sheriff justifies line item costs to the board of supervisors. The board compares the need of other county departments and ultimately decides how to apportion cost reductions." It is essential that the jail leadership provides clear and credible information to support these decisions.

Director Ford says integrity and reputation are at the core of the jail administrator's ability to advocate for the jail. At some point, jail leaders will have to stand their ground with budget people. It's important to educate the decision makers—county councils or boards of commissioners—on what it takes to run a jail in accordance with safety and security mandates. The decision makers need to have confidence that they are getting full and complete information when jail leaders tell them what they can cut and what the impacts and risks will be. This takes trust.

Finally, engaging the public is good strategy. Capt. Hunton says that it helps when the public is aware of the steps that jails are taking to use shrinking dollars in a responsible manner. Asking for book donations for the library, as Olmsted County has done, can demonstrate the jail's practical needs.

Director Merkel adds that leaders need to understand and communicate the department's mission at every opportunity. Sheriff Ross makes the point that not only is

the jail using public money wisely, it also is providing useful public services. Chief Jailer Coleman gives, as one example, the jail's role as a barometer of community health and a resource for control of conditions such as MRSA, mental health issues, tuberculosis, and influenza.

Importance of Public Stewardship

Sheriff Story says that on the one hand, corrections faces "not-in-my-backyard" attitudes and a lack of funding—but when crime happens, the public also wants the justice system to "throw that guy in jail." Perhaps the reality is sinking in that public safety is not cheap.

Director Ryan observes that jail operations have always been the last to be funded and the first to be cut. But without an adequately funded jail, public safety cannot be maintained. Public safety and security must be the priority. If the jail is inadequately funded, law enforcement will not have a place to put criminal offenders, and the community will not have the level of safety they expect. The jail also may become at greater risk for legal action, with potential consequences that will divert resources away from other areas of community need. Safety and security within the jail will be diminished, resulting in more escapes, officer injuries, and other outcomes affecting the facility and the community as a whole. Without an efficient and effective jail operation, public safety is diminished and the true cost of all other public safety and justice services will go higher.

This all points, says Director Ford, to the need for jailers to continuously educate the decision makers (county commissions, legislatures, and the public as well) on the consequences of one choice versus another, and how controls and reductions impact the jail's mission of security, safety, and public protection.

According to Director Merkel, "Make no mistake about it, working your way through these tough financial times will require leader-

ship. Innovation and redesign must be the overriding strategy." Director Wall agrees, stating: "Now more than ever, it's time to make these decisions." In good budgetary times and in bad, jails need to safely perform the duties assigned to them by elected officials. It's up to today's jail leaders to forge the best path. 

Resources

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