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**addressing correctional staffing issues:   
4 factors that make an impact**

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Correctional staffing presents a unique set of challenges—whether you’re struggling to find personnel or to create a coherent schedule that factors in the complexities of the facility. With so many considerations, it can quickly become overwhelming to create an effective staffing plan. But without one, the results are devastating: [staff burnout](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/causes-of-burnout-in-corrections/), unsafe operations, high turnover, and ultimately an inefficient and [ineffective facility](https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2022/09/26/prison-staff-shortages-take-toll-on-guards-incarcerated-people). Knowing what impacts staffing is critical to helping your facility set and reach attainable, sustainable staffing goals.

Many agencies may look at just one piece of the puzzle when determining their staffing needs, but all factors must be considered when developing a comprehensive staffing plan. These factors are:

1. The agency’s mission and vision
2. The standards and state-specific requirements the agency follows, as well as its established policies
3. The physical plant (including technology) of the facility
4. The operations and activity level of the facility

Let’s take a look at each of these factors in turn and see how they fit together to influence a facility’s staffing plan and capabilities.

**Mission & Vision**

An agency’s mission addresses and outlines the goals and objectives of the agency. Your mission statement is central to every aspect of your facility’s operations and, as a result, your staffing. Key considerations from your mission and vision include everything from facility security to community safety and intervention to rehabilitation. Each of these items and the focus of your mission has a significant impact on required staffing levels. Continuously referring to your mission statement as you conduct a staffing analysis will keep you focused on what matters most to your agency and community.

**Standards & Policies**

While standards and state requirements themselves rarely dictate staffing levels in correctional facilities, they do illuminate what must be done and how often. These standards sometimes go as far as to indicate who must perform certain tasks (e.g., female deputies perform female [inmate searches](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/todays-tips/operational-searches-in-corrections/)).

Even more than the standards set by the state or regulatory organizations, agency [policy](https://www.lexipol.com/solutions/policies-and-updates/) defines many—if not all—of the critical aspects that impact staffing, including staffing minimums, leave time allowed, and detailed information on the operations of the facility and personnel tasks. For example, if your agency’s policy prohibits unescorted inmate movement of any kind by any classification, staffing must be adjusted accordingly to ensure personnel levels accommodate those security needs. Understanding the implications of policy on staffing and your budget is a byproduct of conducting your annual [staffing analysis](https://www.corrections1.com/jail-management/articles/can-you-defend-your-facility-staffing-in-court-bJtVSPtzPd4BHxrd/).

**Physical Plant & Technology**

The physical plant of the facility is an often overlooked factor in determining correctional staffing needs. This includes the environment, geography and technology of the facility, which, taken together, provide the context in which operations and activities function. Consider inmate classification and housing availability. Is your jail equipped with subdayrooms that serve as mini-housing units or must you house various classifications in separate housing units? Are your mealtimes staff-intensive, requiring movement, or do your inmates eat in their dayrooms or cells? Do you often house and transport inmates from outside of your jurisdiction? Each moving part can dramatically influence your facility’s staffing needs.

Next, consider how [technology](https://www.corrections1.com/products/communications/articles/technology-in-corrections-increasing-efficiency-enhancing-safety-and-addressing-officer-retention-dTa7mpKZHT7TsOFe/)–which can include closed-circuit television, video visits, electronic locks, intercoms and more—plays a role. Technology may be able to make your facility more efficient in staffing and providing services to inmates. What might seem like a large up-front cost for technology updates may save your facility time and money down the line in staffing efficiencies. A key question here: Are inmates allowed to move unescorted, being monitored by Central Control? As new jails are built, the focus is on bringing programs and services to the housing unit, as opposed to moving inmates to the program spaces. Such approaches to improve staff efficiency aren’t available in all jails, but they effectively demonstrate how your physical plant impacts your staffing needs.

**Operations & Activity Level**

Activities and operations are the pulse of the jail—they’re also the reason you need to implement a staffing plan. This factor identifies the type and volume of the things you do, including both the operations within your control and things outside your control. Intentionally analyzing your activities and operations should help you identify *when* you do the work and *how long* it takes to complete. Consider:

* Inmate downtime
* The time of day activities take place
* Whether those activities are spread out across shifts
* The impact of shift changes on activity level
* Relationships with nonprofits or educational entities in your county
* , [Regular incidents](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/the-smooth-shift-the-dream-of-every-correctional-officer/) that consume staff time

These are just a few examples of activities in your facility that dictate what type of staff are needed, when and where.

Also central to jail operations are your inmates. Inmate-related factors that influence staffing can include length of custody and the gender of your inmate population and whether it is shifting, leading to a shift in staffing needs. Understanding your inmate population begins with developing and regularly reviewing your inmate profile. This profile speaks to your staffing needs, specifically when it comes to the characteristics and training of personnel.

Each of these factors plays an important role in understanding both the needs of your facility and how to address them with a comprehensive staffing plan. To learn more about how to address challenges in jail staffing, download the white paper, “[Real-World Jail Staffing: How to Develop a Correctional Facility Staffing Plan that Works](https://info.lexipol.com/correctional-facility-staffing-wp).”

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**AMANDA HASSENSTAB** worked for a private criminal justice consulting firm for nearly two decades before joining the Lexipol team. During her career, she focused on the planning and operations of new and existing facilities throughout the country. Realizing the heart of a facility is centered around the staff who fills it, jail staffing became her focus and passion. The goal of each staffing analysis Amanda has undertaken was to take a holistic view of the organization and its staffing woes and deliver a practical and functional staffing plan. Amanda is a 20-year law enforcement wife and mother to three teenage children. She enjoys traveling with her family and continuous learning opportunities.