



GUIDE TO JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

JAIL PLANNING & DESIGN FOR EVOLVING INMATE POPULATIONS



At one time, classifying inmates when booking them into a county jail facility was relatively cut and dried. Housing of inmates may have been determined based on their gender and whether they required minimum, medium, or maximum security.

Times have changed.

This resource offers valuable insights into the intricacies and challenges of modern jail classification systems. From dispelling common myths to providing practical solutions for optimized security and inmate management, this guide will equip you with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about jail planning and design to provide compliant inmate housing.

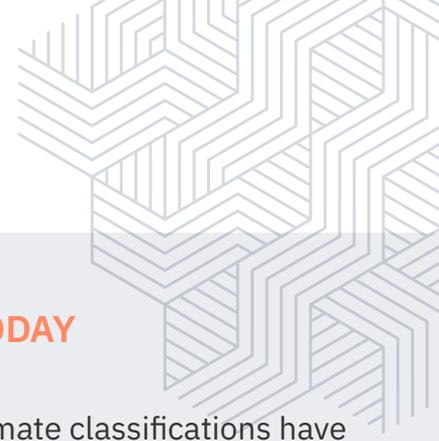


WHAT ARE JAIL CLASSIFICATIONS?



Jail classifications are a categorization system for inmates that helps determine their housing needs based on various factors such as gender, security risk, behavior, and special needs. This process helps authorities effectively manage and allocate resources within correctional facilities, ensuring the safety of inmates and staff.

INMATE CLASSIFICATIONS: THEN & NOW



THEN: 1800s — 1970

The history of corrections facilities is a storied one. Prior to 1870, corrections facilities emphasized retribution and punishment based on the type of offense. Most inmates were kept in comparable settings without much regard for separating minor offenders from those who committed more serious crimes.

In the late 1800s, the concept of reform and rehabilitation was introduced. For much of the 20th century, classifications became more subjective and emphasized psychological diagnoses, sociological causes, and medical deficiencies. In the early 1970s, public frustration with rising crime rates grew, prompting another shift.

Nearly **2/3** of jail inmates **struggle with mental health.**

About **1/2** have an actual **mental illness diagnosis.**

NOW: 1970s — TODAY

Since the 1970s, inmate classifications have trended toward more objective systems based on defined legal factors (severity of the offense, prior convictions, etc.) and personal characteristics (age, gender, mental health, etc.). Those who book and classify inmates must assess their level of risk for the person being booked, staff, and other inmates in addition to program needs.

More recently, jail administrators and sheriffs have been challenged with evolving societal norms and, thus, evolving classifications. Departments work diligently to outline definitions within their objective classification system to determine custody status and housing assignment, but the reality is that there are numerous nuances and circumstances that may warrant unique treatment of individuals, leading to as many as two dozen classifications in some cases. In fact, classification of an inmate may vary from one facility to the next.





CHALLENGES OF MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG INMATES

There's no question that those who commit crimes must be held accountable. But the harsh reality for many inmates is that their behavior is likely enhanced due to undiagnosed and untreated mental illness. Most jail facilities are not equipped with the accommodations or professional staffing required to treat mental illness which can help reduce recidivism rates.

Myth: Those with mental illness can be sent to a mental health facility.

Fact: Most state mental health facilities face even greater capacity challenges than jails, with long wait lists of 75 or more patients.

At one time, an officer might have been assigned to keep vigil with an inmate at a mental health facility, hospital, or nursing home until they were discharged to a jail facility or released. Such practices are no longer realistic. An offender who qualifies for admission into a mental health facility may need to wait months to get treatment. In the meantime, they'll be kept in a jail cell until a bed becomes available.

RELATED RESOURCE:

Debunking Myths About Jail Classifications

[READ MORE](#)

EXAMPLES OF JAIL CLASSIFICATION CHALLENGES

Jail administrators and sheriff's offices often face difficult decisions about how to classify individuals and where to house them. Why? The following scenarios provide insights.



Inmate: Nick

Situation: Nick is a gang member who was arrested along with three other gang members as part of a homicide case. Each of the four gang members is technically in the same classification.

Challenge: Because all four inmates are potentially violent and suspected of being co-conspirators, they must be separated into individual cells that prohibit contact with each other or other inmates. All isolated cells are full and Nick has no where to be placed. Where should he be housed?



Inmate: Amanda

Situation: Amanda is a 27-year-old opioid addict who was arrested for possession and selling of illicit drugs. Shortly after being booked and classified as a minimum security risk, Amanda experiences severe withdrawal symptoms and becomes a threat to herself and others.

Challenge: Administrative staff needs to follow withdrawal protocols and temporarily reclassify Amanda. The jail facility does not have individual cells available to house her nor adequate staffing to monitor Amanda's medical complications. Should they transfer her to a neighboring county or hire temporary medical staff?



Inmate: Sam

Situation: Sam is being booked into the county jail for threatening an individual with a knife. The admissions officer discovers that Sam is transgender and is in the process of transition.

Challenge: Should the admissions officer place Sam in a female or male cell block?



Inmate: Carter

Situation: Carter's large family is well known to law enforcement. He and several of his family members have been booked into jail for disorderly conduct and domestic disputes.

Challenge: The conflict among Carter and his family members is so volatile that they cannot be housed together. Due to space constraints, the administrator is forced to transport Carter to a neighboring county.



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FOR EXPANDING JAIL CLASSIFICATIONS

The options for accommodating evolving and expanding classifications may be limited based on a jail's footprint and capacity. The following are potential options to consider.



Transport Inmates

A temporary fix might include transporting inmates to another county that has capacity. However, many counties with aging facilities may face similar constraints, and an inmate may need to be transported several hours away. If the receiving facility runs out of room, the inmate will be transferred yet again. Additionally, the county loses control over the care of the transferred inmate, which can be a liability risk. An inmate may also need to be driven back and forth to their county multiple times for court hearings. Combined labor, fuel, vehicle, and housing costs for a single offsite inmate could exceed hundreds of thousands of dollars.

RELATED ARTICLE: [Staffing Considerations for a New Jail Building](#)



Renovate Jail Facilities

A jail facility may have the option to reconfigure their facility to accommodate more classifications. Renovating a facility by reconfiguring larger dorm areas into smaller housing units to accommodate more classifications is one option, but it's important to understand that the number of beds and capacity will go down. Not all counties have that option, though, and may need to consider an addition or new facility.



Add On or Build New Jail Facility

Some communities may need to build a new facility to accommodate persistent classification issues. Jail planning and construction specialists work closely with Department of Corrections officials to design and build flexible facilities that have the ability to accommodate variances in inmate populations and mitigate security risks and potential staff shortages.

ADDITIONAL JAIL PLANNING RESOURCES

Expand your knowledge about jail planning, design, and construction with the following helpful resources.

- [Unique Considerations for Jail Design, Architecture, and Construction](#)
- [Prefabricated Jail Cells vs. Traditional Jail Construction FAQs](#)
- [Top 5 Issues That Cause Jail Construction Delays](#)
- [How to Successfully Transition to a New Jail Facility](#)
- [8 Major Jail Construction Challenges & Considerations](#)
- [Modern Correctional Technology Integration For Jail Facilities](#)
- [Not Enough Votes? Next Steps in a Failed Referendum Process](#)

JAIL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

When the time comes to plan for an expansion or new jail facility, it's critical to consider how classifications might evolve even further in the future. Statutes and administrative rules are being written to include fluidity, objectiveness, and the totality of an inmate's circumstances.

However, there's no way to predict future societal shifts that may warrant a new and unique classification category.

Designing a jail to accommodate the unknown is difficult. To mitigate risks, modern jail facilities are being built using podular designs. Compared to linear jail designs that require more staffing, podular jail design allows officers to monitor multiple units from a central hub. Podular designs also have smaller footprints, allowing a facility to configure more cell blocks and beds to accommodate additional classifications. And because podular cells can be isolated, jail staff may be able to confine individuals in unique classifications more easily.

RELATED RESOURCE: [The Benefits of Podular Jail Design vs. Linear](#)

Because of the multiple regulatory requirements surrounding classifications and jail design, it's imperative to work with a construction firm that specializes in jail planning and design. Samuels Group has successfully built and renovated numerous jail facilities in Wisconsin and Iowa. We work closely with sheriffs departments, county board members, and the Department of Corrections to ensure compliance and that a community's goals are met. Our team will also assist with town halls and communication plans to ensure taxpayers are fully informed and educated about the needs in their community.

[EXPLORE SERVICES](#)

Contact Samuels Group today to begin exploring options for expanding your jail capacity to accommodate more classifications now and in the future.



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