U.S. Department of Justice
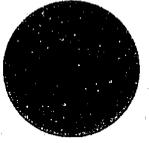National Institute of Corrections

JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

DOCUMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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JAIL CLASSIFICATION
SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

Jails constitute the most pervasive component of this nation's criminal justice system. More persons experience jail than any other form of correctional supervision. (Flanagan and Jamieson 1988). These persons include individuals who are detained on criminal charges, who have been sentenced to jail, who are in violation of their conditions of parole or probation, or who are awaiting transfer to another confinement facility. They are characterized by wide-ranging risks and needs, creating complex and demanding requirements for jail managers. These conditions pose a particular challenge for inmate classification, a vital component of effective management but one that often has been neglected due to high volume of admissions and rapid turnover in jail population.

Considerable attention has been afforded classification of prison inmates in the last decade. Much of that emphasis has been the direct result of changes in prison utilization. Increasingly prisons have become crowded, dangerous institutions, in which the perceived public demand for harsh sentences are being met while attempting to comply with court rulings that confinement condit- ions not be so inadequate that they violate constitutional rights to just and humane punishment.

Jail systems now seem to be following in the wake of their prison counterparts. Inmate populations are burgeoning beyond facility capacity. Jails are housing, at least for short periods, more violent inmates. Litigation against jails is increasing. These factors have begun to create among jail administrators, (as

previously occurred with prison officials), a clear recognition of the need to allocate limited physical, program, and financial resources in a manner that best protects staff and inmates while meeting the primary correctional goal of public protection. In this environment, classification has come to be viewed as both a management tool and a means for enhancing consistency and equity in decision-making.

At the forefront of classification today is "objective classification." Objective classification relies on a narrow set of well-defined legal factors (e.g., severity of offense, prior convictions, and prior incarcerations) and personal characteristics (e.g., age, residence, and employment) to guide decision-making. These items are incorporated into a standardized form or checklist that is used by staff to assess every inmate's custody and program needs. Emphasizing fairness and explicitness, objective classification features the following elements:

- o Employment of classification instruments that have been validated for inmate populations;

- o Use of the same classification approach for all inmates;

- o Assignment of inmates to custody levels consistent with their backgrounds; and

- o Promotion of similar decisions among classification staff on comparable offender cases.

As a management tool, objective classification also has been found to facilitate:

- o Defense in litigation pertaining to jail operations;

- o Identification of appropriate levels of supervision for differing inmate risks;

- o Effective use of personnel based on an understanding of divergent custody and program needs;

o Provision of data useful to facility planning; and

o Generation of information that can be used in monitoring and evaluating system goals (Jeffers 1980).

While jails have just begun to explore objective classification, prisons have been employing it for a number of years; several objective prison classification systems have been designed and widely implemented.[1]

In light of all these developments, the Jails Division of the National Institute of Corrections, in 1986, funded a project to devise an objective classification system that would meet the unique needs of jails and be readily adaptable to jails of all sizes. This project involved three separate but interrelated phases of work.

Phase One defined the functions of a jail classification system and, via a literature review and national survey of jails, identified a set of objective criteria as indicators of inmate risks and need.

Phase Two focused on the design of an objective classification system with four sets of instruments: screening, initial classification, reclassification, and inmate needs assessment. This phase also involved development of effective strategies for implementing the system.

Phase Three involved field-testing the instruments at three jails. The test, or implementation, process entailed ongoing

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[1] See, e.g., the Security Designation/Custody Classification System developed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Custody Determination Model developed by the National Institute of Corrections, and the Correctional Classification Profile developed by Correctional Services Group, Inc.

monitoring of the classification system and assessment of its effectiveness. Based on field-test results, the instruments were further fine-tuned to meet specific jail needs.

The project also included a review of objective jail classification systems that have been implemented in other jurisdictions but which utilize different formats and policies. The findings on those systems underscore the point that no universal classification system has been established. Each jail must develop its own system based on its particular needs and organizational environment.

This Executive Summary provides a condensed version of the Final Report (available from the NIC Jail Center). It describes the development and implementation of the system and the major findings of an evaluation of the implementation process.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE
OBJECTIVE JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The primary objective of this project was to develop an objective inmate classification system that would not only meet the unique characteristics of jail operations, but also be flexible enough to accommodate use in a variety of jail settings. Equally important, project staff sought to devise a classification system that would enhance correctional decision-making, thus augmenting the ability of jails to better manage their resources.

Such a system required the use of standardized instruments--or decision-making aids. These instruments, in turn, were grounded in a structured format that met the following four criteria:

o   Validity: The system must be capable of achieving the classification goals set by user agencies.

o   Reliability: The system must promote similar classification decisions for comparable offenders.

o   Equity: The system must use decision-making items that are non-discriminatory and consistent with commonly accepted societal values.

o   Utility: The system must be efficient, simple to use, and easy to understand.

Using these criteria, along with information obtained from a literature review, a national survey on jail classification practices, and their own experiences with inmate classification, project staff designed a system composed of five instruments:

o   An Inmate Screening Form

o   An Initial Custody Assessment Scale

o   A Custody Reassessment Scale

o   An Initial Inmate Needs Assessment Form

o   An Inmate Needs Reassessment Form

Draft instruments, together with instructions for completing them, were developed and reviewed by all project team members.[2] Revised instruments were then pilot-tested at three jails, selected on the basis of their differing size and classification experience. Modifications resulting from the pilot test, were incorporated into the instruments to enhance their utility and effectiveness. These instruments were then implemented and evaluated for eight months at the following three jail sites: Marion County, Oregon; Hillsborough County, Florida; and Johnson County, Kansas.

Description of the Inmate Screening Form

Development of the inmate screening instrument was guided by two fundamental considerations. First, the screening instrument should be thorough enough to ensure the safety and well-being of not only the inmate undergoing screening, but also staff and other inmates. Second, it should be capable of relatively quick and easy completion. Consequently, a decision was made early on to devise a screening instrument using a checklist format. Following a review of screening standards promulgated by organizations such as the American Correctional Association and the American Medical Association, project staff identified four relevant assessment factors, for which all inmates must be screened at the point of booking:

o Substance Abuse Needs

o Suicide Risk

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[2] Complete and detailed instructions on the classification forms described herein are available from the NIC Jail Center upon request.

o Mental Health Needs

o Medical Health Needs

Based on a lengthy period of pilot-testing, an Inmate Screening Form was developed (Exhibit 1). It consists of a single page, decreasing both the time necessary to complete the form and the space required for data storage.   It also provides classification staff with proper documentation in each of these critical areas.

Initial Custody Assessment Form

The initial custody assessment instrument was designed as a means of refining and expanding upon assessments made during inmate screening. In addition to identifying inmates with special needs, the initial custody assessment determines each inmate's custody level.

This process would occur before inmates are removed from a holding area and placed in a housing area. The timing of initial custody assessment would afford users with two important advantages. First, the time lapse since screening would allow more information on inmates to be obtained, verified, and examined. Second, many inmates booked into a facility would already have been released, reducing the level of effort associated with a more thorough evaluation of inmates' confinement requirements.

Development of the initial custody assessment instrument was guided by the following principles:

EXHIBIT 1

INMATE SCREENING FORM

I. IDENTIFICATION

Inmate Name (Last, First, Middle)	Inmate ID #

Screening Date	Screening Time

II. RISK AND NEEDS SCREENING

1. SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Signs of Being Under Influence of Alcohol/Drugs	Yes	No
Signs of Alcohol/Drug Withdrawal	Yes	No
Type(s) of drug/alcohol used:		
Amount consumed/taken:		
Time consumed/taken:		

Comments:

2. SUICIDE RISK

Suicidal Threats	Yes	No
Previous Stress Experiences	Yes	No
Extreme Shame/Embarrassment	Yes	No
Extreme Nervousness/Restlessness	Yes	No
Extreme Depression	Yes	No
Withdrawn/No-communicative	Yes	No

Comments:

3. MENTAL HEALTH

Past Treatment for Mental Health Problems	Yes	No
Use of Psychotropic Medication	Yes	No
Type:		
Frequency:		
Amount:		
Abnormal Behavior	Yes	No

Comments:

4. MEDICAL HEALTH

Current Treatment for Medical Problems	Yes	No
What:		
Use of Prescription Medication	Yes	No
Type: Frequency: Amount:		
Special Prescribed Diet	Yes	No
Recent Hospitalization	Yes	No
Why: Where:		
Recent Head Injury	Yes	No
Recent Blackouts/Fainting	Yes	No
Unconscious	Yes	No
Obvious Pain	Yes	No
Chronic Cough	Yes	No
Chronic Diarrhea	Yes	No
Current Itching/Skin Rash	Yes	No
Bleeding/Draining Wounds	Yes	No
Heart Condition	Yes	No
Diabetes	Yes	No
Epilepsy/Seizures	Yes	No
Asthma	Yes	No
History of Ulcers	Yes	No
History of/Exposure to Tuberculosis	Yes	No
History of/Exposure to Venereal Disease	Yes	No
History of Hepatitis/Jaundice	Yes	No
A.I.D.S.	Yes	No
Allergies	Yes	No
Current Pregnancy	Yes	No
Use of Birth Control Pills	Yes	No
Dental Problems	Yes	No
Eye Glasses/Contact Lenses	Yes	No
Physical Handicap	Yes	No
Restricted Mobility	Yes	No
Vermin	Yes	No
Lesions/Bruises/Other Signs of Injury	Yes	No
Fever/Swollen Lymph Nodes/Other Infectious Signs	Yes	No
Other Medical Problems	Yes	No

Comments:

I understand that this screening interview has been conducted in my own best interest, and have answered all questions truthfully.

Inmate's Signature: _____

Interviewer's Signature: _____

o Custody decisions should be based, to the extent possible, on actual relevant past behavior. The frequency, recency, and severity of past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior. It may also be necessary to consider other variables demonstrated to be highly correlated with institutional adjustment (such as age, employment history, etc.).

o Inmates should be classified to the least restrictive custody required to protect society, staff, and other inmates. Therefore, maximum custody placements should be reserved for inmates who have demonstrated through past violent behavior that they are a serious threat to other inmates or staff.

o Classification forms should be designed to allow them to also serve as data input documents to an agency's information system. Computerized files allow for routine monitoring to enhance accountability and systematic program planning, research, and evaluation.

o No classification instrument will correctly classify all individuals; there will always be cases exhibiting exceptional circumstances not addressed by "normal" classification criteria. Thus, an override capability must be built into the system and continuously monitored to prevent abuses (Solomon 1980:217-232).

Given these guidelines, factors that could effectively determine an inmate's most appropriate custody classification were identified and incorporated in the custody assessment scale (Exhibit 2).

Available research and project staff experience with inmate classification indicated that two basic formats for objective custody assessment would be most effective in classifying inmates. One is commonly known as the decision tree model which has been implemented in several Michigan jail systems (see Figure 1).

The decision-tree format relies on a branch-like design in which the response to each question determines the next question

EXHIBIT 2
INITIAL CUSTODY ASSESSMENT SCALE

I. IDENTIFICATION
Inmate Name (Last, First, MI)   Inmate ID #

Assessment Date   Classification Specialist

II. CUSTODY EVALUATION

1. SEVERITY OF CURRENT CHARGES/CONVICTIONS (Use Severity of Offense Scale;
    rate most serious charge/conviction, including any detainers/warrants)
    Low _____ 0   Score
    Moderate _____ 2
    High _____ 5
    Highest _____ 7

2. SERIOUS OFFENSE HISTORY (Use Severity of Offense Scale; rate most serious prior
    conviction)
    None or Low _____ 0   Score
    Moderate _____ 1
    High _____ 4
    Highest _____ 7

3. ESCAPE HISTORY (Excluding current charges)   ·
    No escape or attempts _____ 0   Score
    Walkaway or attempted escape from minimum security facility or failure to return
    from authorized absence _____ 3
    Escape or attempted escape from medium or maximum security setting _____ 7

MAXIMUM CUSTODY SCORE (Add Items 1, 2, and 3)
       SCORE OF 7 OR HIGHER, ASSIGN TO MAXIMUM CUSTODY . . . .

          (Always complete remaining items, but do not total score if inmate has
          already been assigned to maximum custody.)

4. INSTITUTIONAL DISCIPLINARY HISTORY
    None or minor with no segregation time _____ 0   Score
    1 or more major disciplinary reports and/or time in segregation _____ 3

5. PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS (Excluding current charges)
    None _____ 0   Score
    One _____ 2
    Two or more _____ 4

6. ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE
    No social, economic or legal problems related to abuse _____ 0   Score
    Abuse resulting in social, economic or legal problems _____ 1
    Abuse resulting in assaultive behavior _____ 3

7. STABILITY FACTORS (Deduct indicated points)
    Age 26 or over _____-1   Score
    Employed or attending school for 6 months prior to arrest _____-1
    Lived at same address for 12 or more months prior to arrest _____-1

COMPREHENSIVE CUSTODY SCORE (Items 1-7) . . . . Total Score

EXHIBIT 2 (con't)

III. SCALE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A.CUSTODY LEVEL INDICATED BY SCALE. . . . . _____
   1 = Minimum   2 = Medium   3 = Maximum   Code

Custody Classification Chart

  7 or more points on items 1-3 . . . . Maximum

  5 or fewer points on items 1-7 . . . . Minimum
  5 or fewer points on items 1-7 with detainer/warrant . . . . Medium
  6 to 10 points on items 1-7 . . . . Medium
  11 or more points on items 1-7 . . . . Maximum

B.CHECK [X] ALL THE SPECIAL MANAGEMENT CONCERNS WHICH APPLY TO THIS INMATE:

    _____ Protective Custody   _____ Known Management Problem
    _____ Psychological Impairment   _____ Suspected Drug Trafficker
    _____ Mental Deficiency   _____ Suicide Risk
    _____ Escape Threat   _____ Medical Problem
    _____ Serious Violence Threat   _____ Physical Impairment
    _____ Known Gang Affiliation   _____ Other (specify): _____
    _____ Substance Abuse Problem

C.OVERRIDE OF SCALE CUSTODY LEVEL IS RECOMMENDED . . . . _____
   1 = Yes   2 = No   Code

If yes, give rationale (required): _____

_____

_____

D.RECOMMENDED CUSTODY LEVEL. . . . . _____
   1 = Minimum   2 = Medium   3 = Maximum   Code

Specialist Signature _____ Date _____

IV.   SUPERVISOR APPROVAL OF OVERRIDE

A.RECOMMENDED CUSTODY LEVEL. . . . . _____
   1 = Approved   2 = Disapproved (Complete B.)   Code

B.FINAL CUSTODY LEVEL (if override disapproved). . . . . _____
   1 = Minimum   2 = Medium   3 = Maximum   Code

Rationale (required if different from recommendation):_____

_____

_____

Supervisor Signature _____ Date _____

V.RECOMMENDED HOUSING ASSIGNMENT: _____

Figure 1

Decision Tree Format

Committing offense is rape, armed robbery, or murder?

Yes → This is first adult conviction?
- No → Maximum Security
- Yes → Close Security

No → Inmate is 25 or older?
- No → Medium Security
- Yes → Minimum Security
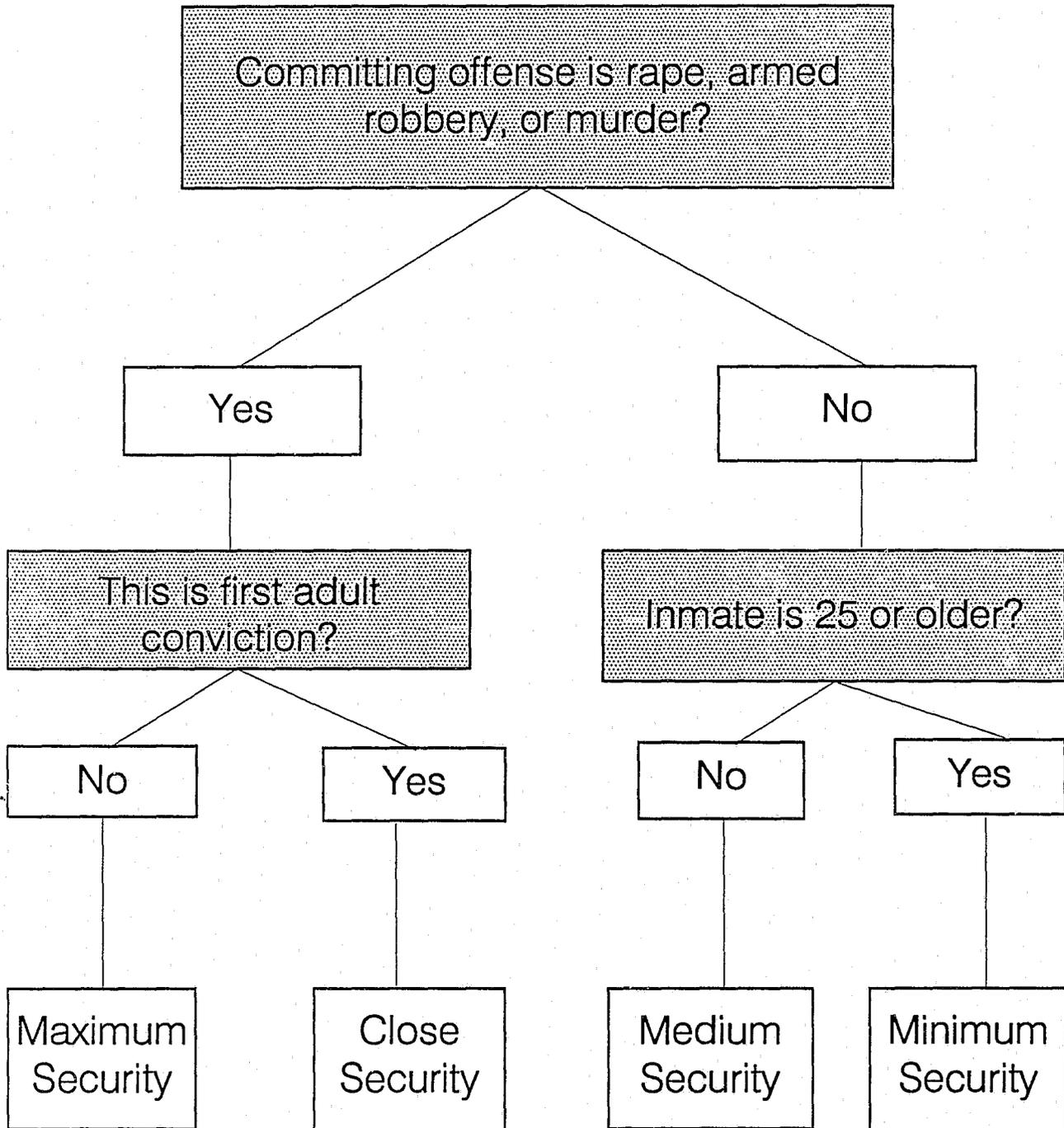
asked. Answers to a series of questions eventually sort inmates into various custody categories.

The additive scale format assesses an inmate on similar factors. Unlike the decision tree, the scores for all factors are totaled and a custody level is assigned based on the sum. Both formats provided an excellent means of addressing the previously identified assessment factors and, subsequently, sorting inmates into appropriate custody levels.

Custody Reassessment Form

Because an inmate's behavior tends to change over time and because new information about inmates may be received after initial custody assessment, an objective jail classification system must provide a method for periodically reassessing or reclassifying each inmate's custody level.

Development of the custody reclassification instrument was guided by many of the same principles enumerated previously in the discussion of initial custody assessment. However, the project team also strongly believed that the reassessment instrument should also address in-custody behavior so that a "just desserts" approach would emerge. That is, an inmate's initial custody level could be increased or decreased based upon their conduct during confinement.

In order to maximize consistency within the objective classification system, as well as facilitate use of the system, the initial custody assessment format was replicated for use in reassessment. Although five of these items are included in the Initial Custody Assessment Scale, the reassessment instrument is designed to account for behavior during confinement. For instance,

two new items (4 and 5) are directly related to rule infractions.
These items are assessed using a Disciplinary Severity Scale,
which, like the Severity of Offense Scale (used in the initial
custody form) is developed by individual users. In addition to
these new items, the weights assigned to items pertaining to prior
conduct have been decreased so that inmates demonstrating positive
adjustment can attain a lower custody level. As a result of these
two features, the Custody Reassessment Scale (Exhibit 3) provides
a "just deserts" incentive for good behavior through structured
rewards and punishments.

Inmate Needs Assessment Form

Few jails perform any assessment of inmate program and ser-
vice needs beyond medical, mental health, and substance abuse
problems. Even fewer afford structured programming to address
inmate needs. Insufficient staffing, space, and budget are the
primary constraints, although the short length of stay of most
inmates also plays a part. However, many jail administrators and
staff recognize the advantages of inmate programming and the
necessity of adequate services. Consequently, an initial needs
assessment and reassessment forms were developed (see Exhibits 4
and 5).

The objective jail classification system, thus, is a com-
prehensive approach to inmate assessment, addressing inmates' needs
from admission through release. Application of the system is
straightforward. Agency staff can learn to use it properly with

EXHIBIT 3
CUSTODY REASSESSMENT SCALE

I. IDENTIFICATION

Inmate Name (Last, First, MI)	Inmate ID #	Reassessment Reason
		1 - Routine
Reassessment Date Classification Specialist		2 - Disciplinary
		3 - Other

II. CUSTODY EVALUATION

1. SEVERITY OF CURRENT CHARGES/CONVICTIONS (Use Severity of Offense Scale; rate most serious charge/conviction, including any detainers/warrants) _____ Score
   Low _____ 0
   Moderate _____ 1
   High _____ 4
   Highest _____ 6

2. SERIOUS OFFENSE HISTORY (Use Severity of Offense Scale; rate most serious prior conviction) _____ Score
   None or Low _____ 0
   Moderate _____ 1
   High _____ 3
   Highest _____ 6

3. ESCAPE HISTORY (Excluding current charges) _____ Score
   No escape or attempts _____ 0
   Walkaway or attempted escape from minimum security or failure to return from
       authorized absence _____ 2
   Escape or attempted escape from medium or maximum security setting _____ 6

MAXIMUM CUSTODY SCORE (Add Items 1, 2, and 3)
       SCORE OF 7 OR HIGHER, ASSIGN TO MAXIMUM CUSTODY;   . . . .
            (Always complete remaining items, but do not total score if inmate has
            already been assigned to maximum custody.)

4. NUMBER OF DISCIPLINARY CONVICTIONS (Since last classification) _____ Score
   None _____ 0
   One _____ 2
   Two _____ 4
   Three or more _____ 6

5. MOST SERIOUS DISCIPLINARY CONVICTION (Use Disciplinary Severity Scale; rate during this period of confinement) _____ Score
   None _____ 0
   Low _____ 1
   Moderate _____ 2
   High _____ 5
   Highest _____ 7

6. PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS (Excluding current charges) _____ Score
   None _____ 0
   One _____ 1
   Two or more _____ 2

7. ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE _____ Score
   No problems or occasional abuse resulting in economic or legal problems _ 0
   Abuse resulting in social, economic or legal problems _____ 1
   Abuse resulting in assaultive behavior _____ 2

COMPREHENSIVE CUSTODY SCORE (Items 1-7) . . . .

Total

Score

EXHIBIT 3 (con't)

III. SCALE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A.CUSTODY LEVEL INDICATED BY SCALE. . . . . _____
    1 = Minimum   2 = Medium   3 = Maximum   Code

Custody Classification Chart

7 or more points on items 1-3   . . . . Maximum

5 or fewer points on items 1-7 . . . . Minimum
5 or fewer points on items 1-7 with detainer/warrant . . . . Medium
6 to 10 points on items 1-7   . . . . Medium
11 or more points on items 1-7 . . . . Maximum

B.CHECK [X] ALL THE SPECIAL MANAGEMENT CONCERNS WHICH APPLY TO THIS INMATE:

_____ Protective Custody   _____ Known Management Problem
_____ Psychological Impairment   _____ Suspected Drug Trafficker
_____ Mental Deficiency   _____ Suicide Risk
_____ Escape Threat   _____ Medical Problem
_____ Serious Violence Threat   _____ Physical Impairment
_____ Known Gang Affiliation   _____ Other (specify): _____
_____ Substance Abuse Problem

C.OVERRIDE OF SCALE CUSTODY LEVEL IS RECOMMENDED . . . . _____

    1 = Yes   2 = No   Code

If yes, give rationale (required): _____

_____

_____

D.RECOMMENDED CUSTODY LEVEL. . . . . _____
    1 = Minimum   2 = Medium   3 = Maximum   Code

Specialist Signature _____ Date _____

IV.   SUPERVISOR APPROVAL OF OVERRIDE

A.RECOMMENDED CUSTODY LEVEL. . . . . _____
    1 = Approved   2 = Disapproved (Complete B.)   Code

B.FINAL CUSTODY LEVEL (if override disapproved). . . . . _____
    1 = Minimum   2 = Medium   3 = Maximum   Code

Rationale (required if different from recommendation):_____

_____

_____

Supervisor Signature _____ Date _____

V.RECOMMENDED HOUSING ASSIGNMENT: _____

EXHIBIT 4
INITIAL INMATE NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM

Inmate Name (Last, First, MI)	Inmate ID #

Assessment Date	Classification Specialist

HEALTH

1 Limited physical capacity, acute illness; needs hospitalization or out-patient treatment   2 Mild disability or illness; outpatient treatment required; non-strenuous work   3 No problems which limit housing or work assignments   <u>Code</u>

EMOTIONAL STABILITY

1 Severe impairment; danger to self, others; needs hospital environment   2 Moderate impairment; requires monitoring, individual or group therapy   3 Emotionally stable; no indications of mental illness   <u>Code</u>

EDUCATION

1 5th grade or below reading, math skills; needs remedial or special education classes   2 No H.S. diploma; needs adult education or GED program   3 High school diploma, GED or equivalent   <u>Code</u>

VOCATIONAL SKILL

1 No discernible skill; needs training   2 Limited skills; ability to hold semi-skilled position; needs training   3 Possesses marketable skill or trade   <u>Code</u>

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

1 Frequent abuse resulting in social, economic or legal problems; needs treatment   2 Occasional abuse causing disruption of functioning   3 No disruption of functioning or legal difficulties   <u>Code</u>

MENTAL ABILITY

1 Serious disability limiting ability to function; needs sheltered living, work situations   2 Mild disability limiting educational, vocational potential   3 No discernible disability   <u>Code</u>

OTHER: (1) describe _____

<u>Code</u>

INITIAL PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS	PROGRAM CODE	PRIORITY CODE*
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____

*Priority Codes: 1 = Urgent, immediate need
                     2 = Problem directly related to criminal behavior; high priority
                     3 = Problem resolution would enhance ability to succeed in community

EXHIBIT 5
INMATE NEEDS REASSESSMENT FORM

Inmate Name (Last, First, MI)	Inmate ID #

Assessment Date	Classification Specialist

HEALTH
1 Limited physical capacity, acute illness; needs hospitalization or out-patient treatment   2 Mild disability or illness; outpatient treatment required; non-strenuous work   3 No problems which limit housing or work assignments   _____ Code

EMOTIONAL STABILITY
1 Severe impairment; danger to self, others; needs hospital environment   2 Moderate impairment; requires monitoring, individual or group therapy   3 Emotionally stable; no indications of mental illness   _____ Code

EDUCATION
1 5th grade or below reading, math skills; needs remedial or special education classes   2 No H.S. diploma; needs adult education or GED program   3 High school diploma, GED or equivalent   _____ Code

VOCATIONAL SKILL
1 No discernible skill; needs training   2 Limited skills; ability to hold semi-skilled position; needs training   3 Possesses marketable skill or trade   _____ Code

SUBSTANCE ABUSE
1 Frequent abuse resulting in social, economic or legal problems; needs treatment   2 Occasional abuse causing disruption of functioning   3 No disruption of functioning or legal difficulties   _____ Code

MENTAL ABILITY
1 Serious disability limiting ability to function; needs sheltered living, work situations   2 Mild disability limiting educational, vocational potential   3 No discernible disability   _____ Code

OTHER: (1) describe _____
_____ Code

PREVIOUS PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS	PROGRAM CODE	PRIORITY CODE	ADJUSTMENT CODE*
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

NEW PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS	PROGRAM CODE	PRIORITY CODE*
1.		
2.		

*See Adjustment and Priority Codes on back of form.

only a few hours of training. Equally important, it is suffi-
ciently flexible that it can be employed in jails of varying sizes
and organizational structures.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following implementation of the NIC system at the three test
sites, an assessment of the NIC, additive and decision tree models
was undertaken. This evaluation found that although these
classification systems have unique origins and have been appliedb
a variety of jail settings, a number of common findings emerged:

1. There is no universal standard objective jail classifi-
    cation system with respect to assessment criteria and
    instrument formats.

    The two most common jail classification formats encountered
    were additive and decision tree screening systems. Each has
    its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of ease of use,
    reliability, and validity. But no particular system should be
    viewed as superior to other objective approaches. Con-
    sequently, jail administrators and classification staff must
    exercise judgement in determining which system and formats
    will work best for their jail.

2. Objective jail classification systems use the same struc-
    ture and scoring processes for constantly assessing an
    inmate's proper custody and housing level.

    Each of the systems evaluated consists of an initial screening
    of all inmates for medical, mental health, suicide, substance
    abuse, and protective custody placement. For most sites, this
    screening process was the most important part of the entire
    classification process as it was applied to all incoming
    inmates. The screening process was then followed by an
    initial classification or custody assessment to determine the
    appropriate housing area for inmates expected to stay beyond
    the first few hours of detention. Finally, each system has a
    reclassification or review component to reassess an inmate's
    custody level. These reviews generally occurred every 30 to
    60 days.

3. <u>Although every objective jail classification system studied varied in format and structure, each of the systems tended to use similar items for scoring an inmate's custody level.</u>

Each of the systems consistently used the following items for scoring an inmate's custody level at both initial and reclassification hearings:

- o Offense/Charge Severity
- o Prior Felony/Misdemeanor Convictions
- o Prior Assaultive Behavior
- o Prior Escape History
- o Current Detainer
- o Substance Abuse (Alcohol Included) History
- o Age
- o Measures of Community Stability (education, employment, residence,)
- o Prior Institutional Conduct

These variables emphasize legal and policy factors rather than variables which are believed to be predictors of in-custody behavior. The reclassification instruments are similar to the initial classification instruments although they place a greater emphasis on the inmate's in-custody behavior.

4. <u>The objective jail classification systems evaluated tend to classify the majority of jail admissions for minimum custody.</u>

Evaluation results showed that most of the jails using objective systems placed large proportions of their jail admissions in minimum custody, based on system recommendations. Only a very small percentage were classified for maximum or close custody. If an agency fully implemented and followed an objective system, these figures would have profound implications for new jail construction and renovation projects. Specifically, additional space may be required for less secure and therefore less expensive jail facilities.

5. <u>A high proportion of persons admitted to jail have special risk factors that need to be closely monitored.</u>

This study found that in those jurisdictions using a risk screening instrument a majority of jail admissions had either medical, mental health, suicide, substance abuse or other special management characteristics. The data indicate a need for jails to be adequately staffed with medical and mental health professionals and services in order to deal with these individuals on a routine basis.

6. <u>The levels of overrides occurring with these new systems were quite low, ranging from zero to five percent</u>.

Both the Objective Jail Classification and Decision Tree systems reported very low over-ride rates. On a positive note, these low rates show that staff agreed with the system recommendations in the vast majority of cases and that the instruments had face validity. On the negative side, staff may have been unwilling to exercise their professional judgement in some cases where the use of such judgement should be encouraged.

7. <u>Despite the perceived and realized benefits of these systems, a number of the sites experienced difficulties in fully implementing the objective systems</u>.

Implementation of new classification systems proved to be a time consuming and tedious process. In only one of the three NIC sites was full implementation realized although the other two sites will fully implement once they open new facilities and acquire additional staff. In Hawaii, the system remains as a paper review with no real consequences for inmate movement. The progress of system implementation proceeded differently at each site due to several conditions, including:

o   Inability to separate inmates according to custody level due to facility design and crowded conditions.

o   Unwillingness by staff at all levels to fully adopt system due to impending move into new direct supervision facility.

o   Insufficient classification staff to screen and perform an initial custody assessment on all inmates booked into the facility.

o   Unwillingness to change agency policies in a systematic manner that would allow total integration of the classification system.

o   Limited in-house staff training on classification issues.

o   Limited effort to ensure that classification forms were accurately filled out and monitored.

NECESSARY FACILITY CHARACTERISTICS
FOR SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the lessons learned through this project, it is possible to list the critical conditions necessary for local jail jurisdictions to implement an objective classification system:

1. The administration must clearly define missions and goals of the detention facility.

2. The reasons for adopting an objective classification system should be understood and agreed upon by all staff, at all levels.

3. The various custody levels (minimum, medium, close, maximum) should be clearly defined and linked to commensurate security settings located within the facility.

4. The administration must be willing to revise existing classification policies and procedures to enable effective integration of the objective system.

5. Direct access to training resources and staff to allow for in-house training of all staff on the operation of the classification system.

6. Classification staff should have direct access to accurate and timely prisoner/inmate information sources to support an objective classification system.

7. The jail must have adequate numbers of classification staff with the necessary skills and aptitude to perform a wide variety of classification related tasks.

To ensure proper integration of an objective classification system, the administration's level of understanding of classification systems should be sophisticated enough to allow educated choices concerning the type of system chosen and procedures used during implementation. Moreover, the administration must demonstrate a high level of commitment, encompassing staff, funding, space, and the authority to perform the functions of a classification unit. The final, and least important, attribute of a facility is the physical layout of the housing areas to accommodate separation of varying custody level inmates.

NECESSARY COMPONENTS OF
AN OBJECTIVE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Each component of all of the classification systems studied (objective classification and others) has a distinct function related to assessment of inmates' security, custody, programming, medical, and mental health needs. The screening form has been restricted to review only immediate substance abuse, suicide risk, mental health, and medical health needs. The initial screening instrument also considered security and management risks and protective custody needs. However, through staff input during the implementation process, it was determined that these items were better dealt with in the initial custody assessment form, (i.e., having them on both the screening and initial custody form was repetitive).

The screening process is probably the single most important component in the classification system. The screening form is the one instrument to be used on every inmate who enters the facility. Whether the person is being held a short time for public intoxication or is being held for transfer to the state penitentiary, jail staff need to be aware of medical and mental health issues that may affect the well-being of the inmate while in the custody of the jail. The screening form is intended to obtain vital information on the health of the inmate which can be used to protect the inmate from causing harm to self or others.

The initial custody assessment component is intended for inmates who are housed outside of the reception or holding areas

of the facility. The two principal purposes of the form are to separate predatory inmates from potential victims and to prevent escapes. The overriding benefits of using an objective rather than a subjective method for determining housing assignment are equity and consistency in decision-making (i.e., reliability).

From a design perspective, the overall goal is to keep instruments as simple and straightforward as possible. Ease of use was a major intent during the design stages of this study and was largely successful with few errors detected and relative ease and efficiency in completing the forms.

Another major concern of the project staff was to produce a system that provides jail staff from protection from legal liability. This does not imply developing methods for avoiding litigation for inappropriate staff behavior, but, rather a means of providing procedures which protect inmate rights and safety while sufficiently documenting decision-making processes.

The initial custody form is the main component of an objective classification system and can be considered as important as the initial screening form if applied to all inmates.

The custody reassessment or reclassification form is also an essential component of a behavioral based objective system and is an integral part of the overall custody assessment process. However, due the brief period of detention experienced by most inmates, it is not applied to most inmates entering a jail. T h e initial inmate needs assessment and the inmate needs reassessment forms are useful tools for managing scarce program resources and for developing a description of the level of service needs required by the inmate population. Only one of the sites decided to collect

information on these forms (Johnson County) for use in planning future program services. The other two sites stated that very few services were available for inmates and the time necessary to fill out the forms would be greater than the benefits derived from the information received.

NIC'S FUTURE ROLE IN SUPPORTING
LOCAL FACILITIES' ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF OBJECTIVE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

The Jails Division is actively involved in promoting the use of objective methods of inmate classification in local jail facilities. Its current emphasis on spearheading the development and use of objective classification comes in a three-phase process geared toward: 1) assessing whether a local jail agency is at the appropriate stage to adopt and implement an objective inmate classification system, 2) on-site training and assistance in implementing the system, and 3) longitudinal monitoring of the implementation process and evaluation of the classification system.

Jail administrators interested in implementing an objective jail classification system should contact the NIC Jails Division for further information at:

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