LAW ENFROCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

COMPUTERIZING A SMALL JAIL

A LEARNING CONTRACT

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

MODULE II

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Introduction:

The following study was done to determine the feasibility of changing a small jail of 92 inmates from a manual operation to computerized management.

In order to determine the feasibility of changing to a computerized system, the following factors were considered:

1. What procedures need to be computerized?

2. What systems are available?

3. Would changing to computerized management be cost effective?

4. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of changing methods of operation?

Seven general procedures or jail functions were considered and thought necessary to be computerized. These procedures are:

1. The booking procedure.

2. The visitation records.

3. The final disposition records.

4. The inmate release forms.

5. The commissary inventory.

6. The commodity inventory.

7. The jail budget.

The booking procedure:

The booking procedure is the most time consuming and was considered to be one of the most important areas to be

computerized. In the booking procedure, five individual forms must be completed on each inmate booked into the facility. The first form is the Prisoners Jail Record which indicates all current information relating to the prisoner. Such information as prisoners address, place of employment, next of kin, physical description, drivers license, and social security number are recorded on this form. Also indicated on this form is arrest information such as arresting officer's name, charge, and court date.

The second form completed is the inmate's medical form which indicates the prisoner's medical history and current medical problems which require medication or special classification due to a contagious disease or suicide tendencies.

The third step in the booking procedure is an inventory of the inmates property and completing a form to identify all personal property at the time of arrest.

The fourth and fifth forms which must be completed are the Criminal History form, which indicates all prior arrests and convictions, and the Inmate Classification Record which is based on criminal history. The inmate must be classified and confined in jail according to his/her past criminal history.

Jail Visitation:

Visitation records must be maintained on each inmate. A list of each visitor the inmate has is kept in the

prisoners file. Visitation is held twice a week on Sunday and Thursday. Each inmate is allowed to visit with approved visitors. An approved visitor is one who has not been an inmate at this facility within the past six months. The jailer on duty must verify that the visitor is approved by manually checking the jail file. Once the visitor has been approved, information on the visitor, name, date of birth, home address, and telephone number is obtained and logged into the inmate file.

Final Disposition Information:

Final disposition records indicate the prisoners court appearance and State commitment information. A copy of the final disposition is sent to Austin, Tx where it is entered into TCIC and NCIC and will reflect the inmates criminal history in the event of any future arrest.

Inmate Release Information:

The inmate release information consists of three separate forms. The inmates property receipt form, the bond information form, and the time served form.

Commissary Information:

Commissary is another function which is very time consuming. Commissary includes accurate account of each inmates cash transaction, the inventory of all commissary items, and current supplier information.

Commodities Information:

An inventory of all commodities within the jail must be

completed by the jail supervisor, the inventory will document all food products on hand and the rate of consumption on a daily basis. Supplier information and accurate records on all purchases must be submitted to the County Auditor each week.

Jail Budget:

The last function which would be added to the computerized system is the jail budget. Which is submitted to, and maintained by the County Auditor's office.

A Computerized Jail System:

To understand the computer systems available you must understand the basic computer terms used to describe the systems. A module is a set of computer programs, under one name, which allows an agency to perform all of the required tasks for one aspect of law enforcement. An agency may purchase any number of available modules. The various modules together in a single computer can by referred to as a System. Within a module are levels which contain particular information and each level is called a file. For example, all commissary suppliers would be placed in the commissary supplier file. Each file consist of records, one for each item in the file. Each record is a collection of fields of detailed information. Finally, the system functions through a program which makes software perform and provides results. A program is a set of instructions, written in a particular computer language, which instructs

the computer to manipulate data, allowing you to accomplish a particular task.[1]

Computer Systems Available:

Three county jails, of similar size were contacted to obtain information on computer systems which are currently being used. Of the three jails contacted, two recommended AT&T Law Enforcement Software, and the third recommended CPS Business Systems, Inc.

Ultimately, these software suppliers were contacted along with Apollo Data Services, Inc., and IBM Governmental Software. Of the four companies contacted, AT&T Law Enforcement Software and Apollo Data Services, Inc. were the two companies which offered software systems compatible with the computer equipment within the Erath County Sheriff's Department. Also it was felt that this software best suited the particular procedures which needed to be computerized within the Department. Total cost of the Software system from Apollo was $8,850.00, while AT&T's total cost was $11,500.00. Both prices included an installation/setup, and training for jailers who would be using the system.

Advantages Of A Computerized System:

At the present time under manual operation the booking procedure takes approximately 45 minutes to complete. By using a computerized system, the same procedure could be reduced to 20 minutes per inmate. Based on an average pay scale of $8.00 per hour, 45 minutes represents a unit

cost of $6.00 per inmate booked into jail. Using the manual system, five individual forms are used. The cost of having the new forms printed each year represents a unit cost of approximately $850.00 per year. The cost of computer paper which would replace these forms represents a cost of approximately $500.00 per year. Time spent by the Jail Supervisor on purchasing, inventory, and control of commodities accounts for about one third of his time. If computerized, the Jail Supervisor would be free to assume other responsibilities. At this time, the Jail Supervisor prepares the budget for the jail. The budget is submitted to the County Auditor's office and maintained by the County Auditor. If the budget and related expenditure documents were placed on the jail computer, the Jail Supervisor could monitor spending and evaluate the balance on line items daily.

The last major advantage of computerizing the jail management system is the space which would be saved by storing jail records on the computer. The manual system requires that records on each inmate be stored in file cabinets located within the record department. This method not only takes up a large amount of space, but also is inconvenient and time consuming for the jailer to physically maintain files while booking, releasing, or pulling files if the inmate is returned to the facility on another occasion.

Disadvantages Of A Computer System:

The major disadvantages of a computer system fall within three areas; the initial cost of purchasing the system, time required in training personnel, and maintenance.

The initial cost of software for a computer system, such as AT&T is $11,500.00. Any item in excess of $5,000.00 is considered to be a line item and requires that bids be submitted to the County Judge before any purchases can be made. Any funding for line items must be designated in the budget for that item. This creates the problem of not being able to purchase the system during a specific fiscal year, unless the cost of the system had been submitted in the budget for that year.

The time required to train each jailer on using the computer system would involve rescheduling shifts and would probably involve overtime compensation.

The last major disadvantage is the on-going maintenance required by any computer operation. The two companies which offer systems suited to the needs of this facility are AT&T and Apollo Data Services. AT&T is located in Schaumburg, IL., and Apollo's office is located in Odessa, Tx. If problems arise, especially during the night, repair on the system could take considerable time.

Summary Of Information Obtained:

Based upon the information obtained during the study, it is the Erath County Sheriff's Department's opinion that

the advantage of saving time and space outweigh the disadvantages of time spent on training. A computer may not be cost effective in the short run, but by saving time, the system would allow personnel time for additional duties, which in the long run may reduce the need for additional personnel.

The initial cost of the computer system would have to be placed on the budget for fiscal year 1991, and the system would then be subject to the bid process. October 1,1990 is the beginning of the new fiscal year, which allows three months to accept bids and prepare for the new system.

By computerizing the Jail facility, the County will save money and should function more effectively.

ENDNOTES

[1]AT&T Law Enforcement Software, <u>Jail Management and Commissary Inventory Booklet</u>, (Schaumburg,IL.: 1989),1-6.

[2]IBM Data Software, <u>Jail Management Booklet</u>, (Lexington, Ky.: 1989), 1-12.

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Texas, 75204.

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