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National Institute of Justice

Research in Action

James K. Stewart, Director

April 1989

Jail management software developed with NIJ support

by Linda D. Waterhouse

Jails must collect, manage, and disseminate vast quantities of information about a large population of inmates whose status changes daily, often hourly. Administrators are often hard pressed to maintain an accurate census and ensure that court schedules are met, releases are timely, and warrants and hold orders properly cleared before an inmate is released.

Jail administrators also must respond to requests from Federal, State, and municipal agencies for statistics, and to local officials for budget and planning data. New laws such as bail reform and determinate sentencing generate new information needs.

Fast, reliable information retrieval requires computerized management, a capability many jails lack. Only large agencies could until recently afford to plan, buy, and maintain automated systems, but jails with average populations under 400 make up 82 percent of local correctional facilities.

An affordable package

To smooth data management by these small and medium-sized jails, the National Institute of Justice supported development of a microcomputer-based management information system by SEARCH Group, Inc. The resulting jail records software program, LOCKUP, uses a generic set of data elements to keep records from booking to release and

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maintain them in a central data base for updating and review.

The system can run on a single workstation at an IBM or other DOS-based microcomputer, or on a network of microcomputers linked by Novell Netware.

Mushrooming developments in microcomputer technology in recent years make computers affordable for even small jails, but a review of the *Directory of Automated Criminal Justice Information Systems* and *The Criminal Justice Microcomputer Guide and Software Catalogue*, both published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, reveals relatively few jail recordkeeping packages for micros.

System design

To determine the basic functions, data elements, and reports required, the LOCKUP designers surveyed county jail administrators across the Nation. "Upgrading Information Systems in New Generation Jails," a study conducted for the Washington State Corrections Standards Board, yielded model admission and release forms.

The dBase III Plus software was chosen as a widely used and well-supported data base manager. Customizing LOCKUP thus is less expensive. Using a data base management system, a jail administrator can usually adapt the generic data elements to local needs. But if a programming professional is required, it is easy to locate one with expertise in dBase III Plus.

Use of IBM or compatible hardware enables the LOCKUP user to take advantage of a wide variety of other software, such as word processing and spread sheets, and of widely available support and repair facilities.

Report from test sites

LOCKUP was tested successfully in Dickinson, North Dakota, in a small jail with an average daily population of 35, and at a sheriff's office in Hanford, California, where the average jail population is 342.

In beta-testing LOCKUP as a multiuser system, Hanford had up to three operators networked at the same time, while Dickinson used up to six operators at a time. (A beta test is a secondary test of a new product conducted at an operational field site by the sort of users for whom the product is intended.) Hanford has now increased the number of workstations from 3 to 19, spanning two facilities.

Hanford reported that LOCKUP's booking recap report and release recap report together saved officers 14 to 35 hours each week. Hanford also noted that LOCKUP's rebooking process enables officers to edit existing personnel and medical information instead of reentering it all.

Hanford, which has customized its system, reported that one routine takes data gathered in booking and prints it on the fingerprint card, rather than having the information manually retyped to the card. Staff members say this local addition to the basic program saves 3 to 4 hours of time every day.

Exhibit 1
LOCKUP's functions and preprogrammed reports

Functions

Booking
Release
Search/inquiry
Modify
Outdate calculation
Medical and classification screening
Agency billing
Shift log
Visitor/phone log
Cash transaction log
Call movement log
Log reports

Reports

Inmate list by name
Inmate list by booking number
Inmate list by call location
Sentenced inmate list
Releases scheduled
Booking recap
Release recap
Court roster
Booking and release sheets
Medical screening report

System details
LOCKUP is completely menu driven. Data are stored in a central location where all operators can review and update them. Automatic edit-checks ensure data accuracy, requiring operator confirmation before the data are stored. Passwords and file and function authorizations secure the system, and an audit trail keeps a log.

Exhibit 1 shows LOCKUP's functions and preprogrammed reports, although other reports can easily be generated to meet local needs.

Six volumes of documentation come with LOCKUP:

Executive summary provides a top-level view of the system, describing objectives, features, and functions.

Functional specifications provides a walkthrough of the system with screen layouts, report formats, and a data element dictionary.

User's manual explains step-by-step procedures for entry and retrieval.

Administrator's manual tells how to install, maintain, and back up the system.

Technical specifications describes the system, including files and programs.

Test plan enables the user to retest the system if it is later customized.

LOCKUP is available from SEARCH Group in a package including software, documentation, 2 hours' telephone support, and 3 days' training for the system administrator; in a smaller package of only the product plus phone support; or SEARCH Group will install LOCKUP and train agency personel under contract.

Information on LOCKUP is available from SEARCH Group, Inc., Suite H, 925 Secret River Drive, Sacramento, CA 95831, telephone 916--392-2550, or from Dr. Richard Rau at the National Institute of Justice, 202-724-2949.

References
Noel C. Morgan. *Criminal Justice Microcomputer Guide and Software Catalogue.* Washington, D.C., Bureau of Justice Statistics, forthcoming.

SEARCH Group, Inc. *Directory of Automated Criminal Justice Information Systems,* Washington, D.C., Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1986.

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