

**State Budget Shortfalls Impact Correctional Recreation;
The View From Both Sides**

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**Presented at the
2002 National Correctional Recreation Association Conference
in Omaha Nebraska**

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide background information and research for state administrators, legislators, correctional administrators, correctional recreation professionals and the general public for use in discussing potential Correctional Recreation policy changes that may result from the current state budget shortfalls.

When states fall short on money, prisons rapidly come under scrutiny. Schools, roads, health care, police and fire protection are seen as necessities. Prisons are on the bubble. Several states are already trimming their corrections budgets.

When corrections budgets start getting slashed, correctional recreation is not far behind. Prison construction and security require huge sums of money. The heavy drain of those expenses and the 1990's trend toward "Get tough on crime" / "No-frills in prisons" may encourage legislators and correctional administrators to place Correctional Recreation on the chopping block without fully analyzing its contributions both inside the prison walls and outside, after the inmates are released.

Certain sections of the paper may appeal to specific readers depending on their background and needs. The section on cutting recreation budgets covers some breaking news in Illinois and lists possible approaches to those facing major budget shortfalls. Tough choices must be made by all sides. Hopefully they will be well-informed, wise choices and learn from the impact of previous correctional management legislation.

This paper is posted online on our web site. The online version contains links to many of the reference materials and additional comments and updates. If you are a legislator or correctional administrator having problems locating some of the references, call us or drop us an email and we will try to assist you in obtaining them.

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We also invite your comments on this paper and any suggestions you may have toward dealing with the issues.

State Budget Shortfalls

Most state governments are in serious budget problems resulting from the economic slowdown.

National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBR0)
The Fiscal Survey of States
web site: <http://www.nasbo.org>

This report summarizes the current economic state of the states and discusses attempts currently being made by several states to deal with the crisis. It reports corrections represented 3.8 percent of total state spending and 7 percent of General Fund spending in 2001

NASBO reports a combination of a dramatic fall in revenues and soaring health care and homeland security expenses after September 11th have caused state budget shortfalls to grow to 40 billion dollars. Even before September 11th, states were cutting budgets and lowering revenue projections. 40 states are currently expecting major shortfalls.

The National Conference of State Legislatures
Pressure on State Budgets Continues to Build, According to NCSL Report
February 7, 2002

As of January 2002, forty-five states reported revenues below projections. Louisiana, North Dakota, Texas, West Virginia and Wyoming are on or slightly above target revenues. 30 states reported expenditures over budget, thirty-nine reported budget cutbacks or holdbacks and twenty-six reported tapping rainy day accounts. Thirty-seven states already report budget gaps in next year's budget.

Gubernatorial Candidates Sidestep Debate Over Taxes
Wall Street Journal
March 5, 2002

Gubernatorial candidates in at least 15 states find themselves being pressured to offer solutions to the worst budget shortfalls in a decade, but fear political suicide if they suggest taxes may be even part of the answer. Even if a tax increase can be avoided, the candidates are bracing for a rough first term because deep cuts in state spending seem inevitable.

CALIFORNIA
Larger Budget Shortfall Than Predicted
Los Angeles Times
February 21, 2002

Lawmakers need to come up with an additional \$5 billion to balance the budget as the recession and stock market take a heavy toll on California's anticipated revenues.

OKLAHOMA

Lawmakers Have \$350 Million Less to Spend
Stillwater Newspress (Oklahoma)
February 20, 2002

Oklahoma lawmakers have \$350 million less to spend in the next fiscal year than they did a year ago per a revenue estimate by the State Equalization Board. Lawmakers are striving to spare education and health care from cuts, but it will not be easy.

WISCONSIN

Budget Woes Worse Than Illinois
Rockford Register Star
January 24, 2002

Wisconsin faces a \$1.1 billion shortfall in its 2001-2003 budget, about the same amount per year as Illinois, but they only have half the population of Illinois. Republican Governor Scott McCallum proposed cuts but schools aid, health and social service programs were protected from cuts.

VIRGINIA

Panels Offer Cuts for VA Spending
Washington Post
February 18, 2002

Lawmakers unveiled plans to reduce and reorder state government thought tuition and fee increases, prison closings, health care cuts and dozens of other reductions. The Senate's Senior Republican called the actions "gut-wrenching." They are struggling to close an immediate gap of \$1.3 billion and a looming \$2.5 billion gap through mid-2004.

States Begin to Target Prisons for Budget Reductions

When states fall short on money, prisons rapidly come under scrutiny. Schools, roads, health care, police and fire protection are seen as necessities. Prisons are on the bubble. Several states are already trimming their corrections budgets.

Ripe for Cutting: Prison Budgets.
Los Angeles Times. February 10, 2002

Reports that during the boom years of the 1990's prison construction spending was one of the fastest growing line items on state budgets. One in every 14 general-fund dollars spent by states nationally in 2000 went to prisons. Several approaches to reducing operational costs are being examined.

Profile: States Look at Cutting Spending on Prisons to Help Their Financially Strapped Budgets
Morning Edition National Public Radio (NPR)
February 7, 2002

Most state governments are hurting. Across the country legislators are scrambling for ways to cut back on spending. A number of states are rethinking sentencing policies. While many states are reducing the number of people in prison, the federal prison population is growing about 10 percent per year. President Bush's new budget included \$300 million to build 18 new prisons.

Cutting Correctly: New Prison Policies for Times of Financial Crisis
Justice Policy Institute
http://www.cjci.org/cutting/cutting_main.html

This 29 page study discusses many of the cost reduction approaches being considered by states and makes several policy suggestions. Correctional Recreation is not specifically mentioned in the report.

NEBRASKA

Governor's Budget Recommendations After February 22, 2002 Economic Forecasting
Advisory Board Meeting 2001-2003 Biennium.

Nebraska, host of this year's National Correctional Recreation Association annual conference, faces budget shortfalls similar to many states. On January 15th, Governor Mike Johanns addressed various state agency requests for \$29.8 million in supplemental General Fund appropriations and a \$50 million budget imbalance remaining after the 2001 special session. His recommendations reduced the budget imbalance to \$27.5 million. Since then \$20 million in rising school aid costs and decrease in anticipated state revenues of \$133 have enlarged the budget imbalance to over \$180 million.

The governor recommends numerous cuts including a three percent across the board reduction in General Fund appropriations for 2002-2003. This is in addition to the five percent across the board cuts enacted in November 2001. The Department of Corrections was exempted from the November 2001 cuts, but is now recommended for a two percent reduction for FY 2002-2003. This results in an overall cut of about \$2.4 million in the operational budget for the Department of Corrections in 2002-2003 from previously budgeted amounts. He also recommends stretching the cash flow out to three years from two for construction of a Correctional Center for Women at York.

ILLINOIS

Illinois Governor Presents \$52.8 Billion Budget with Job Cuts, Prison Closings
Chicago Tribune
February 21, 2002

Mixing deep cuts and unorthodox tactics, Governor George Ryan proposed a budget that would slam the brakes on runaway spending by slashing jobs, closing prisons and chopping \$500 million off healthcare services for the poor. All 177 house and senate seats are up for election and lawmakers may be reluctant to anger voters by embracing his vision.

Ryan claimed victory for fulfilling his pledge to dedicate 51 percent of all state revenues to schools, but drops in revenue have reduced the effect it could have had on schools.

State officials have chronically complained the prison system is over populated. He proposes closing the minimum security Vienna Correctional Center and the Illinois Youth Center and wants to build a new maximum security facility in northwest Illinois. He proposes leaving the new maximum security facility empty for now to reduce operational costs.

It may get even worse

State predicts costly short-term fallout

By Christi Parsons and Ray Long

Chicago Tribune staff

March 9, 2002

With budgets already in crisis mode Illinois officials predicted Friday that short term tax revenue will drop substantially as a result of the federal economic stimulus package. The package passed the U.S. Senate on Friday. It provides business tax breaks that initially will reduce tax proceeds to states and local taxing bodies. Those tax cuts are "expected to cost states about \$14.6 billion over the next three years, because many states calculate their corporate tax structures on the federal system. The Ryan administration estimates Illinois governments will lose \$400 million during the next budget year, \$250 million of it from state coffers.

That bill was signed by President Bush Saturday March 9, 2002.

Bush signs stripped-down economic stimulus bill

CNN

March 9, 2002

"We're seeing some encouraging signs in the economy, but we can't stand by and simply hope for continued recovery." Bush said in his Saturday radio address, given live from the Rose Garden where he signed the bill.

A portion of the package provides tax incentives for companies to expand and invest in plants and equipment in an effort to create jobs and stimulate the economy.

Correctional Recreation

Currently all state correctional systems provide access to recreational activities. These programs are sometimes called Leisure Time Services (LTS). Correctional Recreation takes on many forms across America based on prison population. Programs exist for inmates of different sexes, ages, mental capacities and security levels. Different budget levels, mandates, facilities, equipment and staffing levels and staff skills result in some institutions having a wide range of activities, while others provide more basic activities. Most, if not all, of these programs are mandated by federal and state laws. Recreational areas are even being constructed in Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba for hundreds of terrorist suspects.

Judge: Ohio Prison Violates Rights
Associated Press
Feb 26, 2002

A federal judge ruled Ohio must reform its system for sending inmates to a super-maximum security prison where they live in solitary confinement 23 hours a day and are shackled any time they leave their cells.

The American Civil Liberties Union accused the state of creating prison conditions more severe than solitary confinement at any other state prison. During separate a non-jury trial last month, the state agreed to make changes in health care at the prison and promised to build an open air recreation area. The two parties were unable to work out the details and the judge ordered the system be reformed.

Construction Starts on Permanent Facility to House Prisoners Captured in U.S. War Against Terrorism
AP Worldstream
February 27, 2002

A new detention facility composed of 48 cell blocks is being built elsewhere and trucked to the location. It will have 408 separate cells and replace the hastily built Camp X-Ray where the 300 prisoners of war in Afghanistan are being held. The blocks will have a concrete deck where inmates can stretch out and exercise.

Correctional Recreation has received media coverage in several publications and specials.

Sports Behind the Walls. by Rick Telander. Sports Illustrated Vol. 69. October 17, 1988. Pgs. 82-88.

Locking up sports. EPSN by Tom Farrey. December 16, 1999.

CNN Prison Lifting Special. Provision to Eliminate Weights in Prison Is Debated. April 22, 1994.

20/20 Prison Lifting Special. 'Bigger and Badder?' - Banning Weight-Lifting in Prison. John Stossel. May 6, 1994

National Correctional Recreation Association (NCRA)

The NCRA is composed of practitioners at the federal, state and local levels, including juvenile, medical, and community-based facilities. They are committed to promoting professional programs and services which assist inmates in eliminating barriers to leisure, developing leisure skills and attitudes and optimizing leisure participation.

The NCRA has developed a series of standards to help the Correctional Recreation professional in developing recreation programs that promote security, aid in the reduction of recidivism and encourage the appropriate use of leisure time. It is their goal, to educate the public and decision-makers as to the benefits of recreation in the correctional setting.

The "No Frills" Movement

Beginning in about 1994, weightlifting in prisons came in the spotlight from several fronts. Primary issues raised by opponents were the desire to "get tough on crime" by limiting prison amenities, concern that powerful inmates could be a threat inside prison or after their release and the possibility that weightlifting equipment could be used as a weapon. Between 1994 and about 1997 several states passed legislation banning or limiting weightlifting in prisons. The Zimmer Amendment restricted the purchase of several types of weightlifting equipment by federal prisons. In recent years, the issue has moved to the back burner. Weightlifting remains banned or limited in approximately a dozen states. Perhaps the only current legislative activity on the issue is Rhode Island House Bill 6662. Very similar bills have been initiated in Rhode Island in 1999, 2000 and 2001, but they have failed to pass.

Weightlifting bans were part of a much larger "no frills" prison movement. In-cell television viewing; R, X, or NC-17 rated movies, pornographic materials; boxing, wrestling, judo, karate electronic musical instruments, computer and in-cell coffee pots and hot plates were among many items banned or limited.

Prison Privileges Are Disappearing Nationwide Trend of Limiting Amenities in Jail Comes
Down to Issues of Economics and Safety
Erika Chavez
Allentown Morning Call
June 6, 1999

Amenities being cut or limited in some prisons include: contact visits with family members, free coffee, time outside their cells, cigarette smoking, weightlifting, telephone access, free medical visits and in-cell television viewing.

No-frills prisons and jails: a movement in flux.
Federal Probation
Vol. 60 No. 3 (Sept. 1996) Pages 35-44.
By. Peter Finn

Many corrections managers, and all the corrections experts contacted for this review, felt that the elimination or reduction of inmate privileges would make it more difficult for prison and jail staff to maintain security for two reasons.

First, privileges such as weightlifting, television, and recreation, keep inmates occupied; eliminating or reducing their availability would give inmates additional time in which to cause trouble, from plotting escapes to scheming to get drugs to assaulting corrections officers and other inmates. "An idle person," two corrections administrators warned, "is the devil's workshop."

Second, amenities are among the few positive incentives prison and jail administrators have with which to motivate appropriate inmate behavior. Loss of these privileges would leave managers with punishment (e.g., loss of good time, segregation) as their only tool for managing inmate behavior. As a result, facility security would be reduced.

The article goes on to provide extensive references including legal cases surrounding the limitation of inmate privileges.

Correctional Recreation Operating Budgets

Recreation programs represent a very small percentage of overall corrections operating budget.

Colorado DOC FY 2001-2001 Operations Budget Request was for a total of \$548,448,611 with \$5,865,341 of that allocated to recreation (approximately 1.1 percent).

Research in the Benefits of Correctional Recreation

Many academic studies have documented the positive aspects of Correctional Recreation. Not all have proven a positive correlation with the desired outcomes. Some report difficulty in isolating the variables under study and in conducting long term studies on inmates. In addition to the potential to modify behavior in some inmates, recreation in prisons has been found to use excess energy, relieve boredom, manage stress, improve wellness, teach cooperation, develop inmate decision making skills, teach inmates to accept the leadership roles of others, teach inmates how to use leisure time constructively and serves as a privilege that can be removed as a punishment. The studies also report most crimes are committed during leisure time. Continuing to be actively involved in recreation after release may reduce recidivism.

2002 Reference

Recent Advances in Intelligence and Self-Esteem: What They May Mean for Correctional Recreation
 Dr. Donald Greer
 NCRA 2002 National Conference

A presentation by Dr. Donald Greer from the University of Nebraska at Omaha focused on the possible transfer of recent research in the area of "serious leisure" from the academic world to corrections. Very basically, "serious leisure" activities are enduring activities that might be viewed as work by others. They include activities like gardening, building hot rods, hobbies, wood working and art. Skills are developed and the activities are engaged over time. The activities are thought provoking and could help inmates develop skills and talents. He recognizes these specific ones may not be applicable to all prison environments, but correctional recreation professionals might be able to weave the basic concept into their programs. These types of activities could be developed into lifelong pursuits by some inmates. Those inmates might be kept out of trouble after their release by their continuing involvement in "serious leisure" activities.

1990's references

Research on Recreation in Correctional Settings
 Sandra L. Little
 Parks & Recreation
 Vol. 30. No. 2 . February 1995. Pg. 20.

This paper provides an extensive bibliography of Correctional Recreation research studies prior to 1995 and provides comments on several of the major studies.

Correctional Recreation and its Impact: Self-esteem Components of Prison Inmates
 Jennifer S. Bryson, David L. Groves and Julie Lengfelder
 Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior
 Vol. 29. No. 3-4. 1992. Pgs. 27-39.

This study is another report on the study above. The 177 inmates were segmented into four groups based upon the level of felony they were incarcerated for. Billiards, bingo, dominoes, individual weightlifting, competitive weightlifting, jogging, softball, religious services and horseshoes significantly correlated with positive self-esteem in one or more of the groups.

Prisoner's Rights to Recreation: Quantity, Quality and Other Aspects
Robert D. Lee, Jr.
Journal of Criminal Justice
Vol. 24. No. 2. 1996. Pgs. 167-178.

U.S. Courts have come to recognize the need for recreation and have made numerous rulings that guarantee prisoners are afforded some minimal amount of time in recreational activities. Court decisions have also dealt with the quality of recreation and the extent to which prison officials may restrict what activities are conducted. Outdoor recreation, the social aspects of recreation and the health status of prisoners as it relates to recreation are important manners upon which the courts have ruled.

The Role of Recreation in the Federal Prison System
Thesis
Arnie Caplan
Acadia University (Canada). 1996.

Provides a very thorough historical review of Correctional Recreation and prior Correctional Recreation research in both the U.S. and Canada.

1980's references

Correctional Recreation and the Self-esteem of Prison Inmates
Psychology and Human Development
Jennifer S. Bryson and David L. Groves
Vol. 2. No. 2. 1987-1989. Pgs. 89-101.

This study involving 177 inmates tested for a correlation between the type of recreational activity most frequently participated in and self-esteem. Recreational activities with a broader coping styles were directly related to self-esteem. Self-esteem had a strong effect on delinquency. Higher self-esteem could lead to a lower rate of recidivism.

An Exploration of Recreation Participation Patterns in a Correctional Facility: A Case Study
T. Aguilar and Kelly Asmussen
Journal of Offender Counseling, Services & Rehabilitation
Vol. 14. No. 1. Pgs. 67-78. 1989.

This survey noted the five main roles of recreation in an adult correctional setting are as an institutional adjustment tool, institutional privilege, diversionary service, educational service and rehabilitative service. Diversionary service is the primary use of recreation in most adult correctional situations.

A Survey of Prison Reform on Recreation Program Services and Perceptions Toward Program Change in Selected Adult Male Federal and State Correctional Institutions
Jimmy Calloway
PhD. Thesis University of Maryland College Park
1985

The study determined changes that had occurred as a result of court degrees addressing recreation reform.

The Role of Leisure Time Activities in Corrections
American Correctional Association
Corrections Today
Vol. 42. No. 1. Jan/Feb 1980. Pgs. 36-37, 40-41.
NCJRS #65543

Research has adequately documented that recreation and leisure-time experiences have a substantial impact on one's self concept, socialization and self-expression. This documentation has not typically been transferred to corrections policy and practice.

Recreation and Leisure Time Activities in the Correctional Setting - a Selected Bibliography
U.S. Department of Justice NIJ Publication
48 pages. Published 1981.
NCJRS # 69083

Designed for the prison administrator and prison correctional program planner this bibliography provides sources that identify, define, justify and structure recreational programs in the correctional setting. Most documents were published between 1972 and 1979.

Attitudes of Minority Inmates Toward Recreation Programs as a Rehabilitative Tool
M. McIntosh
International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice
Vol. 10. Issue 1. Dated Spring 1986. Pgs. 107-113.
NCJRS #103371

This study determines the attitudes of three minority inmate groups (Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans) toward recreation as a rehabilitative tool in one state prison.

Recreation Expenditure and Deviant Behavior in a State Prison
IR Hunter
Corrective and Social Psychiatry and Journal of Behavior Technology Methods and Therapy
Vol. 34. No. 4. Oct. 1986. Pgs. 105-108.

Abstract not available

1970's references

Recreation and Corrections - It's Development, Philosophy and Future
Fain and Fitzhusen
(article in this book) Therapeutic Recreation - State of the Art
National Recreation Association
1977
NCJRS #61110

The role of recreation as a positive, integral part of corrections programs is discussed. In the penal institution it serves to maintain not only the physical well being but also mental and emotional health. As inmate morale improves, the inmates become more cooperative which improves staff morale. Recreation can also develop inmate decision making abilities.

Philosophy of Recreation in Corrections
National Therapeutic Recreation Association
Therapeutic Recreation Journal
Vol. 6. No. 3. Third Quarter 1972. Pgs. 101-102.
NCJRS #9732

By the constructive use of leisure time inmates can learn to function in the prison and be taught habits that will help them adjust to society upon release.

Prison Reform - a Historical Glimpse at Recreation's Role
National Therapeutic Recreation Association
Therapeutic Recreation Journal
Vol. 6. No. 3. Third Quarter 1972. Pgs. 103-110.
NCJRS # 9730

A historical overview of recreation in correctional facilities.

Role of Recreation Services in the Prison Rehabilitation Process
National Therapeutic Recreation Association
Therapeutic Recreation Journal
Vol. 6. No. 3. Dated Third Quarter 1972. Pgs. 111-114, 144.

Recreation must be an integral part of the total rehabilitative process. It must be related to the personal situation of the inmate and be directed toward the ultimate goal of preparing the inmate to re-enter society.

Analysis of the Recreational Pursuits of Selected Parolees From a State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania
National Therapeutic Recreation Association
Therapeutic Recreation Journal
Vol. 6. No. 3. Third Quarter 1972. Pgs. 134-140.

This study of 20 inmates found prison parole recreation patterns reflected parolee's concepts and skills prior to imprisonment and carry-over value of prison recreation activities was not as strong as the carry-over value of pre-prison recreation pursuits.

Recreation in a Prison Environment
National Therapeutic Recreation Association
Therapeutic Recreation Journal
Vol. 6. No. 3. Third Quarter 1972. Pgs. 115-118.

The Director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons offers suggestions on how recreation can and should be used as a part of the therapeutic process in prisons. They can be structured to teach inmates to work together, accept the leadership roles of others and to use leisure time constructively.

The Need for Recreational Activity in Forced Confinement
Allen Bartholomew
Australian Occupational Therapy Journal
Vol. 23. No. 2. Apr-Jun 1976. Pgs. 62-69.

For a high percentage of the inmate population, recreation could take the place of time spent simply in confinement.

Learning From Previous Correctional Management Legislation

Many previous attempts at legislating correctional policies have not had the impact desired.

Unwanted Change: Legislation's Impact on Adult Corrections Management
Peter M. Carlson
The Public Manager
Vol. 30. No. 1. Spring 2001. Pgs. 49-54.

Policy implementation is a difficult and challenging task. Even the consequences of well-intentioned and well-implemented policy can create new issues that were not anticipated. Several specific policies that failed to meet expectations are described.

In relation to the Zimmer Amendment which limited weightlifting in federal prisons. "Prison authorities have long subscribed to the notion that positive activities for confined offenders keeps them productively occupied and less inclined to other nefarious interests. Accordingly, nearly all correctional agencies throughout the country attempt to offer a recreation program among other activities that assists the personal growth of inmates and facilitates the orderly management of institutions." It goes on to quote a former prison recreation manager saying "these restrictions (the Zimmer Amendment) are adversely impacting the management of recreational programs as weights are a very popular pastime and have always kept many active inmates productively and legitimately occupied; this activity has historically filled idle time, reduced boredom, reduced tension, built self-esteem, and taught the necessity of cooperation".

Those involved in legislative efforts that may result in significantly reductions in Correctional Recreation programs should read the article above and try to anticipate problems that may arise in the implementation of their changes.

Finding Funds to Offset Budget Cuts

Several recreation programs already receive monies from commissary funds, telephones, snack machines and other sources. Additional means of generating revenue could be sought.

Several states and the federal government run prison industry facilities manufacturing products for sale primarily to other government entities. Some representative programs are UNICOR in the federal system, Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction (TRICOR), Prison Industries in South Carolina and Corcraft in New York. Many institutional manufacturing facilities operate at lower efficiencies than those in the private sector.

ERP in Institutional Manufacturing
B. Douglas Clinton and Rhonda D. Lummus
Management Accounting Quarterly
Summer 2000

Private sector manufacturers are implementing Enterprise Resource Planning systems to improve efficiencies. The unique nature of institutional manufacturing (prison industries) leads to many special considerations for system implementers. The absence of a desire to automate, more people are often working than needed, the difficulty of delivering inventory through gates encourages larger orders (larger inventories), and many other inefficiencies compared with private enterprises are identified.

Reducing some of these inefficiencies and perhaps cooperating with nearby states in production and sale of goods might greatly increase profits.

If inmates knew increasing and maintaining increased production could save their recreation programs, individual productivity as well as the overall number of workers might increase. A "work for rec" program might allow increased recreation time or programs for workers.

Some facilities already provide increased recreation access to inmates who work.

Lemon Creek Correctional Center (Alaska) Inmate Programs
Web site: <http://www.correct.state.ak.us/corrections/institutions/lccc/educatio.htm>

"All inmates are offered at least one hour of outdoor recreation per day. If an inmate works, then more outdoor recreation time is offered."

"All inmates are offered at least one hour of indoor recreation per day. If an inmate works, then more gymnasium privileges are offered."

Prison farms, billing states for road cleanup crews, the sale of arts and crafts, donations from inmate families, the general public and corporations are a few additional possible sources of funds that might defray a portion of the recreation budget. Obviously any approach of this nature would need approval of the governing bodies. Most of these approaches might not be able to be implemented in time to stave off the current wave of budget cuts, but some might be a buffer against future cuts.

Cutting Recreation Budgets

Several states have already cut their corrections budgets. Construction and security are the major expenses in the prison system.. They are tangible expenses the general public and legislators can understand as necessary evils (drains on tax dollars). Inmate programs like recreation are often seen to be expendable, especially when finances are tight. “Get tough on crime” and “No-frills in prisons” movements may place Correctional Recreation on the chopping block without fully analyzing its contribution.

The probability of a good decision being made is proportional to the knowledge of the matter in question. In this situation that knowledge is distributed among state administrators, legislators, the public, correctional administrators, correctional recreation professionals, the general public, prior research and the inmates themselves. By pulling this knowledge together, a better decision can be reached.

Recreation cuts have already been proposed in Illinois. The budget adjustment recently proposed by Governor Ryan in Illinois eliminates over 100 correctional recreation positions.

Chief Public Information Officer, Illinois Department of Corrections
Telephone Interview
Gary Polson, Strength Tech, Inc.
March 11, 2002

When asked about the proposed large reduction in correctional recreators by the state and if they had any statements or news releases concerning it. He was very cordial and reported they did not as it had only recently been proposed. He said the proposal would eliminate 124 LTS (Leisure Time Services) positions. When asked if they had any plans of how they might deal with that situation he said their would be at least one staff member at each facility and they may enlist community volunteers. Due to budget restrictions in recent years, they have already backed-off some, especially with respect to bringing in outside teams for softball and basketball. He noted the LTS reduction is only a proposal at this time, the legislature has not yet acted on it.

One has to be naïve to read all the budget shortfall headlines in the front of this paper and not think it is going to happen at other institutions It may not always be visible as a line item, because it may come in the form of lower operational budgets and personnel reductions.

Potential Methods for Reducing Correctional Recreation Budgets

All cuts eventually work down to positions, programs, equipment, maintenance and facilities. Facilities are already in place. Maintenance expense is often absorbed by inmate labor. Most major equipment is already in place (exercise equipment, basketball goals, game tables, audio visual equipment, art supplies, games). Programming cost are proportional to the number of events and the number of inmates participation. Annual equipment replacement budgets relatively low and distributed throughout the year. Cutting staff positions immediately reduces payroll costs, but the state begins paying unemployment and severance benefits to those workers reducing the overall effect on the state budget. In addition, the state loses their years of training and experience. Personnel cuts may not always be the wisest choice.

Some methods that may be proposed to reduce staffing costs are listed below. Not all meet current state or federal mandated programs and some may reduce security inside and outside the institutions. This paper does not endorse any of them. They are merely listed here for discussion.

Correctional Recreation staffing levels can be reduced by reducing the overall workload

1. Reduce the number of hours, days or seasons recreation is offered
2. Allow inmates to recreate in larger groups
3. Eliminate activities and programs requiring higher levels of supervision
4. Limit recreation to an unsupervised open outdoor exercise rec yard
5. Reduce the number of activities, sports and programs provided
6. Limit recreation access to a fraction of the inmate population
7. Reduce the number of inmates in the facilities
8. Transfer more recreation management responsibilities to other corrections officers
9. Transfer more recreation management responsibilities to inmate workers
10. Increased use of community volunteers
11. Eliminate recreation at some facilities
12. Eliminate recreation at all facilities

The number of "on staff" correctional recreation professionals might also be reduced by

1. Improving the efficiency of the remaining correctional recreation professionals by providing them with training, tools, aides and other resources to improve their efficiency
2. Outsourcing part or all of the correctional recreation function
3. Having the remaining correctional recreation professionals work longer hours (overtime)

Other budget reduction strategies include:

1. Reducing the number of hours current correctional recreation professionals work
2. Reducing pay and benefits to current correctional recreation staff

At this time, the Bureau of Prisons does not expect budget shortfalls to impacts their recreation programs. But it is easy to imagine the spotlight placed on corrections by state budget shortfalls being reflected to the federal side and then drifting down to recreation.

Suggested Guidelines for Correctional Budget Cuts

If recreation cuts are inevitable, there are currently no guidelines or methods in place for how best to make them as effective as possible. Some possible guidelines are suggested below.

1. Recreation programs will still need to be in compliance with existing ordinances and court decisions mandating recreation, or existing laws will need to be changed
2. Correctional recreation professionals laid off will be entitled to any exit benefits and severance packages specified in their current contracts
3. Develop an extensive list of existing recreation programs and activities by facility listing the number of participants, relative impact on the population and cost of the program or activity for use as a tool in budget discussions.
4. Exemptions be considered for at least some “serious leisure” activities as described by Dr. Donald Greer from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in a presentation at this conference.
5. Attempt to minimize the impact on the quality of life of today’s inmates and correctional professionals
6. Security conditions inside and outside the institutions are not compromised
7. Recognize that most inmates will one day be released
8. Evaluate possible alternatives to employee layoffs including new sources of funding

Letter from an inmate

Over the years we (Strength Tech, Inc.) have received dozens of letters from inmates praising correctional recreation activities and indicating how those activities helped turn their lives around. A portion of a letter we received from an inmate after he was released is reproduced below.

The reason for my clean record in prison was due to the fact that I was allowed to go to the gym and work out. It was this mode of stress relief that allowed me to take my frustrations and aggressions out in a constructive and non-confrontational matter. When I first went to prison I didn't know anybody and so I went to the gym and found some of the best people that I have ever known, working out and getting in shape. My friends that I found in the weight room were a group of Christian men who only had the sole intention of making themselves better able to serve God. It was this group of men that set my prison life on the right track and headed in the right direction. There were plenty of guys my age that would just stand around all day and they were the ones that always seemed to be in trouble. It would have been very easy for me to join their crowd but I looked at them and then I looked at the guys in the weight room and my decision was final. I wanted to be with the guys who were actually doing something positive with their time and were serving a greater purpose.

Summary

Most states are currently experiencing major shortfalls in their revenue collections. Several have already reduced correctional budgets to reduce expenses. At least one states (Illinois) has proposed eliminating over a hundred correctional recreation positions. Hundreds of correctional recreation positions may soon come under fire.

A basic understanding of correctional recreation was provided, including academic references indicating correctional recreation has the potential to modify behavior in some inmates, is a way to use excess energy, relieve boredom, manage stress, improve wellness, teach cooperation, develop inmate decision making skills, teach inmates to accept the leadership roles of others, teach inmates how to use leisure time constructively and serves as a privilege that can be removed as a punishment. They also report many crimes are committed during leisure time.

Current Correctional Recreation programs are court and legislative mandated. If cuts are enacted, those mandates must still be met or changed.

Not all corrections policy decisions have not had the impact desired

The potential may exist for increasing correction revenues in the long term from larger, more efficient prison industry production operations.

Several specific methods for reducing correctional recreation budgets were enumerated. They result in a variety of problems ranging from sacrificing positions, programs, activities or security.

Roads, schools, health care, police and fire protection are important too.

Tough decisions are about to be made. We hope this paper will initiate discussions leading to well-informed, effective choices.

This paper is posted online on the Strength Tech, Inc. web site. The online version contains links to many of the reference materials as well as updated information.

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We also invite your comments on this paper and any suggestions you may have toward dealing with the issues.

References

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- U.S. Bureau of Prisons <http://www.bop.gov>
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Inmates are allowed more recreation time if they work
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<http://www.worldleisure.org/Commissions/Education/edcompospaper%25seriousleisure.pdf>
- Serious Leisure: a Conceptual Statement
<http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~yian/reserve/stebbins2.htm>
- Strength Tech <http://www.strengthtech.com>
Covers weightlifting in prisons and other correctional recreation issues