Guidelines for Safe Office Design

INTRODUCTION

There are an estimated 100,000 community corrections[1] employees working in the U.S. Many of these dedicated professionals are working in offices that are substandard, both in terms of size and staff safety. Over the years there have been a number of highly-publicized incidents involving shortcomings in office safety and security.

The functions of and the responsibilities carried out in the community corrections offices continue to evolve. The safety and security of staff can be improved if office design is more standardized and makes greater use of safe office design practices. This position paper has been developed to serve as a planning guide and resource for community corrections administrators, supervisors and their design professionals as they work to enhance safety and operations.

POSITION

The American Probation and Parole Association considers the safety of community corrections staff to be a primary goal of the Association and recommends that community corrections agencies assess the safety design of offices, and design or redesign offices to provide as safe a working environment as is reasonably possible.

THE MISSION OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

The majority of community corrections agencies perform one or more of the following core activities in their offices. These onsite activities enable staff to accomplish their mission of ensuring public safety through the successful diversion/reintegration of adults and juveniles on their caseloads. This list is illustrative and does not encompass all of the activities of all community corrections agencies.

    a. Conduct investigations related to criminal/delinquent offenses and violations of probation, parole, or court or releasing authority orders or conditions.

    b. Supervise both adults and juveniles[3] placed on probation, supervision or supervised release by the court, as well as persons paroled or otherwise conditionally released from prison or juvenile detention or correctional facility.

    c. Prepare pre-trial and pre-sentence investigations, pre-disposition reports, pre-release and pre-parole reports, prepare violation of probation and/or parole reports and a

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, the term "community corrections" encompasses adult and juvenile probation, parole (including post-incarceration supervision provided under other terminology), pretrial services and residential facilities located in the community.

[3] The term justice-involved individual will generally be used to encompass the full range of individuals and statuses for which community corrections agencies are responsible.

variety of other types of judicial and correctional reports, to support decision-making by judicial officers and releasing authorities.

d.   Conduct supervision activities which may include the use of electronic supervision equipment.

e.   Perform urinalysis and other forms of substance abuse testing.

f.   Hold meetings, conferences, workshops and counseling activities associated with supervision, group activities, meetings with community-based groups and interoffice or interagency coordination.

g.   Provide services to victims, including making contact with victims to ensure that they are aware of sentencing and hearing dates and dispositions, conducting financial investigations to support restitution as part of sentencing, and other activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I.   General Office Design Guidelines

A.   The design of the office areas should be business-like, professional, functional and appropriately designed. The entire facility shall meet all applicable building and fire codes.

B.   Offices should be designed to provide appropriate separation and zoning of areas. Office areas should be designed to create several separate and distinct areas, including:

1.   Staff-only areas -- including support staff workstations, secured computer and records areas, weapons lockers and evidence storage rooms.

2.   Staff/public accessible areas (including officer offices, conference/meeting rooms, and substance abuse testing areas) where justice-involved individuals can meet with staff in individual or group activities and where staff are provided with appropriate functional workstations and safety/security support systems and backup.

3.   Separate and discrete public access and waiting areas, protecting the privacy of the office visitors; and

4.   General support areas -- for staff and support services access and use.

II.   Important Considerations For Community Corrections Office Design

A.   There is an obvious need for security associated with the activities of the community corrections office, including specific requirements associated with the nature of the work, the individuals visiting the office, the nature of the criminal cases, the fact that in many jurisdictions community corrections staff may be armed, the incidence of

office arrest of persons in violation their conditions of supervision, and the confidentiality requirements of the court and personal records created and used within the office.

1. Staff should have quick and direct access to the office and should be able to exit the office areas into staff parking areas for field supervision visits and investigative work with relative ease.

2. Staff parking should be in close enough proximity to allow for timely and efficient transportation of arrestees.

B. Security concerns are high; even when community corrections offices are located in buildings with security screening. Access to staff areas from the public reception area should require passage through a controlled door with an electronic and/or cipher lock.

1. The perception of the area should not be overly restrictive.

2. While providing appropriate security, community corrections agencies should try to reduce the sense of "us" and "them" between staff and others, particularly the justice-involved individuals.

C. Most offices are designed to allow staff to work on collaborative tasks. Collaborative investigations/casework is an important component in the supervision of justice-involved individuals. As a result, office areas and individual workstations should be designed as multi-tasking workstations, designed to support multiple concurrent activities, multiple visitors, and the possibility of changes in assignment.

1. Office areas should meet current guidelines for high-performance office areas, with good acoustic privacy in offices, appropriate use of windows, both for natural light where possible and for observation of activities within each office for security purposes. There should be adequate area for specific equipment and functions, and appropriate design for power, data/telecommunication, lighting and security systems.

2. Wherever feasible, exterior windows should be provided for staff areas. Due to security requirements, windows in offices where justice-involved individuals or visitors have access should be at least six (6) feet above ground or of a configuration where visual access from outside is not possible. For established construction where exterior windows cannot be retrofitted, windows should be bullet resistant with tint where appropriate.

D. Environmental conditions and controls are important. Care should be taken in the design of mechanical and electrical systems to meet good office design standards for lighting, glare reduction, appropriate ventilation and temperature control.

1. Office exits should be placed in such a manner as to allow arrangement of desks that provide staff with primary, or at least equal, access to the door, thus not

allowing justice-involved individuals or other visitors to "trap" staff in their office.

2. All mechanical systems should be designed to provide appropriate ambient sound levels to support privacy and confidentiality, and system design should meet sound attention level requirements between spaces to preserve confidentiality of conversations between rooms.

E. Community corrections offices may be located in self-contained, free-standing structures, or may be tenants in buildings shared with other governmental or private-sector tenants. "Satellite" offices should meet the same safety standards as established probation/parole offices.

1. Whether free-standing or shared with other agencies, community corrections offices should be secure and safe, with direct access to both public parking and designated and/or protected staff parking areas. Site and building design, including provisions for access and entry, should incorporate logical Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) features, including:

a. Trash bins used for the community corrections offices where justice-involved individuals report should be placed outside and away from the building. Bins should be constructed or located so as to restrict retrieval of items by the public.

b. Large sculptures, planters or other somewhat indestructible objects to act as vehicle barriers should be placed around the building where justice-involved individuals are reporting. The planters should be well maintained so that items are not easily hidden in the plants or containers.

F. Appropriate security measures should be taken in locating public parking.

1. Staff parking area is an important issue. In many locations, a ratio of parking spaces to total office staff is provided, such as one space for two staff or one space for every government car.

2. Recent standards recommend that one space should be provided for every staff that spends more than 13 days per month in the field.

3. Since some offices have designated pre-sentence investigation staff and designated field staff, parking requirements will vary based on the specific organizational and operational structure in any office.

4. Staff parking should be close to the office, well lit and monitored by security cameras.

5. Reserved parking spaces should not be identified with individual names.

6. Ideally, staff cars should be located in a secured area for the protection of government or private vehicles and staff.

G. Should juveniles and adults report to the same office, there should be separation of the respective waiting areas.

III.   Important Considerations for Office Space Requirements

A. Executive and Administrative Support Office Areas

1   The office areas of community corrections agencies are composed of staff access areas (restricted public access). These office areas usually include private offices and required support areas for senior supervisors and administrators.

2   In most offices, reception activities are performed by a staff person who may be located in or near the administrative area, with responsibility for answering phones and in-person receptionist functions.

3   Other functions dedicated to administrative staff include handling mail distribution and sorting, preparation of files and office/officer statistics and schedules, and general office support functions.

4   Access to staff areas should be locked and access controlled. All entry and exit doors should be constructed of solid core materials and always be locked unless under visual control. Offices should have security cameras and a video recording system in all areas where visitors have access. Staff should have secured storage for duty equipment.

5   Where staff are working on assignments with no contact with justice-involved individuals (some pre-sentence investigations) their offices may be located within the administrative office areas.

6   The relationship between the staff working in the offices and support staff is crucial to effective operations. Staff supervising caseloads have cases in different stages of the case management process at all times, leading to a constant pressure to complete assignments. It is critical that the work flow in the office is logical, and that the right people have access to appropriate information (hard copies and computerized) at the right times.

B. Office Areas Routinely Accessed by Justice-Involved Individuals

1. Community corrections office areas are routinely accessed justice-involved individuals. These areas, typically house "supervision units" and should be situated to provide direct but controlled access from both the staff area and reception area, and should be furnished in a typical office standard style with some specific variations to accommodate specific security/safety design

provisions (CCVE monitoring, appropriate duress alarm buttons, special glazing and wall/door construction requirements).

2. In these areas, both supervisors and staff typically require an office to provide appropriate separation, acoustic privacy and confidentiality.

    a.   The design of these offices should emphasize communication and privacy, but security of the staff is of primary importance, and office design should provide for appropriate security systems and appropriate furniture design and placement to enable staff to quickly leave the office if necessary.

3. Generally, justice-involved individuals access these areas by coming to the reception area, at which point the receptionist calls the staff, and the staff comes to a reception area and escorts the visitor to the office. Justice-involved individuals should never be allowed to move within the office unescorted. Interviews are typically individual contacts.

    a.   In many jurisdictions, policy and procedures limit the total number of visitors in the individual offices to not more than three (3), and staff typically have the option of using a meeting/conference room located near the reception/ public waiting area.   Where conference/meeting rooms are located near a reception area, acoustic separation and privacy between the room and other offices and the reception/waiting areas must be maintained.

    b.   Many agencies are using "Sterile Interview Rooms" in lieu of interviewing people in individual offices. These offices should have access close to the reception area. The offices should contain only items needed for interviews. There should be good visual access via the placement of windows. If computers are integral to the interview process, computer access must be available. As with all offices, staff should have primary access to the door. Duress alarms are to be available to the staff while seated.

4. Importantly, while most access to the office by visitors is uneventful, periodically staff must take justice-involved individuals into custody in the office setting. Arrested individuals must be escorted from the building in custody, and specific provisions should be made for holding, the path of travel to a designed exit, and to a secured transport area.

C. Support Areas

1. General office support areas for community corrections offices include:

    a.   A reception counter with security glass, a pass-through, and a level of security lining in the walls surrounding the glass area, consistent with the facility threat/risk assessment.

b. Conference/meeting rooms (general/large for staff and large group counseling, and smaller one(s) for individual meetings.

c. Urinalysis (UA) toilet.

d. UA and/or other substance monitoring supplies storage.

e. UA testing (e.g. EMIT) equipment and secure sample storage.

f. Electronic monitoring/GPS office.

g. Electronic monitoring/GPS equipment storage/repair room.

h. Gun lockers (for those jurisdictions where staff are authorized to carry weapons).

i. Secure computer terminal/printer room.

j. Library (training materials, reference materials).

k. Evidence room.

2 Controlled shipping and receiving areas should be provided for community corrections offices. Policy and procedures should ensure that all deliveries are registered, screened and logged in prior to being accepted.

3. A staff-break/lounge area and staff toilets should be provided in staff-accessible areas only. In facilities where community corrections offices are co-located with judiciary-related offices, these may be shared or designated for separate departments, based on overall policy and procedure.

a. In all cases, these areas should be separate from public restrooms and lounge areas, and located within a restricted area to preserve security, separation of staff from visitors, and adequate provisions for weapon control.

4. Calculations of required support areas should be based on anticipated use due to actual community corrections office staffing and size. However, since many community corrections offices report to specific judicial units, it is not uncommon for community corrections offices to share training areas, automation and support services, and other support functions with clerk offices, court-related offices, or other justice community agencies or services.

D. Total Departmental Areas

1. The net areas specified in Table 1 (Space Guidelines – Typical Community Corrections Office Areas) do not include the space required to accommodate internal circulation, such as hallways, among the listed spaces. While the

amount of internal circulation space required varies with each facility's specific design, an additional factor should be applied during preliminary planning to determine the total usable area of the facility (i.e., the estimated total usable area of the facility is equal to the sum of all the net programmed spaces plus circulation space).

2. Use of this factor is important, since use of wider-than-normal hallways is important in areas where escorted visitors and staff are moving in both directions on tight schedules.

    a. Wider-than-normal hallways can allow people to get together for impromptu discussions, and can be very important in providing fast response and good access for staff response in the event of an incident within the office.

IV.   Access and Security

A. Access into a community corrections office should be strictly controlled, although visits are necessary and essential and include a wide range of visitor types (see below).

B. Offices require public access to the reception area during the day and often in the evenings. Access for office staff is also required during these times; staff should be able to enter and leave the office without passing through the public reception/waiting area and without using the facility's public circulation system extensively. If the office is not located within a courthouse or other facility with weapons screening at the public entries, the office should be provided with a weapons screening facility of its own.

C. Examples of Visitors to the office include:

1. Justice involved individuals who come to see their officer;

2. Families of persons under supervision;

3. Defense attorneys;

4. Prosecuting attorneys;

5. Victims and victim advocates,

6. Law enforcement officers;

7. Treatment and other service providers,

8. Vendors, and

9. Other members of the public.

D.   Agency staff should assume visitors will come through screening, through public corridors.

1.   The public may enter the community corrections office into a controlled public reception/ waiting area.

2.   After regular business hours, group sessions may be conducted at the community corrections office, in a public conference/meeting room near a public entrance with strict limits between the conference room and the general office.

Since some visitors come with a friend or family member(s), waiting areas may be designed to accommodate children, who may be required to wait in the waiting area, but at the discretion of the staff , they may come in with the visitor. Waiting areas should be easily viewed from the reception station, with no blind spots.

E.   The security and alarm systems should function as an integral part of the security and alarm systems for the total facility.

1.   Doors to executive offices, senior staff offices and enclosed storage rooms should have key locks, except as otherwise noted.

2.   Secure storage spaces should be provided with heat sensors. Single fixture toilets should have privacy locks.

3.   Doors from public reception/waiting areas to restricted access areas should have electric strike locks. Reception/public counter workstations should be equipped with silent duress alarms connected to the building control/communications room.

4.   In addition, duress alarms should be located in supervisors' offices, each individual office/sterile interview room, and general office areas accessible to all community corrections staff. These alarms should be located to allow access from the staff seated area and include a means to alert responding staff as to which office is requesting assistance.

5.   The public counter in the community corrections office must be break-resistant and equipped with a counter-to-ceiling break-resistant or bullet-resistant (based on threat assessment) glass screen.

F.   Location of Security and Duress Alarm Systems

1.   Reception/public counter.

2.   Supervisor's office.

3.   Selected inner areas.

4. Secure storage.

5. Each staff's office

6. Sterile interview rooms

7. UA collection area

Personal body alarms should also be available in areas where staff are with visitors and may need to move about, such as UA collection areas.

V. Policy Review and Training

In order to operate facilities as safely and securely as possible, to protect staff and visitors, and to ensure maintenance of the best practices that support the mission of community corrections, APPA recommends that each jurisdiction:

A. Write, or review existing, jurisdiction-specific policies and procedures to ensure that they are consistent with statutes and case law.

B. Mandatory office safety training should be provided to each staff member upon hire and during refresher safety training. Training should minimally include:

1. Safety awareness.

2. Safety issues in approaching and exiting the office.

3. Safe office arrangement.

4. Fire and bomb threat evacuation.

5. Policies on responding to verbal/physical situations within the office.

6. Office arrest procedures.

Table 1:

POTENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A CHECKLIST
FOR OFFICE DESIGN

SPACE GUIDELINES -- TYPICAL COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS OFFICE AREAS
Table 1

OFFICES	
Unit Executive	225 SF - 300 SF, with private toilet (50 SF)
Executive Secretary	100 SF- 120 SF (includes admin. Records)
Reception Area	50 SF (minimum), or 15 SF per person at typical peak period
Chief Deputy, Deputy-In-Charge, Manager	200 SF - 225 SF
Professional First Line Supervisor -- Large office	150 SF -180 SF
Professional Administrative	100 SF - 150 SF
Professional Line Positions (Reporting Office)	120 SF - 150 SF
OPEN WORKSTATIONS	
Operational and Administrative	80 SF - 120 SF
Support First Line Supervisor	80 SF - 100 SF
Secretary	64 SF -- 100 SF
Operational and Administrative Support Positions	48 SF – 64 SF
Counter and Cashier Workstations	45 SF
GENERAL OFFICE SPACES	
Counter/Screening	5 LF / Staff Position
- built-in / stand-up station with break-resistant design and glazing	
Records Storage	10-15 SF / File Cabinet
Secured Records Storage	8 SF/ 10 LF per file cabinet
Active Records Storage	9 SF/ 21 LF per file cabinet
Inactive Records Storage	9 SF/ 21 LF per file cabinet
Transfer Box Storage	50 SF
Work Table	90 SF
Supplies Storage -- Large Office	100 SF

Supplies Storage -- Small Office	50 SF
Equipment Storage -- Large Office	150 SF
Library	9 SF / 21 LF of shelving (7 shelf / 36" unit)
Small Office	50 SF
Work Area	15 / Staff, min. 105 SF
Copier Area (per copier, low/med/high respectively)	50 SF / 80 SF / 120 SF
Conference Rooms - Small Office	300 SF for up to 20 persons
Conference Room - Large Office	400 SF for 21 or more persons
-- general requirements: 25 SF / person + 70 / CALR station	
Fax Work Station	10 SF
Shared CRT/Printer Area	50 SF
Vault/Safe	20 SF - 80 SF
Microform Reader/Printer	35 SF
Microform Storage Cabinet	12 SF / cabinet
Shredder	25 SF
SPECIAL OFFICE SPACES	
Toilet for Urinalysis / Substance Sample Collection	80 SF
Urinalysis / Substance Supplies Storage	40 SF
Urinalysis / Substance Testing/EMIT Lab & Sample Storage	175 SF
Electronic Monitoring Equipment Storage / Repair	95 SF
Storage/Repair Room	150 SF
Secure Computer Terminal/ Printer Room	150 SF
Gun locker	10 SF
Law Enforcement Processing	200 SF – 250 SF