

Executive Summary

Additional Inspection of County Jails 2023: Project Evaluation and Recommendations

Author: Jenny Carver

Date: June 14, 2024

In November 2022, Multnomah County voters approved Measure 26-233, a County Charter amendment recommended by the Multnomah County Charter Review Committee that requires Board members to conduct at least one additional inspection of County jails administered by the Sheriff's Office per calendar year. This is in addition to the yearly inspection required by Oregon Revised Statute (ORS 169.040).

The additional inspection was carried out for the first time in the calendar year of 2023. An evaluation was launched in March 2024 to gather information from people who were involved in the project or would like to provide feedback. Five participants responded to the survey, four individuals were involved in a group discussion, and one individual was interviewed.

The evaluation was organized into four sections, using Multnomah County's Equity and Empowerment lens as a guide, focused on purpose, people, process and overall thoughts. Generally, participants felt that the purpose of the project was fulfilled for the first year of implementation; the people included were able to provide relevant and valuable perspectives to inform the project and the project team was intentional about including people who could bring different perspectives. Participants who participated in the inspection itself (for the process section) felt the process was generally clear and the tools were well designed to support those involved. Finally, participants generally felt the intention of the amendment for "volunteers to issue public reports with findings and recommendations" was achieved.

Overall, the first year of implementing the additional inspection was a positive experience for the people involved, according to those who participated in the evaluation. There were three areas for improvement that were widely agreed upon:

- Providing more clarity about the purpose of the inspection and how it differs from a facility tour.
- Finding ways to expand the applicant pool through more robust outreach and updating the application process.
- Developing strategies that engage people most impacted by incarceration in the planning and implementation process.

The observations and recommendations in this evaluation will be important to inform the iteration of the additional inspection in 2024 and in the coming years.

Additional Inspection of County Jails 2023: Project Evaluation and Recommendations

Author: Jenny Carver

Date: June 14, 2024

Disclaimer: The author of this report was assigned as the project manager for the Additional Inspection of County Jails 2023 in January 2023 as a Strategic Initiatives Manager for the Multnomah County Chief Operating Officer's team. On March 18, 2024 the author started a new position with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office as the Deputy Chief of Staff. As part of the transition, the author completed the planned evaluation of the Additional Inspection 2023 and will continue to support future additional inspections as a member of the Sheriff's Office.

Background and Methodology

In November 2022, Multnomah County voters approved Measure 26-233, a County Charter amendment recommended by the Multnomah County Charter Review Committee that requires Board members to conduct at least one additional inspection of County jails administered by the Sheriff's Office per calendar year. This is in addition to the yearly inspection required by Oregon Revised Statute (ORS 169.040).

The amendment states the County will use an application process to identify at least one volunteer member of the public to accompany the Board, with preference for individuals who live in, work in, or have demonstrated connections to Multnomah County. According to the amendment, volunteers should be independent of the County auditor and the facilities they inspect, and given reasonable stipends and administrative support. The additional inspections - within reasonable measures for safety and security - would provide access for the County commissioner and volunteer(s) to the facilities. And volunteers will issue public reports with findings and recommendations.

The additional inspection was carried out for the first time in the calendar year of 2023. After the first year of implementation, this evaluation was completed to gather information from people who were involved in the project or would like to provide feedback. The goal was to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement for this process moving forward.

Methodology and Results

The evaluation was launched in March, 2024. Evaluation participants were given the opportunity to complete a survey, attend a virtual interview or group session. Direct invitations to participate were sent to 19 individuals including project team members, project sponsors, volunteers, Board of County Commissioners and their staff, and the Multnomah County Chair. A link to the survey was available on the project webpage and open to the public for two weeks. Transcripts from interviews and one group session were analyzed along with the survey results and organized into observations about the first year of implementation and recommendations for the project sponsor and team to consider in the future.

Five participants responded to the survey, four individuals were involved in a group discussion, and one individual was interviewed. A total of 10 individual responses were recorded and meeting notes, emails and other project materials were also examined. Survey and focus group questions can be found in **Appendix II**. According to survey results and attendance reports for virtual sessions - participants included project sponsors, project team members, volunteers, County Commissioners and County Commissioner Staff, the Chair and Chair's staff and a member of the general public.

Project Evaluation

This section will provide an overview of the project itself and provide detail about the evaluation, the findings and recommendations.

Project Purpose and Summary

In May 2023, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Multnomah County designated a project manager to lead a team to deliver the first year of implementation for the additional inspection of County jails. The project team included representatives from:

- Multnomah County Attorney's Office,
- Multnomah County Sheriff's Office,
- Multnomah County Office of Community Involvement,
- Multnomah County Chair's Office,
- Multnomah County Central Human Resources - Trauma Informed Care expertise and,
- County Communications.

The purpose statement for 2023 was to "implement Measure 26-233, County Commissioner Inspection of Jails Amendment to allow for more transparency in the county jail facilities, and to center the values of equity, justice, belonging and compassion in this project".

The project team developed the materials and workflow to support the recruitment and selection of volunteers, an internal and external communication strategy, as well as guidance and resources to support volunteers pre- and post-inspection. The team also provided regular updates and opportunities for feedback to the County Chair and Board of Commissioners. The additional inspection was conducted in October 2023. Final reports from volunteers and a more

indepth view of the project can be found on the project webpage at:
multco.us/oci/additional-inspection-county-jail-project-2023.

Findings and Recommendations

The evaluation was organized into four sections, using Multnomah County's Equity and Empowerment lens as a guide:

- The **Purpose Section** explored how well participants felt the purpose was achieved for this project in 2023.
- The **People Section** explored how participants felt we did or did not meaningfully include people who were most impacted by this project at different states of the project.
- The **Process Section** explored what was or was not clear and/or valuable about different stages of the project once volunteers were selected. Questions in this section were not included in the survey that was made available online for the general public and for the internal survey, participants were able to skip this section if they did not participate in the inspection itself.
- The **Overall Thoughts and Wrap Up Section**, provided an opportunity for participants to share anything that wasn't included in the rest of the survey/discussion or additional comments about the first year of implementation.

Purpose Section - Findings and Recommendations

Participants generally felt that the purpose of the project was fulfilled for the first year of implementation. Most participants felt that there were constraints on the amount of time to plan for and implement the project. The implication is that with more time and the lessons learned in this first year - the project will be improved in the future. Several participants mentioned the need to be more clear about what is meant by an "inspection". This was heard both from participants that participated in the visit to the jails and those who did not.

The participants that felt the purpose was not fulfilled felt that more opportunities for feedback from people who are most impacted by the criminal justice system would be helpful, that the number of participants that attended the inspection itself was too many, more information ahead of time would have clarified what the volunteers were looking for and a more robust template for the reports would also have been helpful.

Here are some of the recommendations:

- Engage volunteers in a discussion about transparency and what it means in this context.
- Gather more information from the general public throughout the process.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit itself to address the discrepancy between a "tour" and "inspection".
- Find a way to create more of a feedback loop with communities disproportionately impacted by incarceration.

- Provide more information ahead of time so volunteers can have a more informed view of the current state of the jails.
- Provide more opportunities for individuals who have lived experience or a direct connection to communities disproportionately impacted by incarceration.
- Provide sample lunch from the facility and include visitor waiting rooms in the inspection (specifically the bulletin board, video kiosks and Securus Commissary ATMs).

People Section - Findings and Recommendations

Participants generally felt that with the resources that were available for the first year of implementation, the people included were able to provide relevant and valuable perspectives to inform the project. Participants also noted the need for more representation and involvement from people most impacted by incarceration in Multnomah County.

Here is a summary of the recommendations generally provided for this section:

- Ask the community, Chair and Board of County Commissioners to further define the purpose of the additional inspection moving forward.
- Develop additional tools and/or training for volunteers to prepare them prior to the inspection.
- Explore having the Chair or Commissioners identify a specific charge or focus area each year for the volunteers.
- Bring in additional voices from the community to inform the application process, outreach and communication strategy by leveraging existing networks like the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) Justice Fellowship.
- Provide a better understanding of anticipated outcomes from the reports for the public and volunteers.

Planning and Application

During the planning phase, participants generally felt that the project team was intentional about including people that could bring different perspectives for the first year of implementation. A few highlighted a standing agenda item for project team meetings that asked team members to reflect on asking others to be involved.

Although participants felt generally that the application itself and the outreach strategy for getting the word out was successful, they emphasized the need to improve our outreach efforts and expand the time the application was open to increase the number of applicants. Participants noted the electronic version of the application made it more accessible, however the length and ambiguity of some of the application questions may have been a barrier.

In total, we received 14 complete applications and 8 incomplete applications. Of the complete applications, here is a summary of applicant demographic information:

- Five applicants said they were between 25-34 years old, two applicants were between 35-44 and two more between 65-74, one applicant was under 25, one between 45-54, one between 55-64, and one applicant declined to answer.

- Six applicants identified themselves as female, six applicants identified themselves as male and one applicant identified themselves as non-binary.
- A majority of the applicants identified White, Slavic, or European as their racial/ethnic identity; with only one applicant identifying as Black, African American or African; one identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native and White, Slavic or European; and one applicant declined to answer.
- Nine applicants came from a 2 person household, three came from 1 person household and one applicant from a 4 person household.
- The approximate household income reported for applicants were as follows:
 - Six reported \$90,000-\$199,000
 - Three reported \$60,000-\$89,000
 - Two reported \$30,000-\$59,000
 - One reported under \$30,000
 - One declined to answer.
- Nine applicants reported they owned the property where they live and four applicants are currently renting when asked about housing status.

When asked how applicants heard about the opportunity, most indicated they saw it on social media platform Instagram. The others heard it from a friend or coworker and one applicant read about it in Street Roots.

Here is a summary of the recommendations provided regarding the application and applicant outreach efforts:

- Get the word out earlier about the opportunity and conduct additional outreach to organizations like: Portland State University Law and Social Work programs and organizations connected to LPSCC.
- Continue to make the application available online and strategically place paper copies at locations like libraries where community members will find them.
- Reduce the length of the application by removing questions (such as question 6) and provide more clarity regarding questions 2 and 5 and the amount offered for the stipend.

Communication Strategy (Internal and External)

Internally, participants felt that regular updates and opportunities were provided for project team members and County leaders. Additionally, partners were involved early in the process - like Corrections Health. Externally, the project webpage was kept up to date and included clear, comprehensive information. One participant shared that the project webpage was difficult to find and could have included a summary of information about applications that were received. It was also noted that some use of social media and other external facing tools was helpful but could be improved in the future.

Here is a summary of the recommendations provided regarding the internal and external communication strategies:

- Leverage existing relationships with local newsletters.
- Work with culturally responsive partners to find the best way to market the opportunity.

- Explore if there's additional opportunities to offer for volunteers selected for the inspection like a meeting with the Sheriff and/or other MCSO leaders to go over findings.
- More outreach through different avenues like non-profits, churches, schools, City District coalitions and neighborhood associations with a focus on zip codes (or other geographic areas) that are disproportionately impacted by incarceration.
- Post the opportunity in public lobbies or visiting area waiting rooms at the jails.
- More outreach for all districts from County Commissioners.
- Make the webpage easier to find through keyword searches, find ways to link it to existing pages (for example mcso.us)
- Include process for applicant selection on the project webpage for transparency.
- Offer a blank application ahead of it being open for a preview.

Process Section - Findings and Recommendations

This section did not include as many responses as other sections in the evaluation and focused specifically on the tools and strategies designed to support volunteers and others who participated in the inspection and report writing. Generally, participants who provided data for this section felt the process was clear and tools were well designed to support those involved in the inspection and report. Specifically, participants noted the following tools were a valuable part of the process:

- Orientation session for volunteers, conducted by project manager and MCSO representative.
- Template for Volunteer Report for volunteers to use during the additional inspection and report writing.
- Post-inspection debrief resources (meeting and survey to identify aligned interests among volunteers).

When asked what was most impactful about the day of the additional inspection, participants noted they could see how the visit could be traumatic even if it wasn't their experience. A couple participants noted that some of the statistics stuck with them long after the day of the inspection and how important it was for frontline staff to facilitate the inspection.

Generally, participants felt that the intention of the amendment for "volunteers to issue public reports with findings and recommendations" was achieved. However the gap between what the expectation was for an "inspection" was not met. It was noted that the volunteers' interest and devotion to having a professional and fully informed report was evident in the reports. A few participants expressed appreciation for support and guidance in the report drafting process and one applicant expressed appreciation for no editorial interference from the County when finalizing the reports.

Here is a summary of the recommendations regarding the process of the additional inspection and report writing:

- Include contact information for union representatives and other operational staff when possible.

- Allow for equivalent time for MCSO and Corrections Health to present during the inspection.
- Explore how power dynamics during the inspection may impact the comfort level with asking questions.
- Have individual debrief meetings with volunteers and utilize the survey to identify any possible pairing or group report writing
- More clarity about what will happen with the reports besides being posted online, in the beginning
- Encourage volunteers to include connections/other affiliations in their volunteer bios for transparency.
- Explore changing the template for volunteers depending on the focus of the inspection.
- Make connections to what happened last year as a result of the reports.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, the first year of implementing the additional inspection was a positive experience for the people involved, according to those who participated in the evaluation. There were three areas for improvement that were widely agreed upon:

- Providing more clarity about the purpose of the inspection and how it differs from a facility tour.
- Finding ways to expand the applicant pool through more robust outreach and updating the application process.
- Developing strategies that engage people most impacted by incarceration in the planning and implementation process.

The observations and recommendations in this evaluation will be important to inform the iteration of the additional inspection in 2024 and in the coming years.

APPENDIX I: Evaluation Feedback

The final draft of this evaluation was provided to participants on June 4, 2024 and given until June 11 to provide feedback. Participants were able to comment either in the document or provide feedback anonymously via survey. One survey response was recorded and is summarized below:

- The report reflected the perspective that more outreach is needed to include people most impacted by the corrections system and modifying the survey to make it more accessible.
- The report did not appropriately two perspectives:
 - Emphasis that County staff should not be allowed to volunteer and participate in the additional inspection because it is too much of a conflict of interests.

- The Measure does not say County Commissioners should select a volunteer from their district - applicants who better reflect the prioritized communities should be recruited regardless of their district.
- The recommendation in the report that volunteers should be given more information ahead of the inspection was surprising - the participant who provided feedback was under the impression this had occurred already.
- Finally, the participant wanted to emphasize again the need for a longer outreach period and more robust, strategic outreach to frontline, incarcerated communities and/or their loved ones.

APPENDIX II:

- 📄 Additional Inspection 2023 Group Discussions protocols and script.pdf
- 📄 Public_ Additional Inspection of County Jails 2023 - Survey - Google Forms.pdf
- 📄 Additional Inspection of County Jails 2023 - Survey - Google Forms.pdf