

How to Build A Juvenile Institution On Time and Within Budget

By Loren Buddress, Mary K. McHatton,
James Mueller and Gregory Smith

San Mateo County, Calif., built its first juvenile hall in 1948. In 2000, 52 years later, the probation department was regularly taking youths to the local hospital for treatment of heat-related problems suffered in the hot summertime months in a building with no air conditioning. After 50 years of use, juvenile facilities frequently are no longer safe or secure for residents or staff. Old facilities often are linear in design, with long corridors that are difficult to monitor. And, after half a decade of use, the infrastructure of the buildings is often worn out (the electrical system, the plumbing, the air circulation system and the roof), and service systems are outdated.

In 2000, San Mateo County acknowledged the dire need to replace its decrepit juvenile facility. In partnership with the county's board of supervisors, the court, the county manager's office and other county departments, the probation department was asked to take the lead in this project.

Today, the county is nearing completion of a new youth services center that will focus on treating teens in trouble and serving their families; construction is set to be complete by August 2006. The old juvenile hall is being replaced by buildings that will house courts, probation services, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, a girls' camp and much more. The architecture reflects the county's vision to provide life-enhancing services rather than locking up juveniles in a warehouse environment.

What It Takes

With the ribbon-cutting ceremony on the horizon, Loren Buddress, San Mateo County's chief probation officer, shared the roadmap to the county's successful five-year construction journey. He identified 10 steps to successfully learning about the process, building a team, developing a vision with a specific plan, funding the effort, collaborating with the stakeholders throughout construction and planning the move.

Realize that this is not an everyday project and learn as much about the process as possible. Exactly how does one go about building a new juvenile facility? The National Institute of Corrections in Longmont, Colo., offers a one-week how-to course for agencies facing the prospect of building a new juvenile or adult correctional facility. If an organization is selected to attend, the training is free, leaving only transportation and lodging costs. This or similar training is invaluable for learning how to run a successful project and how to avoid the pitfalls. San Mateo County sent a collaborative contingent to the NIC training, comprising the presiding juvenile court judge, the county manager, a senior manager from the county's human services agency and three senior managers from the probation department, including its chief and assistant chief.

Get help. Should an organization take on the process or should it consider hiring a consultant? Some agencies devote two to eight full-time staff to the task (depending on its size), borrowing plans and ideas from other agencies with recent experience in similar projects. Others decide to contract with an expert who has assisted in planning and building dozens of similar facilities. Although each agency must make its own decision, San Mateo County used the services of a planning expert to guide the process.

Develop a clearly articulated vision of the types and the nature of the programs to be provided. This vision must be shared by the agencies that will eventually operate the new facility. San Mateo County's team decided it would build a "one-stop shop" called youth services. It would provide mental health and family counseling services, schooling and centralized dining with buildings that look less intimidating and less institutional. Decisions like these define the type of buildings needed to realize the vision.

Create a formal needs assessment and master plan. This is formulated once the vision has been carefully defined. The needs assessment and master plan is a formal project overview document that will include the project's vision,

mission and value statements, and the standards by which the facility will keep its focus through the entire process. The size will be determined by a statement of operating principles, an explanation of how space will be allocated in the new facility, adjacency diagrams and an assessment of a variety of demographic factors. The overview also will carefully articulate the needs of each section of the facility: assessment center, intake/release, housing, etc.

Determine how the project will be funded.

Additional design and management team members may be needed to develop the plan and complete the funding process, but identifying sources and quantities of funding gives them direction. Potential funding sources might include federal, state or local grant funding, financial assistance from foundations or funding from the private sector.

San Mateo County Probation Department applied for the Board of Corrections' juvenile local detention facility construction grant. There were 15 counties competing for approximately \$49 million in grant funds. The county's new youth services center was to focus heavily on treatment, constituting much more than simply a new juvenile hall. A girls' camp that is a facility for female youths with substance abuse and/or mental health problems, a receiving

home and a community school were all part of the plan. The county took seriously criminal justice research showing that there are four factors that reduce crime, delinquency and recidivism: substance abuse treatment; mental health treatment; cognitive-based programs; and educational and vocational programs. San Mateo County's vision is to provide life-enhancing services to the youths and families who come to the services center so that their lives are improved by the experience. The probation department's presentation before the Board of Corrections in 2002 led to San Mateo County being awarded \$21.1 million, the largest grant in the county's history. This was 43 percent of the \$49 million available to the 15 competing counties.

Select an executive oversight committee to manage the planning, design and construction. This step is very important to the project's success. In San Mateo County, two members of the board of supervisors, the county manager and the presiding juvenile court judge made up the committee. Decisions on planning, financing and construction of the center were ultimately decided by the full membership of the county's board of supervisors.

Begin the design and construction of the project. Selecting the contracting method is a key strategy decision. Conventional public works contracting can become a

San Mateo County's vision is to provide life-enhancing services to the youths and families who come to the services center so that their lives are improved by the experience.



Roger Matham

The new San Mateo youth services center will serve troubled teens and their families.

low-bid adversarial situation that ends up compromising the original vision. San Mateo chose a delivery method called “construction manager at risk.” In this method, the public agency contracts directly with the construction manager who will eventually hold the design contract and trade construction contracts. Construction managers team up with an architect to submit design-build proposals. This allows the agency to incorporate qualifications, interpretation of the vision and budget all into the selection process.

San Mateo County issued a nationwide request for proposals from teams of construction managers at risk. A screening committee selected the top three proposals for detailed evaluation of the companies, their teams and their plans. A member of the board of supervisors, the assistant county manager, the presiding juvenile court judge and the chief probation officer made up the selection committee. They selected Turner Construction and KMD Architects as the team that understood their vision and was committed to building a facility that would meet the county’s needs.

Collaboration. This is an essential step of the process. Building trust and good communication with the entire project team and the neighboring community is an invaluable component to ensure the success of the project. Maintaining an inclusive, collaborative process and always trying to enhance communication (both internally and externally) about the project will serve any agency well. Continuing the communication among all the project’s stakeholders increases the feeling of “ownership.” Regular updates with key stakeholders during the design process ensure expectations are met. It also minimizes costly changes during construction.

San Mateo County held more than 70 public meetings to discuss what it was planning and why the youth services center was being built. These meetings included county officials, local city officials, school and police staff,

members of the press, members of the public and anyone interested in the project. The meetings also provided opportunities for input into plans before they were finalized.

Collaboration and communication paid off for the county in 2004, when runaway inflation in the construction industry crippled many public works projects across the country. The broad-based ownership nurtured by the county made it possible to work with the construction and architectural firms to find cost reductions that did not cut the programs or give up the vision. The support of the community and the board of supervisors made it possible to fund the difference.

Building trust and good communication with the entire project team and the neighboring community is an invaluable component to ensure the success of the project.

Construction. The contracting strategy and selection of a competent team pays off. It can be a well-organized effort that looks beyond the sticks and stones and recognizes issues such as safety, “green” building, operation of existing facilities and neighborhood concerns. San Mateo County’s youth service center has been built around the existing 50-year-old juvenile hall, the probation and courts building, a school, a fire station and other county operations on the site. The construction company has kept everything running 24 hours a day, seven days a week for more than two years. Everybody, including the construction workers, has had a place to park on a tight site. A complete new utility infrastructure has been built, all construction debris has been recycled and food deliveries have been met while roads are being replaced. Turner has even provided tours of the facilities under construction so that county staff could see the new building taking shape.

The San Mateo project proved that every project will have unexpected issues to resolve. And the project’s team illustrated that this is the time for teamwork to focus on solutions rather than find fault. Just as construction was about to start, an environmentally endangered plant (*Lessingia*) was discovered on the site. The site plan was



Roger Milham

The youth services center nears completion and is expected to open in August.



Construction continues on the interior of one of the housing units.

revised to provide conservation areas and the endangered plants were moved. This pushed site development work into winter months, costing time and money, but the team stayed focused on solutions to keep the cost down, recover the time and move the project forward. San Mateo County, Turner and KMD established a lasting commitment to work with trust and collaboration for the success of the project.

Carefully develop a plan to move into the new facility.

This includes the time-consuming hiring and training process so that staff will be prepared to assume their duties. And, of course, the grand opening event must be planned.

San Mateo County is planning a four-phased opening. Approximately two weeks before the official opening of the youth services center, probation staff will spend 24 hours in the new facility to ensure that everything works in the new building. After this “shakedown,” the probation department will host a well-advertised open house, during which members of the public will be encouraged to visit the center and participate in guided tours of the juvenile hall. Following the open house will be the official ribbon-cutting and grand-opening ceremonies, which will be followed by an early evening hors d’oeuvres and refreshments fundraising event, including a silent auction to raise additional funds. This event will create a scholarship fund for youths in San Mateo County who have been in the delinquency or dependency systems and who are now going on to college.

A True Team Effort

As is indicated by these 10 steps, building a new juvenile hall/correctional center is an enormously complex project, and it is a process with which few people in probation departments or county government have

extensive experience. Although the learning curve is rather steep at first, there are people who can be wonderfully productive resources to assist an organization: NIC, an organization’s construction/architect team, consultants, sister agencies who may have done similar projects, and state criminal justice agencies who have oversight of juvenile correctional projects.

Building a new juvenile hall/youth services center has meant five years of hard work for San Mateo County; however, work on such a project is a privilege when one considers the reality of creating a facility that will serve some of the county’s most needy youths and their families, and that the facility will probably meet these needs for the next 50 to 70 years.

REFERENCES

Andrews, D. 1994. How to reduce recidivism and protect the community. Presentation, 14 Feb. Linthicum, Md.: U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Academy.

County of San Mateo. 2002. *Needs assessment and master plan update*. Lafayette, Colo.: Voorhis Associates Inc.

County of San Mateo. 2002. Board of Corrections juvenile local detention facility construction grant. San Mateo, Calif.

Loren Buddress is chief probation officer for the San Mateo Probation Office. Mary K. McHatton is vice president of justice for Turner Construction Co. James Mueller is a principal and member of the board of directors for Kaplan McLaughlin Diaz. Gregory Smith is project manager for Turner Construction Co.