

Hawaii Correctional System

Insights Executive Summary from Field Visits



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Research Overview

An overview of the research study goals and objectives



Who is Thoughtworks?

Striving for positive social change is at the heart of our purpose, culture and work.

As technologists, we have a unique role to play in ensuring technology benefits all of society, toward a more equitable future. Our vision for social change inspires and motivates us to take collective action. We amplify, through our skill set, the work of our partners at the forefront of social movements.



About the Research Project

Thoughtworks has been working in collaboration with the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission since August of 2022 to design a system to submit, track, and publish data regarding People in Custody and staff complaints.

From April 14th-17th, 2023, Thoughtworks organized a series of user interviews focused on gathering insights on the wholistic experience of those affected by the carceral system, to ensure that the system we are designing meets user needs, and to learn about the current state.



Goals

Research Goals

1. Understand how to design a complaint system that ensures the safety of those submitting complaints
2. Understand how we can use data to help legislators and key stakeholders in the system make better policies that
 - reduce the number of people incarcerated who are low-risk
 - reduce jail overcrowding
 - help the department be a more rehabilitative and therapeutic place
3. Understand what data will be most important to people who access and use the dashboard

Methodology & Participants

Across two days in April 2023, Thoughtworks interviewed a series of participants during on-site field visits to OCCC and Halawa via:



Contextual inquiry

Visited prison and jail rec yards, solitary confinement, group cells, medical facility, admin area, cafeteria, library center



1:1 interviews

4 people in custody, **4** corrections officers, **2** wardens, and **~10** informal conversations



Focus group

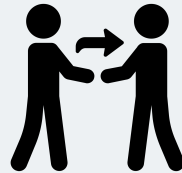
7 community leaders from various grassroots organizations & nonprofits, DPS, and corrections reform lawyers

A note on design research

Observing and interviewing a handful of people in order to improve the design of something is a 60+ year old practice (if not longer).



By doing qualitative interviews with 5 participants, you will identify 85% of the issues in a user experience.* A good investment is to start with 5 people, find your 85% of the issues, fix them, then test again with another 5 people, and so on.



Public services should be designed with a focus on accessibility, usability and equity. Insights from handfuls of people at a time help us design towards these goals.



*<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/5-test-users-qual-quant/#:~:text=In%20comes%20Jakob%20Nielsen's%20article,experiences%20while%20using%20the%20design.>

Hypothesis

In order to help the Commission design a better case and data management system we need to understand the gaps and pain points in the current complaint and grievance systems in place.

If the Commission can use data that identifies where we are failing those in the carceral system to inform legislature, judges, and the community at large, then we can create new programs and enact policies that reduce the number of people who are incarcerated and improving conditions for those who live and work at facilities.

Key insights based on audience

From on-site visits and interviews



Qualitative personas to organized insights

Based on the interviews we conducted, we created **qualitative personas to represent themes regarding the pain points and opportunities we gathered from participants**. We recommend using these persona “drafts” as a reference for user-centered decision making, and continuing to gather input from end users to inform the product direction. Because we interviewed three main audiences as part of this research effort, we have organized insight themes by the following audiences:

People in custody

Corrections Staff

Community Members

[Link to qualitative personas](#)

Research Overview

Current state of the corrections system in Hawaii

Those incarcerated in prisons and jails in Hawaii face dire conditions:

- Infrastructure in facilities is outdated causing security concerns for both correctional officers and those in custody.
- Jails are overcrowded with many cells holding double the maximum capacity of people forcing inhumane living conditions.
- Corrections officers are required to consistently work shifts that can last over 24 hours long with no relief.
- Those incarcerated are not getting their allotted recreation hours or the access to phones they require to get the bail that will help them get out.

Audience 1

Key insights from People in Custody

From on-site visits and interviews



We found the following pain points when interviewing people in custody

Summary of pain point



People in custody **do not feel safe** submitting complaints via the current grievance filing system.



Those in custody need an **anonymous, safe, and accessible** submission process. The tablets were a popular option among those interviewed.



There is a lack of **educational opportunities, mental health support, and transitional housing**.

Feedback is critical to improving conditions, however, people in custody do not feel safe submitting complaints via the current grievance system.

Why?

PAIN POINT

- they have to ask the CO's for the forms and these can be **read by COs** upon submission.
- They face or see others face **harassment and retaliation** for submitting grievances.
- The process for filing a grievance feels **unclear, complicated**, and is not seen as worth the risk.

"You are around these people [CO's] every day. If you want TP, food, if you need a pad you have to ask a CO. So you just deal with attitudes to survive."

- Person interviewed in custody

"In October 2022 I complained about lacking privacy while showering. I got sent to the SHU for submitting the complaint."

- Person interviewed in custody

Those in custody need an anonymous, safe, and accessible submission process. The tablets were a popular option among those interviewed.

Why?

PAIN POINT

- The tablets were identified by those in custody as a possible method to submit grievances that would feel safer.
- Tablets could support multiple languages, have better instructions, and offer screen reader options for those with physical disabilities.
- For those processing complaints, tablet submissions could improve legibility of complaints, and processing speeds / response times.

"The problem is it's not anonymous. To ask for a grievance you have to ask the officer for a form."

- Person interviewed in custody

"Ideally I could submit a grievance on one of the tablets. I then would get confirmation that it was heard, and a response within a reasonable amount of time."

- Person interviewed in custody

There is a lack of educational opportunities, mental health support, and transitional housing.

Why?

PAIN POINT

Overall, the reason for this is:

- Programs are not running when they are meant to and there is a lack of sufficient learning opportunities.
- Those in custody expressed a strong desire to work towards improving themselves while in custody through programs and educational opportunities.
- Those with mental health needs may get medication that stabilizes them in jail but then no longer receive that upon release.
- They feel a deep lack of support upon release financially, physically, and emotionally.

"Mental health inmates get released to the streets, don't have medication, have a mental health breakdown, don't have any support or housing resources, steal something to eat and end up in jail again."

- Person interviewed in custody

Summary of audience-specific recommendations

People in custody

1. **Retaliation prevention via tablet & information:** Enable a secure and anonymous way for those in custody to submit complaints via tablets already in place at the facilities. Make sure those in custody are aware of and understand the processes behind complaint avenues.
2. **Track response improvements:** Monitor and display grievance kickback percentages, response times, and impacts of resolutions to showcase commitment to prompt resolutions. Link GTL tablets to offendertrak for tracking and extend similar solutions for HCOSC complaints.
3. **Monitor programs and outcomes** - Collect data on program outcomes, number of people served, hours of operation, and surveys of program experience from those in custody to ensure that appropriate programming is offered at facilities. Increase educational opportunities offered.

Audience 2

Key insights from corrections staff

From on-site visits and interviews



We found the following themes and pain points when interviewing correctional officers and staff

Summary of pain points



Correctional officers are **overworked and short-staffed** causing safety concerns and inadequate conditions.



Staff members can be **removed from the people in custody's** experience.



Correctional officers feel **inadequately trained and ill equipped** for the job.



Correctional officers may **lack emotional capacity** for the experience of the people in custody and for newer officers.

Correctional officers are overworked and short-staffed causing safety concerns and inadequate conditions.

Why?

PAIN POINT

- Currently two-hundred-fifty-four officers typically work 16-48 hour shifts.
- Positions are chronically underfilled due to the challenging nature of the job and the long unpredictable hours exacerbate the problem.
- The intense nature of the job leads to deterioration in safety and mental health.

"I don't have kids right now but I ask myself all the time, is this the job for me. A lot of people try but they throw in the towel."

- Correctional officer

"Being short staffed means that they [those incarcerated] are always locked down, don't get showers, creates mental health problems & makes it unsafe for officers."

- Correctional officer

Staff members may be far removed from the people in custody's experience

Why?

PAIN POINT

- Other staff such as case managers are inaccessible and physically removed from people in custody.
- There is no open door policy and people in custody have to first go through correctional officers before they can access other staff.
- Correctional officers can be unaware of facility policies that they're in charge of.

"I'm not sure how much rec time they should get"

- Correctional officer

Correctional officers feel inadequately trained and ill equipped for the job

Why?

PAIN POINT

- The current training system leaves correctional officers feeling unprepared & lacking on the ground experience.
- The correction officers are trained with a curriculum that contains a lot of information irrelevant to the corrections system.
- There is a lack of confidence in new officers by more experienced officers. They see new officers as a risk rather than taking the time to mentor them.

"I learned the difference between someone who is schizophrenic or bipolar but nothing on actual tools for how to deal with an inmate who has these issues"

- Correctional officer

Correctional officers may lack emotional capacity for the experience of the people in custody and for newer officers

Why?

PAIN POINT

- Burn out is really common among CO's.
- Correctional officers generally expected recidivism in their workplace.
- After being forced to witness inhumane conditions in part due to understaffing, **it may be a survival strategy for long time CO's to become disconnected from those in custody.**

"They [new officers] often throw in the towel early"

- Correctional officer

"They [those in custody] complain about not having enough toilet paper, toothpaste, commissary, each other being too loud - they're like babies"

- Correctional officer

Summary of audience-specific recommendations

Corrections staff

Recommendations to the Commission:

1. **Collect Staffing Complaints:** Encourage collecting and logging complaints from correctional staff to encompass their viewpoints.
2. **Share Staff's Story:** Share stories of how under resourcing affects staff to emphasize challenges and provide a holistic perspective.
 - a. Use data to illustrate how inadequate training contributes to unpreparedness and high turnover rates.

We recommend the Commission work with PSD to:

1. **Adequately train staff** on carceral systems and **methods that leverage a therapeutic and rehabilitative focus** of incarceration.
 - a. The sentence is the punishment, they should not also be punished while incarcerated.
2. **Revisit the shift relief factor.**
 - a. Current relief factors have not been revisited since the 80s.

Audience 3

Key insights from community members

From on-site visits and interviews



We found the following pain points and needs when interviewing community members

Summary



People are not receiving the **proper basic resources when they leave (ID, bus pass, housing)**.



There is NOT an emphasis on the **positive impact of educational programs on recidivism** and there's a lack of **available programming**.



Organizers want access to more **specific data sources to identify what to focus on**.



People in custody are not being **humanized**. **Humanizing** people in custody and increasing **storytelling** can win **buy-in from the "move makers"**.

People are not receiving the proper basic resources when they leave (ID, bus pass, housing)

Why?

PAIN POINT

Providing people with basic resources helps prevent homelessness, which is a large contributor to recidivism and overcrowding.

Overall, organizers want data around homelessness and lack of resources and support outside of jail to show the link lack of support and overcrowding, homelessness, and recidivism.

"What helps people from coming back is housing. People are homeless - so they just come back next week."

- Community member

"Data needs to influence how the new jail is built"

- Community member

Emphasize the positive impact of educational programs on recidivism while also assessing available options.

Why?

PAIN POINT

Overall, there is very little program evaluation, which impacts access to opportunities for People in custody. For example, people in custody may be held in prison because they can't get into the program that is required by the parole board.

"PNG programs, classes religious stuff, (that) gives us a sense of purpose, gardening programs. It is a big thing to take care of something and gives you purpose. To see something from seed to papaya."

- Community member

Organizers want access to more specific data sources to identify what to focus on

Why?

PAIN POINT

Overall, community members mentioned interest in data points such as: health budget, suicide watch, solitary, chronic illness, amount of people hospitalized and why, number of pregnancies, in order to focus improvement efforts.

Identify repeat offenders that are most costly and focusing on programs for that group (ex: addiction services), may improve custody conditions.

"350 people are using 80% of health budget."

- Community member

Humanizing people in custody and increasing storytelling can win buy-in from “move makers”

Why?

PAIN POINT

Overall, community members mentioned that putting a face to who's inside (people in custody) and their family members would help to increase more empathetic storytelling and thus influence buy in.

“Use our letter writing program and ask permission if excerpts could be taken as part of the program to humanize people in custody.”

- Community member

Summary of audience-specific recommendations

Community Members

Combine Data and Storytelling to Humanize the systemic effects of the correctional system:

1. **Create a data storytelling dashboard**

- a. Work in collaboration with the community and families of those incarcerated to amplify humanistic narratives that will foster empathy and garner support from those in positions of authority within the correctional system.
- b. Utilize both data trends and narratives provided by complaints to feed the dashboard.
- c. This will provide community advocates a microphone for driving impactful corrections reform efforts.

2. **Empower advocacy with comprehensive data**

- a. Review advocates' data requests with the Commission's data access beyond complaint data.
- b. Recommend that PSD implement systems to collect data where there are gaps.

Recommended Next Steps

Insights to Action



Data Storytelling Dashboard Recommendation

Insights to Action

Overall, we found from the on-site interviews and contextual inquiry that there is a **lack of visibility and data to represent the real stories and experience those affected by the correctional system**. We recommend the following for the data dashboard to address each party's concerns:

Audience	Recommendation
People in custody	Enhance the anonymous complaint process to collect better insights of the incarcerated experience. Recommend that PSD implement secure tablet-based complaint intake and monitor response times.
Correctional officers	Include data/stories of how the current correctional system negatively affects the staff experience to provide a holistic perspective on corrections reform.
Community members	Review advocates' data requests with the Commission's data access beyond complaint data. Collaborate with community members to display compelling stories for the dashboard. Align the narrative with advocates' goals.

Thank you for your time!

