



Prison Policy Index FAQs

What is the Policy Index?

The Policy Index is a collection of captured web pages, collected from prison agency websites, that display information about COVID-19 response policies by those agencies. The term “policy” is used broadly: we have tried to include any discussion of how the prison systems responded to COVID-19 across a range of topics (testing, masks, transfers, facilities, etc.). Thus, most of the documents in the Index are not official program statements or policy directives (although those are included). Press releases, FAQs, update pages, and similar posts were included if they displayed relevant information. The policies included in the index were captured over a one-year period, from April 2020 to April 2021, but include information posted before April 2020 as well.

What does the Index show me? How do I use it?

Each row of the spreadsheet represents one captured web page from a state prison agency, either in the form of a PDF (stored in Google Drive) or a permanent link (created via Perma.cc). Each line item includes basic descriptive information (including dates, a short description, a link to the PDF or Perma.cc, etc.). In addition, volunteers have identified whether certain common topics were addressed in each captured page. These topics are listed across the top of the sheet, and policies can be filtered or sorted by specific topics. For more details about what each topic means, please see the Field Definitions.

Please note that volunteers have not evaluated, analyzed, or provided commentary about any statement or topic in the Index. If a captured page is coded for a certain topic, that only means the captured page mentions or discusses that topic in some way.

What time frame does the Index cover?

Data collection for the Index began in April 2020 and ended in mid-April 2021. Volunteers captured information dating back to the beginning of the pandemic to the extent that information was available.

What are the Index’s limitations?

The Index should not be considered comprehensive. A team of volunteers manually searched prison agency websites for policies related to COVID-19. We cannot guarantee that every relevant item posted on every prison agency website was identified. We believe it is thorough, however, and a useful dataset for anyone interested in the steps that prison agencies have taken in responding to COVID-19 in their facilities.

The Index also includes only publicly available information posted on prison agency websites. The Index is not supplemented with news reporting, information retrieved through public record requests, or any other data. The information in the Index has not been verified or investigated.

A note on duplicates: Duplicative documents have been excluded, even if each contained a policy response. Therefore, routine announcements containing the same information were captured periodically, rather than at every instance. Volunteers were also instructed not to capture quantitative infection, recovery, or vaccination data. Those data were captured for the main UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Project database and can be accessed there. The Index focuses on qualitative descriptions of the steps prison agencies have taken, not quantitative data on the spread and impact of COVID-19 behind bars.