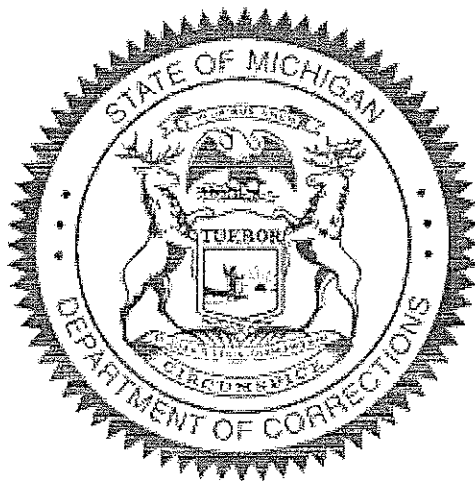


Twelve Questions & Answers For Volunteers



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Thank you for considering service as a corrections volunteer. You probably have questions. Some are answered in this booklet. If you decide to become a corrections volunteer, others will be answered during your facility orientation.

1. What Is The Department Of Corrections?

The Department of Corrections is a state agency whose mission is to protect the public from convicted offenders. It does this by providing the state's judges and other criminal justice administrators a broad range of sentencing options. These options vary from confinement in a correctional facility to probation and other community based sanctions. Policy Directive 01.01.100 "Mission Statement" states:

OUR MISSION

- A. Our mission is to create a safer Michigan through effective offender management and supervision in our facilities and communities while holding offenders accountable and promoting their rehabilitation.

OUR VISION

- B. Our vision is based on the following principles:
1. We will remain committed to the protection of the public, safety of our staff, and security of offenders.
 2. We will actively engage in the development of effective criminal justice policy.
 3. We will ensure sound management using proven fiscal practices and outcome-oriented strategies.
 4. We will hire, train, equip, support, and mentor a high quality staff and hold them to the highest professional standards.
 5. We will provide humane and protective custodial care, rehabilitative opportunities, and reentry assistance for offenders under our supervision.
 6. We will establish meaningful partnerships with public and private entities to assist us in successfully accomplishing our mission.
 7. We will conduct all of our duties and responsibilities with the highest degree of integrity, expectations for excellence, and respect for the value and dignity of human life.

2. What Is The Role Of Volunteers?

The Department provides opportunities for convicted offenders to change their behavior. This is where you, the volunteer, fit into the picture. To the offenders in your program you are a living example of what a positive, productive, crime free life looks like. That and the program you provide may motivate some to make positive changes in their lives. Your program also provides a welcome change in the routine and structured life of a correctional facility. The Department also hopes that your experience as a volunteer will motivate you to provide an alternative view to misinformation regarding offenders and their lives in MDOC facilities.

3. How Do Volunteers Differ From Regular Staff?

All correctional staff are hired and trained to assist in managing the facility and its offenders. Volunteers are invited guests who come into the correctional setting to share their unique skills or talents with offenders. This provides offenders with opportunities to make positive changes in their lives. For example, a chaplain coordinates religious programs. Volunteers are invited to conduct religious services for specific faith groups. Another example, a staff member manages leisure time activities. Volunteers are sought to lead groups such as AA, gardening or a creative writing group.

Volunteers enrich and extend the program opportunities for offenders. They provide experiences beyond those required by statute or policy and which are the responsibility of full-time staff.

4. How Does Someone Become A Corrections Volunteer?

You have already taken the first step. You are interested in sharing your time and talent with offenders. To continue do the following:

A. Write or call the volunteer coordinator of the facility you wish to help. Explain who you are and how you want to help. Contact information for MDOC facilities is available at the Department's website: www.michigan.gov/corrections.

B. If you want to provide a new program, the volunteer coordinator will have to determine if there is enough space and time available for your program, if it is of genuine interest to offenders and if it is not already being offered. If all of these considerations are met you will probably be invited to a meeting at the facility.

C. At the meeting you will be asked to complete an application form if you have not already done so.

D. Before you are accepted as a volunteer a background check will be completed.

- E. You will be scheduled for and complete a volunteer orientation.
- F. Finally you will be scheduled to begin your volunteer program.

5. What If I Have Been Arrested In The Past?

- A. If you have been arrested, or convicted of a crime, inform the volunteer coordinator when you meet.
- B. A prior arrest, a conviction, or being an ex-offender who has served a sentence does not necessarily exclude anyone from serving as a corrections volunteer.
- C. Depending upon the nature of the arrest or conviction, and the date of the offense, special approval may be required.
- D. Ex-offenders who have served a sentence in the MDOC serve productively and positively as MDOC corrections volunteers.

6. What Kind Of Training Does A Volunteer Receive?

You are required to complete volunteer orientation before you begin your volunteer work. During orientation you will learn:

- A. How the mission of the Department and its policies will affect your volunteer service.
- B. Specific information about the facility in which you will serve,
- C. The rules of the facility in which you will volunteer,
- D. Information about the offenders at the facility where you will serve,
- E. Safety rules that you will be required to follow,
- F. How to enter and leave the facility,
- G. Your volunteer identification card picture may be taken as part of orientation.
- H. Finally, if you have specific questions you may want to write them and bring them with you to ensure they are answered.

7. What Should A Volunteer Know About Offenders?

- A. Offenders are human beings, struggling like you, with their daily problems. Offenders have feelings and most wish they could have a better life.
- B. Most offenders are racial/ethnic minorities, in their 20's from single parent homes, from urban areas. Typically, the crime that led them to their current sentence was not their first.
- C. Most offenders have some high school education, poor employment records and problems with substance abuse.
- D. Many offenders are parents and claim some religious preference.
- E. All offenders can be dangerous. They were judged to be so by a court.
- F. All offenders are provided the basic necessities by the correctional facility: food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education and work opportunities. They are offered leisure time activities, as well as prison based programs to enhance self improvement.

8. What Should A Volunteer Know About Security?

Security is a word you will hear often in a correctional facility. It describes the main role of the facility – to keep offenders in a safe environment. Security involves several areas:

- A. Staff members need to know where offenders are all the time. To do this, offenders are counted regularly. No programs can begin while staff members are counting offenders or "taking count." If count does not clear, or is still being taken, you will not be allowed inside the facility. This may delay the start of your program.
- B. Offender movement is also controlled. An offender cannot be anywhere, including your program without receiving written authorization. This may be in the form of a daily, computer produced schedule or sometimes a handwritten pass. A custody officer will ensure that the only offenders in your program are those offenders with written authorization.
- C. To ensure safety, staff must also perform searches. Every place and everyone in a correctional facility or on facility property can be searched. You will be searched before you are allowed inside the facility. At first you may find this embarrassing. It is done in a professional manner and quickly. It is necessary to ensure a safe environment for you, staff and the offenders at the facility.

D. Keeping track of keys and tools is also very important for security. Only staff members who have been assigned keys for your area will be able to lock and unlock doors for you. Sometimes this may cause you to wait. This is essential to ensure the security of the facility and the safety of all who live, work, or volunteer there.

E. You are part of a team effort to keep the facility safe and secure. If you see or hear anything that seems odd or unusual, or makes you uncomfortable, inform a member of the staff as soon as possible.

F. By knowing and following these security procedures, you can do your part in making the correctional facility a safe, secure place for yourself and others.

9. How Is An Offender Assigned To A Particular Correctional Facility?

A. All offenders and correctional facilities are assigned a security level number. Level I is the lowest security level. Level V is the highest security level. The lower the security level, the more privileges (such as movement outside of the cell) are permitted. As the security level increases the restrictions also increase.

B. An offender is first placed in a security level. Then other factors determine where an offender will be placed. One such factor is the particular programs needed by the offender. For a variety of reasons offenders are transferred to meet both their and the Department's needs.

10. What Can A Volunteer Expect As A Corrections Volunteer?

You can expect that:

A. A staff member will be in the room with you if you volunteer in a Level II, IV or V facility.

B. In a Level I facility, the Warden may determine that a staff person will be in the room. However, Level I group services and activities will have at least random in-room staff supervision.

C. Offenders may try to "con" you, to get you to do things *they know* you aren't allowed to do.

D. Offenders may tell you exaggerated information about themselves, the staff or the facility. Your best response may be **no** response. Simply listen. Or tell the offender that your time is limited and direct them to focus on the purpose of the program. If they persist, ask for their name and ID number

and tell the person that you will inform staff. This tends to discourage frivolous talk.

E. Offenders and some staff may not at first trust you entirely. They may ask questions like "Why do you want to come into a place like this?" As offenders and staff become better acquainted with you and you with them, you can expect that you will be accepted as a valuable volunteer.

F. Whether you are a beginner or a veteran, you can expect that:

1. You will be treated courteously by staff.
2. Staff will be available to answer you questions and resolve problems that arise.
3. You will have assigned space for your work.
4. You will not have to wait for a long time before being admitted for your activity unless there is a good reason.
5. And you will be notified if your program has to be cancelled that day.

11. What Does Staff Expect Of Me?

Staff have very few, but important, expectations of you. They expect:

- A. You will arrive on time for your scheduled program. If you can't come, inform the facility as soon as possible.
- B. You will obey the rules. This will provide a good example for the offenders. It will help ensure your own safety as well as that of the staff and offenders.
- C. You will not bring anything into the correctional facility unless you have received prior written approval to do so. This permission may be given by the Warden, Deputy Warden, or the Shift Commander. This written approval will be indicated on a Gate Manifest. Every item you want to bring into the facility it must be indicated on the Gate Manifest.

Even items you consider ordinary or harmless can be fashioned into weapons, or used for an escape attempt. Attempting to bring any item into a facility without prior approval is a violation of MDOC policy and may violate state law. It may result in the loss of your volunteer privileges, and may be cause for arrest and criminal prosecution.

12. How Long Should I Volunteer?

The answer varies. Your volunteer program may have an end date that is part of the project. For example, a facility may seek a volunteer to lead a ten session group discussing the book The Power of Positive Thinking. When the course ends the volunteer service would end.

If your program is more open ended, such as a twelve step support group, or a religious service, you will be asked to serve for no more than one year. Your volunteer identification card will indicate this. At the end of the year, you may decide to continue your volunteer service. And the facility administration may agree to continue your program.

If it isn't working out as hoped, both of you may agree to discontinue it. If there is a disagreement, the Warden has the right to decide who can and cannot come into the facility. If you disagree with the Warden's decision, you may appeal that decision to the Deputy Director, CFA.

You may also end your service sooner than one year by notifying the facility's volunteer coordinator. Some volunteers find their volunteer service very rewarding and serve for many years.

Additional Important Information

During your volunteer work you are covered by governmental immunity statute MCL 691.1407. However, the Office of the Attorney General will not provide representation for you in lawsuits arising from your role as a volunteer.

Volunteers are not permitted to give gifts of money or property to an offender, or to family members of the prisoner. Volunteers are not permitted to receive gifts of money or property from an offender or from family members of the offender.

Volunteers are not permitted to visit, correspond with or accept telephone calls from an offender at the facility where they provide volunteer services. This is regarded as "over familiarity" and may result in ending your volunteer privileges. Any information a volunteer needs to provide to or receive from an offender as part of his/her volunteer services must be processed through the volunteer program coordinator.

It is a felony to bring alcoholic liquors, prescription drugs, controlled substances, poisons, weapons, or any item which may be used to assist in the escape of a prisoner into the facility or onto the facility grounds. Tobacco products may be stored, but not used, in your locked vehicle in designated parking areas, and in secured areas designated by the Warden.

Personal cellular telephones and similar electronic communication devices are not permitted on facility grounds unless in a locked vehicle in designated parking areas, or in secured areas designated by the Warden for this purpose.

Volunteer clergy are permitted to bring up to two ounces of wine into a facility for liturgical purposes as set forth in Policy Directive 05.03.150 "Religious Beliefs and Practices of Prisoners."

Volunteers are not compensated for providing volunteer services. If volunteer services are provided at a Correctional Facility Administration facility, volunteers may in special circumstances be reimbursed by the Prisoner Benefit Fund for expenses incurred subject to Policy Directive, 04.02.110 "Prisoner Benefit Fund."

These basic questions and answers will hopefully get you started on your venture into correctional volunteering. Additional questions will be addressed during your orientation. Good luck and thank you for your interest in sharing your time and talent with the offenders and staff of the Michigan Department of Corrections.