

MDOC Volunteer Handbook

Introduction:

Thank you for offering your time and service to the staff and prisoners. Volunteers are required to comply with rules, procedures, and policies. This orientation booklet is based upon policies used by this facility and the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC).

Volunteers are required to be updated at least annually to keep them aware of changes in the rules, changes in the facility, and to remind them of various concerns. Volunteer training opportunities should be offered as needed.

To better understand the Volunteer Program and the MDOC, please review and follow the guidelines in this booklet. If you do not understand a particular rule or regulation, seek assistance from your Volunteer Coordinator.

The primary mission of the MDOC is the protection of the public. Volunteers will remember this primary function at all times when interacting with prisoners.

Your Role as a Volunteer:

The corrections staff is responsible for controlling and retaining offenders, as well as assisting them to rehabilitate themselves. The Administration is aware neither the budget, trained personnel, nor the facilities are always available to successfully accomplish all of these objectives. Volunteers play a vital role in providing specific services. Because of this, volunteers are invited into the institution to augment existing institutional services.

There are two types of volunteers. *Outreach volunteers* provide religious guidance and counseling to prisoners in the visiting room. *Regular volunteers* enter the facility and provide rehabilitative programs such as religious instruction and AA counseling. It must be remembered that *no one can be both an Outreach Volunteer and a Regular Volunteer at the same prison.*

When providing services to prisoners, volunteers must not interfere with the Corrections staff as they perform their duties or enforce the facility rules, regulations or routines. Please keep in mind that you are to consult your Volunteer Coordinator if any situation arises where there is a question or doubt as to the appropriate course of action.

Establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the institutional administrators and correctional officers is important to you in carrying out your volunteer service objectives. The following key functions will help to maintain open communications and working relationships:

1. The facility must have a clear understanding of the types of services you will be performing.
2. It is necessary for you to be aware of what is expected of you. During volunteer orientation you will be given "Questions and Answers for Volunteers." You will also have a chance to ask additional questions of the Volunteer Coordinator and Custody staff.
3. A copy of "Volunteer Services Agreement" and "Agreement to Comply with Policies" will be kept on file in the Volunteer Coordinator's office. You read these statements and sign them.
4. Volunteer services and programs are periodically evaluated to monitor and maintain effectiveness.

Working with Offenders:

Working with prisoners cannot be reduced to a "cookbook" method. Much will be left to the good judgment of the volunteer. Volunteers should use the following guidelines in relating to the offender:

1. *Be yourself.* Don't establish a facade or create a special status for yourself. Express yourself genuinely. Avoid using prisoner slang. Don't pretend to understand something if you don't.

2. *Mean what you say.* Don't make a promise unless you have thought it through first and can carry it out. Prisoners will test you, call your bluff, and see if you follow through on your promise.
3. *Be supportive, encouraging, friendly and FIRM.* Be honest, objective, and disapproving when it is warranted. Be friendly, but not overly familiar. Don't discuss personal matters with the prisoners. Be consistent and fair. Enforcing rules for some and relaxing them for other prisoners is inconsistent and unfair.
4. *Respect is the key.* You must respect the prisoner's individuality and basic rights. Avoid prejudices and feelings of superiority. Respond to the prisoner's needs and interests, not your own. Once you have earned the respect and trust of the prisoner, he will be open with you.
5. *Don't pry.* Don't ask prisoners why they are in prison. Let the prisoner tell you on his own about personal issues such as guilt or associated matters regarding his crime or his family.
6. *Accept each prisoner as an individual.* Categorizing a prisoner is unfair and dehumanizing.
7. *Be patient.* The positive effects of your patience with the prisoner may not have a decisive influence until after you have stopped working with him.
8. *Be aware of con games.* Not everything a prisoner says will be true. Make it clear that you will not be manipulated. If a situation arises that you consider "borderline" check with staff and make sure how it is to be handled. Remember that prisoners can take several years in setting up a ruse and may use other prisoners in the process.
9. *Maintain professional detachment.* NEVER give out your address or phone number or give money to a prisoner or prisoner family member.
10. *Expect hostility.* Prisoners have dealt with a great deal of frustration throughout their lives. Most have experienced repeated failure and are suspicious of any offer of assistance or guidance. A prisoner overwhelmed with problems may confront you with hostility. At such times, do not force conversation upon him and don't respond in a hostile, sarcastic, or anxious manner. Keep your composure. Ignore the hostility and withdraw for awhile. Chances are that the prisoner will regain his composure.
11. *Don't over identify.* Don't take the prisoner's problems upon yourself. Often they are fabrications designed to evoke sympathy. Don't share with them any frustrations you may have with staff (refer that to the volunteer coordinator). Over identifying with the prisoner can bring about the "we/they" syndrome.
12. *Don't expect thanks.* You may not receive thanks or any show of gratitude from the prisoner. He may feel it, but may not know how to express it. However, your effort will be appreciated.
13. *Be prepared to handle romantic advances.* Keep all discussions focused on your particular program's purpose. It is a felony for a volunteer to have sexual contact with a prisoner under the jurisdiction of the MDOC.
14. *Be trustworthy.* Avoid repeating what a prisoner tells you.
15. *Don't have your own agenda.* Don't use your program or the prisoners to inflate your ego. Your purpose and the focus of your program should be to benefit the prisoners. Your satisfaction will come from a job well done.

Do's & Don'ts Review

DO'S	Be yourself	Be respectful	Be careful
	Expect hostility	Be friendly but firm	Be trustworthy
	Earn respect	Be prepared for romantic advances	Be professional
DON'TS	Don't probe	Don't over identify	Don't expect thanks
	Don't be manipulated	Don't have your own agenda	

Policies and Procedures:

1. *Confidentiality* – Matters pertaining to the prisoners are confidential. In order to respect confidentiality, information (including names) should not be given.
2. *Remember Where You Are* – Prisoners are incarcerated because they have disobeyed the rules of society. Many have done violent crimes. There is a possibility that prisoners may engage in sexual, assaultive, or otherwise violent behavior.
3. *Recognize the unique factors that are present in this institution.*
 - a. This is an all male population prison.
 - b. Prisoners are not here of their own free will. They tend to focus a lot of their thoughts and efforts on getting out by whatever means available.
 - c. Many prisoners have been incarcerated for several years and sometimes cannot identify with things you take for granted.
 - d. Some prisoners spend much of their time in a small room approximately 8' X 10'. Sometimes they view your particular program only as an excuse to get out of their cell. This does not mean you won't have a positive effect on them.
 - e. This is a "forced" environment and most definitely not a natural one. Some of the problems caused by a forced environment include: 1) group pressure 2) prisoner cliques 3) unique set of values.
4. *Be fair, objective, and consistent when dealing with prisoners.*
 - a. Recognize their needs
 - b. Prisoners are used to a day-to-day routine and your attitude and method of dealing with them is a part of that routine. They may not like your attitude or methods, but if you are fair, objective and consistent they will respect you for it.
 - c. You set the limits
 - d. The prisoners will push you until you say to stop. How hard and how far they push will depend on how hard and how far you allow them to push you.
 - e. If a prisoner makes an improper advance, handle it appropriately. If you are unable to do so, notify staff. Minimally, it is a test to see what your limits are.
 - f. Don't compromise. Firmly establish in your mind your purpose for being here and don't deviate from it.
 - g. Don't "panic" if you find yourself with a prisoner. If this happens, report it to any staff member and the Volunteer Coordinator.
 - h. Do not criticize staff, the institution, other races, ethnic groups, countries or religions.
5. *Avoid over familiarity with prisoners.*
 - a. You could lose your volunteer status because of over familiarity. We must keep the prisoner, but we can dismiss you. Remember, if you are dismissed, you may appeal the decision to dismiss to the Deputy Warden of the prison. Examples of over familiarity follow.
 - b. Don't give out your address or phone number.
 - c. When in doubt, ask yourself if losing your volunteer status and possible imprisonment because of illicit involvement with a prisoner is worth it.
 - d. Give NOTHING to a prisoner and take NOTHING from him. Bringing things into the institution for a specific prisoner or taking things out is prohibited. Materials used by your group, or for the general population, must be manifested (listed on a MDOC document called a Gate Manifest and signed by authorized staff) before usage to allow for proper security checks and screening.
 - e. No physical contact other than a handshake is permitted. As noted above, it is a felony for a volunteer to have sexual contact with a prisoner.

- f. Leave your personal problems at home. Sharing your problems with a prisoner can lead to a serious conflict of interest, or may provide the setting for a ruse.
 - g. Don't relate institutional incidents to others outside the prison.
 - h. Regular volunteers, those entering the facility, are not permitted to visit or otherwise communicate with prisoners at this facility, outside of their volunteer activity. This includes mail, or telephone communication. If a prisoner attempts to communicate with you, notify the Volunteer Coordinator immediately.
6. *Dress Code*
 - a. Do not wear any clothing similar in appearance or color to State issue prisoner attire. If there is a disturbance, we need to differentiate you from the prisoners.
 - b. Short skirts, low cut blouses, or other revealing clothing may invite unwanted advances and will not be permitted. Appropriate underclothing must be worn.
 - c. Moderate, business-like clothing is appropriate. This prevents distraction from the purpose of your work.
 - d. Do not wear clothing imprinted with obscene words or pictures, or pictures or logos, etc. that may reveal or identify something about you.
 - e. Effeminate grooming, attire, or accessories worn by male volunteers will not be permitted.
 7. *Safety Precautions*
 - a. Don't run while on prison property. Running usually indicates that someone is being chased, or is chasing someone. Running is usually interpreted as a danger signal. Prison staff will react to people running. It not only causes anxiety, but distracts the officers' attention. You may injure yourself.
 - b. Use sidewalks when walking inside the institution.
 8. *Gates and Security*
 - a. Corrections Officers need to maintain security and are responsible for identifying you for the search of any vehicle, package, purse, etc. that enters prison property.
 - b. When an officer is processing staff, do not interrupt them.
 - c. Occasionally while being processed into the facility, you may be asked to return to the waiting area. Do so without hesitation.
 9. *Guests*
 - a. Guests are defined as individuals authorized to enter the facility only one time due to some unique circumstances or program. Guests may not be Outreach Volunteers who visit this facility.
 - b. Guests must have a LEIN clearance to enter and be at least 18 years of age. It may take several weeks to process their LEIN requests. Submit their LEIN paperwork early.
 - c. You are responsible for the dress and conduct of your guests. You must ensure that they are knowledgeable of and adhere to existing rules and regulations.
 10. *Contraband*
 - a. Contraband is any property which is not allowed on prison property or in visiting rooms by State law, rule, or MDOC policy.
 - b. Some items of contraband are dangerous (cameras, guns, alcohol, knives, etc.) and some are illegal. Having them in your possession will result in a felony charge. Other contraband items are not dangerous (chewing gum, cash, etc.) but are not allowed. Dismissal will occur for possession of either form of contraband. When in doubt, ask the Volunteer Coordinator or the officer at the front desk.
 - c. Pocket knives and butane lighters are not allowed. These can readily become weapons and can be used to harm you.

- d. While drugs are contraband, we recognize that some medications must be carried by an individual at all times. Please make staff aware of any such required medications so that appropriate accommodations may be made.
11. *Personal Possessions*
 - a. Secure personal possessions (keys, wallets, purses, and other valuables) in lockers located near the front desk.
 - b. Anything brought inside the prison must be manifested.
 - c. All regular and outreach volunteers shall be subjected to a clothed body search by an employee of the same sex as the person being searched.
 - d. Smoking is not allowed inside any building. You must be 100 feet away from any building entrance should you choose to smoke.
 12. *Personal Phone Calls*
 - a. No outgoing personal phone calls shall be made on institutional phones. Public phones are available in the waiting area of the main administration building.
 - b. Emergency incoming personal phone calls will be relayed to you, but routine messages will not.
 13. *Personal Vehicles*
 - a. Your vehicle is subject to search at any time.
 - b. Vehicles must be kept locked and keys taken out of the ignition at all times while on prison property.
 - c. Before coming to the prison, check your vehicle for contraband items (guns, drugs, alcohol, tools that may be potentially dangerous, etc.) and remove any found. Contraband items are not allowed on prison property at any time.
 14. *Parking*
 - a. Park only in areas marked “visitor parking.”
 - b. Do not loiter in the parking area. If you need to wait for other volunteers or a ride, please wait inside the building.
 15. *Emergencies*
 - a. You are expected to obey any officer when an order, command, direction or instruction is given. This is for your protection and the security of the institution.
 - b. If you hear a siren while inside the facility, you should stay where you are until escorted by staff. Should an emergency occur, you will be given directions by staff. In most cases you will be escorted to the visiting room in the Administration Building. There your arrival will be documented by staff. Once your whereabouts and safety are confirmed, you will be released to the main lobby in the Administration Building, where you will sign out and leave the facility.
 16. *Suggestions* – Your recommendations regarding programs are appreciated. Please submit your suggestions to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Conclusion:

The staff appreciates the many volunteer hours of service and the benefits provided through volunteer activities. Properly implemented, volunteer activities aid in reducing tension and are beneficial to the institution. Your work complements ours. Volunteer activities provide a link with the community through educational and inspirational programs. Positive role models may assist the prisoner in discovering options and available resources for personal decision-making. We hope that your experience will be positive for you, the prisoners, and the Corrections Staff.