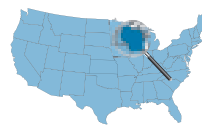


Closing the Gap in Inmate Training



WIDS collaborates to create standardized job descriptions and expectations for educating and training inmates.



The 35 correctional facilities across Wisconsin, housing a total of 22,000 inmates, are collaborating to develop consistent inmate job descriptions and job performance evaluations. In doing so, inmates will not only know up front what is expected of them when performing a specific job, their performance will be consistently evaluated no matter where they are incarcerated in the state.

Within Wisconsin's correctional system, inmates are encouraged to pursue technical and four-year degrees, as well as learn occupations on-the-job, according to Julie Wurl-Koth, Director-Office of Program Services

at the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC). But job descriptions and evaluation methods vary widely across the state's correctional facilities, making it difficult to identify inmate training improvement areas.

"One of our initiatives is to close inmate education and training gaps," says Wurl-Koth. "In order to identify those gaps, we needed consistency. So, we are working to standardize job descriptions and performance evaluations so they are the same at all correctional facilities in Wisconsin."

"That way, if inmates work in custodial services, they all have the same job description and expectations," adds WIDS Consultant Susan Sharkey. By developing a consistent evaluation system mirroring job performance expectations in the public sector, inmates, she maintains, are better able to develop the skills most valued by employers. As a result, they are better prepared to benefit Wisconsin's workforce upon release.

A collaborative project, the initiative includes input from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, representatives from business and industry, and WIDS.

Sharkey is using WIDS Software to define the job descriptions and performance evaluations, with help from representatives from business and industry and from each correctional facility. Once the project is complete this spring, inmates will know the expectations of a given job up-front, according to Sharkey. "They will go over what they will be evaluated on, whether it is attitude or work performance," she says. "Then when they are evaluated, supervisors can work with them on ways to improve."

Wurl-Koth maintains WIDS provides a common language shared by Wisconsin's correctional facilities, technical colleges and employers. "Employment after release is a big deal for inmates," says Wurl-Koth. "Their on-the-job experiences help them to earn good paying jobs so they don't want to break the law again."

Assessment of those skills is important, agrees Kim Koeck, Educational Director at Redgranite (Redgranite) Correctional Institute. Koeck was involved in developing

the custodial services job description and performance evaluation, which were piloted at Fox Lake Correctional Institution. Now the remaining position descriptions and performance evaluations are also being developed.

Each job description also includes a set of soft skills, according to Koeck, including, work cooperatively, communicate effectively, maintain composure under pressure, use good manners, show initiative and resourcefulness, adapt to change, take constructive criticism and directions, use equipment responsibly, follow safety rules and regulations, and act with integrity. The evaluations are also designed so that each correctional facility can add additional expectations if desired.

Overall, there's a feeling that the job descriptions and performance evaluations will greatly benefit the inmates,

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as well as supervisors. "Oftentimes, supervisors of inmates don't have experience or formal training in supervising," says Wurl-Koth. "Now they have a consistent tool with guidelines to review inmates." Moreover, thanks to the consistency in descriptions and evaluations, it's simpler to gather data and continuously improve inmate training. "Our long-range vision is to develop a database that will show how the work we're doing in corrections increases a person's vocational and soft skills," says Wurl-Koth. "If we are using the same terminology, we can keep records on each person's skill development. It's amazing the support that's come out of this," says Wurl-Koth of the initiative. "People really like it." ●