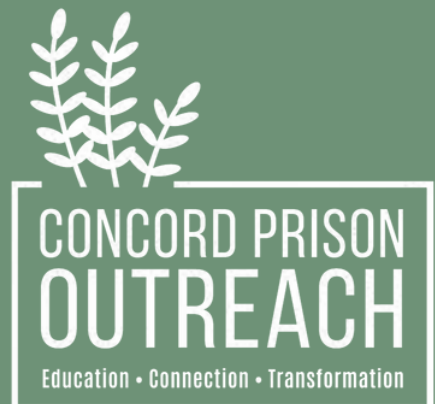


# CONCORD PRISON OUTREACH

---

2025 VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT CONCORD PRISON OUTREACH</b>	<b>3</b>
WORD FROM OUR VOLUNTEER AND PROGRAM MANAGER	
CPO STAFF	
CPO MISSION AND VALUES	
CPO PROGRAMS	
PROGRAM SITES	
<b>VOLUNTEERING</b>	<b>11</b>
WHY PRISON EDUCATION	
VOLUNTEER PROCESS	
CPO POLICIES	
VOLUNTEER CLASSIFICATION	
VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS	
<b>INSIDE THE WALLS</b>	<b>18</b>
VOLUNTEERING INSIDE THE PRISON	
NAVIGATING THE PRISON CLASSROOM	
LANGUAGE	
ETHICAL VOLUNTEERISM	
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	<b>23</b>

---

## MESSAGE FROM OUR VOLUNTEER AND PROGRAM MANAGER:

Hello, and thank you for your interest in joining the Concord Prison Outreach (CPO) volunteer community!

Volunteers like you are the backbone of our organization, enabling us to fulfill our mission of improving the lives of incarcerated individuals and their families.

This handbook is designed to provide essential context for your role as a volunteer within Massachusetts prisons and jails. It includes important information about incarceration in Massachusetts, the onboarding process, volunteer expectations, and our policies and procedures.

Please note: This orientation handbook is specific to Concord Prison Outreach volunteers and does not replace the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) or the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction (MHOC) Volunteer Handbook, including their specific policies and procedures related to volunteers. CPO volunteers are required to read and adhere to both this document and the DOC or MHOC Volunteer Handbook, along with the associated policies and procedures for volunteering inside those facilities.

Volunteering inside prisons and providing educational services is a unique and rewarding experience. This handbook outlines the guidelines that are critical to your success.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

With deep gratitude,

*Ellie DiMauro*

Manager, Volunteer Engagement and Programming

\*Special thanks to Hannah Zack and Kiana Aftahi for their significant contributions in making this handbook.

# CPO STAFF

---



## **SAM WILLIAMS**

### **Executive Director**

Sam has been instrumental in various initiatives across Boston, including prison rehabilitation and re-entry, addressing the impact of racial profiling, community economic development, urban planning, youth development, and public safety. He currently serves as the Chair of the Community Advisory Board for Northeastern University's Institute on Race and Justice. Mr. Williams is a former member of the Board of Directors for Action for Boston Community Development and was an appointed member of the Executive Office of Public Safety's Massachusetts Racial Profiling Task Force. He is also a poet, writer, and trainer.

---



## **ELLIE DIMAURO**

### **Manager, Volunteer Engagement and Programming**

Ellie graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Massachusetts Lowell with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History. Before joining CPO, she interned with Washington Parks & People, a community-based nonprofit in Washington, DC, where she served as the Volunteer Manager and Operations Assistant. She is passionate about social and racial equality and is committed to ensuring that underserved populations have access to educational services. Ellie also enjoys visiting museums and watching horror movies.

---



## **JEANNETTE SHEAHAN**

### **Office Coordinator**

Jeannette has dedicated her entire career to the education and human services fields. She holds a master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Lesley University and has served in various roles, including mathematics teacher, Youth Employment Coordinator for the City of Cambridge, Career Counselor at a therapeutic high school, and administrative assistant at Concord-Carlisle High School. Jeannette joins CPO with great enthusiasm to be part of a team and community committed to the personal and educational growth of incarcerated individuals. She is also passionate about exercise and fluent in French.

# VISION & MISSION

Concord Prison Outreach (CPO) is a 501(c)(3) organization composed of a coalition of individuals and faith communities committed to helping people who are incarcerated build better lives for themselves and their families. CPO works cooperatively with the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) and the Middlesex Sheriff's Office, offering educational programs that focus on skill-building and personal growth, essentials to help support people in prison to achieve success post-incarceration. Since its founding in 1968, when its first volunteers helped support people in a local prison infirmary, CPO has developed into the largest organization of its kind in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

---

**Mission:** Concord Prison Outreach offers high-quality, transformative programs that focus on education, personal growth, and increased opportunity for incarcerated people and their families.

**Vision:** All people who are incarcerated in Massachusetts have access to meaningful educational and personal growth opportunities.

## **Core Values:**

- **Community** - A vow to be a passionate community of volunteers, educators, students, and staff working collaboratively to expand opportunity
- **Integrity** - A pledge to be authentic, trustworthy, and truthful in our work and communications about CPO and those it serves
- **Respect** - A promise to value and honor different points of view and put forth the necessary effort to meet people where they are
- **Social Justice** - A commitment to promote equity, access, and opportunity to historically marginalized individuals and communities
- **Transformation** - A belief that all have the capacity for personal growth and life-altering change

## Program Area: Families and Children

“

*This video is an opportunity to express our love to our children in yet another way. It is a memory they can hold of us while we are not there.*

- Read to Me, Dad Participant

”

The number of children with an incarcerated parent is on the rise. Maintaining parent-child connections is linked to positive outcomes for children, improves the quality of life for the parent in prison, and reduces stress for the co-parent.

---

### Read to Me, Dad/Mom

In this 4-week program, fathers explore a variety of children's books and then select a fun, positive, and inspiring book, or poem for their child. They practice reading it aloud, and the reading is recorded or videotaped. The recording and book are then sent to the child, fostering the connection between children and their absent parent. This program is also offered to mothers and family members that would like to connect to children in their families including grandfathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, etc.

---

### Kids' Corner

Kids' Corner is a program for children who are visiting an incarcerated family member and takes place in a section of the visiting rooms, where there are a variety of books to read with the children, along with games, toys, and coloring pages for them to use. The volunteer plays with the children and oversees materials that the children borrow and bring to use where their families are seated. This program helps to make the visits a more enjoyable experience for the children as well as providing the parents a time when they can talk together about private matters while their children are occupied at the Kids' Corner.

---

### Parenting

Concord Prison Outreach offers ongoing support to incarcerated parents who are adjusting to parenting at a distance and who seek to enhance their parenting skills overall. Participants get help with the challenges of parenting: improving communications, parenting from a distance, teaching discipline, and raising children with a sense of self-worth. Steps towards regaining trust and seeking forgiveness are discussed. Participants can expect to complete activities requiring them to reflect on their personal belief systems and the effect their belief systems have on their parenting style and relationship with the co-parent. Additionally, participants will be challenged to consider new ways of relating to and interacting with their children by discussing the strengths and barriers of the new approach presented, and its conflict with their worldviews and values.

## Program Area: Socio-Emotional

“

*I learned ... that it's okay to look and talk about our scars, holding them in our hearts as trophies, not a weight to hold us down. A scar can serve as a reminder and also a receipt that you have paid that price, but you still are here and can make a difference.*

- Program Participant

”

Emotional growth is an essential pillar of Concord Prison Outreach’s mission of Education, Connection, and Transformation. It is crucial to the life trajectories of the people in prison and to society as a whole to develop strategies for managing emotions and behavior and to break patterns rooted in past behavior. Concord Prison Outreach is committed to providing socio-emotional programming grounded in research. While some programs have roots in spirituality, all programs use a non-denominational and respectful approach.

### Restorative Justice 8-Week Reading Group

This course is designed for incarcerated individuals interested in taking responsibility for the harm they have committed, making amends to their families, victims, and communities, and finding the path to their own inner healing. The length of the course reflects the deep group work required on the journey from self-exploration to empathy for others. Participants begin by identifying the trauma in their own lives that may have led to unhealthy decisions and then move toward taking responsibility for the harm they have caused. Although making amends to victims is rarely possible in a prison context, participants are encouraged to "bring victims forward" by making positive changes in their own lives and repairing harm in their families and communities.

### Path of Freedom

Path of Freedom is a Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence (MBEI) course written by Fleet Maul and Kate Crisp. This course focuses on mindfulness meditation, emotional awareness, communication, conflict resolution, and various resourcing and resiliency-building skills. The main objectives of the programs are developing greater self-awareness, improving impulse control, and greater social awareness to foster a new positive vision for their lives.

### Yoga

This class incorporates yoga postures, gentle movement sequences, breathwork, supported silent meditation, and guided relaxation to support increased awareness and mindfulness of the breath and body, and quieting of the nervous system. This class is a gentle joint practice, so there is no weight bearing through the knees or wrists. Chairs are available.

### Meditation/Healthy Living

Meditation is a practice in which an individual uses a technique, such as breathing, concentration, or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity – to train attention and awareness and achieve a mentally clear, emotionally calm, and stable state. Meditation is one deliberate means of changing the course of one’s thought process and, in turn, altering how one perceives and responds to the environments around them. In this session, you will learn about the philosophy, mechanics, and daily practice of meditation in a hands-on way.

## Program Area: Vocational

“

*Providing these programs has thoroughly enriched my life and the lives of others. It leaves you with the difference that you make and it's truly an empowering experience.*

- Horticulture Volunteer

”

Vocational courses are highly sought-after, especially among individuals nearing their release dates. Concord Prison Outreach programming aims to equip participants with the skills necessary to secure employment and meet the needs of potential employers upon reintegration into society. Additional courses, such as MoneySmart or the entrepreneurship course, empower students to gain mastery over their personal and household finances and potentially leverage their skills for income-generating opportunities.

### Horticulture/Gardening

The Horticulture program covers six key content areas: basic plants, gardening fundamentals, seed starting and plant propagation, organic gardening, understanding the food chain, and landscape design. Students gain practical experience in greenhouse operations, including starting plants for use in vegetable gardens and landscaping. They also learn landscape design principles, participate in garden planting and maintenance, and contribute to landscape beautification efforts. At locations like Northeastern Correctional Center in Concord, students may engage in landscape design projects and utilize harvested vegetables in the facility's restaurant.

### Entrepreneurship

The entrepreneurship program consists of twelve sessions designed to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of what it takes to establish a successful business. The primary focus is on assisting students in developing a viable business plan, encompassing both short and long-term goals. Throughout the program, participants identify their personal and business strengths and weaknesses, assess business opportunities and threats, and strategize on how to maximize their competitive advantages. Emphasis is placed on conducting market research and creating realistic budgets. Additionally, participants hone their presentation skills, including crafting a compelling "elevator" pitch.

### FDIC MoneySmart

MoneySmart, an FDIC education program, focuses on fundamental financial concepts, promoting progress toward financial responsibility. Over the course of ten classes, students cover topics such as basic banking, borrowing, managing a checking account, budgeting, saving, financial regulations, credit reports, responsible credit usage, installment loans, and the essentials of purchasing a car or home. This program empowers students to take control of their financial future by making informed and prudent financial decisions.



## Program Area: Arts & Humanities

“

*When the door slides shut, my world quickly becomes black and white. It's as if color has ceased to exist...But I know that someday my colors will return to me. It will be with vibrant reds, greens, and blues...*

- Creative Writing Student

”

Participation in the arts can enhance feelings of self-worth, reduce stress, and provide a positive and constructive outlet for emotions for all individuals. For those in prison, these benefits come with the added opportunity to reconnect with interests from better times and cultivate new passions that bring meaning to daily life. The stress reduction and promotion of pro-social behavior fostered by engagement in the arts benefit both incarcerated individuals and prison staff.

### Art

Visual arts serve as a medium for self-expression and stress relief, allowing participants to communicate their emotions and experiences with loved ones outside of prison. A diverse array of materials, including colored pencils, papers, watercolors, art instruction books, stencils, and stickers, are available for participants to utilize. They may use this time to create artwork for personal enjoyment or craft special occasion cards such as Mother's Day, Valentine's, or birthday cards for their children.

### Book Discussion Group

Readings encompass poetry, novels, plays, and short stories that exemplify good writing and have enduring qualities. Some readings are selected based on thematic elements such as survival, leadership, friendship, aging, father-son relationships, or fables. All selections are chosen to broaden both the leaders' and participants' understanding of literature and the human experience.

### Creative Writing

This 8-week course is tailored for poetry enthusiasts, creative writers, or individuals interested in freestyle writing who seek to challenge themselves and deepen their appreciation for the art form. It also caters to those looking to enhance their basic writing and storytelling skills.

# PROGRAM SITES

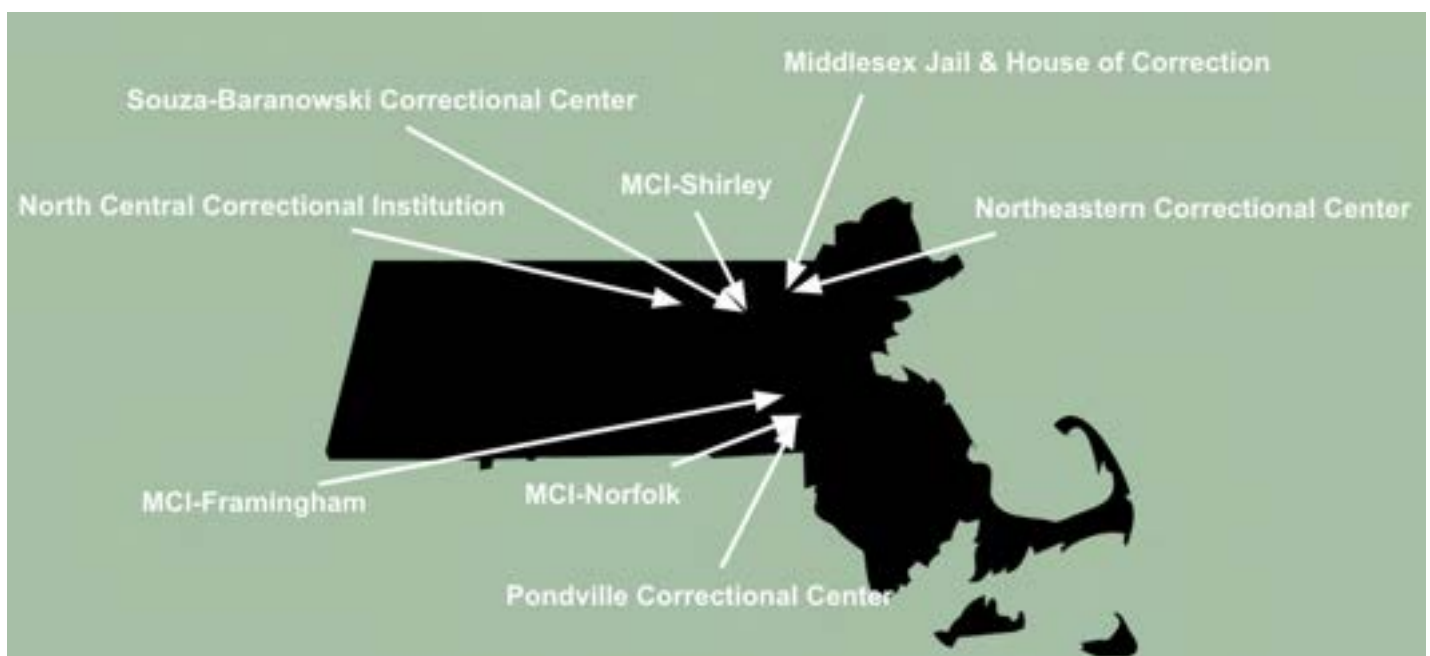
Concord Prison Outreach partners with the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) and the Middlesex Sheriff's Office to provide programming across eight sites. The DOC oversees the state prison system and manages incarcerated individuals in 13 state correctional facilities, each assigned a security level based on the perceived safety risk of its population. The four prison security levels are maximum, medium, minimum, and pre-release. The Middlesex Sheriff's Office oversees the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction (MHOC), which houses men awaiting trial or serving sentences of up to 2.5 years. CPO volunteers facilitate programs at several DOC sites as well as at the MHOC.

## Massachusetts Department of Correction State Prison Facilities

- **MCI-Framingham** (Medium) - Framingham, MA
- **MCI-Norfolk** (Medium) - Norfolk, MA
- **MCI-Shirley** (Minimum & Medium) - Shirley, MA
- **North Central Correctional Institution** (Minimum & Medium) - Gardner, MA
- **Northeastern Correctional Center** (NECC or "The Farm") (Minimum & Pre-release) - Concord, MA
- **Pondville Correctional Center** (Minimum & Pre-release) - Norfolk, MA
- **Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center** (Maximum) - Shirley, MA

## Middlesex County Sheriff's Office

- **Middlesex Jail & House of Correction (Jail)** - Billerica, MA



# WHY PRISON EDUCATION?

## Here is what the data tells us:

**Education** is vital in interrupting the cycle of mass incarceration. Studies conducted over the last three decades indicate that prison educational programs lead to reductions in crime, savings for taxpayers, and long-term contributions to the safety and well-being of the communities to which formerly incarcerated people return.

A 2013 RAND Corporation report conducted a meta-analysis of adult prison education programs and found that for **every dollar spent on an incarcerated individual's education, five dollars are saved in taxpayer money that would otherwise pay for prisons.** Meaningful educational opportunities also affirm the rights and dignity of incarcerated individuals as human beings, regardless of their criminal records.

## More specifically, prison education:

- **Reduces recidivism:** A 2013 meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation found that incarcerated individuals who participated in any type of correctional education program—such as adult basic education, HiSET preparation, or vocational training—had 43% lower odds of recidivism compared to those who did not participate. This equates to a 13 percentage point reduction in the risk of being re-incarcerated (Lois et al.). Prison education has the potential to significantly decrease Massachusetts' current recidivism rate of 30% (MICI).
- **Saves money:** According to a UCLA study, investing one million dollars in correctional education prevents approximately 600 crimes, whereas spending the same amount on incarceration prevents around 350 crimes (Bazos and Hausman).
- **Increases employment outcomes:** Without a high school diploma, unemployment rates are exceedingly high among formerly incarcerated individuals, ranging from 25% among white men to 60% among African American women. As the workplace becomes increasingly skilled, it becomes more challenging for formerly incarcerated people to find employment. However, those who engage in vocational programming while incarcerated are 13% more likely to secure meaningful employment after release (Couloute and Kopf).

# BARRIERS TO RE-ENTRY

## EMPLOYMENT

50% of the formerly incarcerated who could not find a job after release ended up back in prison\*

93% of the formerly incarcerated who found a job after release did not return to prison\*

>90% of companies consider criminal records in hiring decisions

\*Of 262,000 released from prison 2002-2006

## HOUSING

Most public housing bans people with a criminal record

Public housing agencies are permitted to evict entire households based on the criminal record of one occupant

Many of the formerly incarcerated cannot afford to buy or rent in the private housing market



1 in 5 people who leave prison will experience homelessness

## VOTING

6.1 million Americans are not allowed to vote due to their criminal record

34 states do not permit those who are incarcerated, on parole, or post-sentence to vote

## EDUCATION

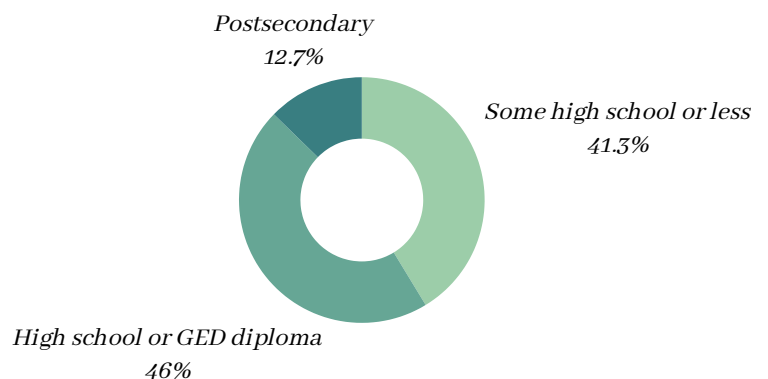
Only 35% of prisons provide access to higher education\*

For over two decades (1994-2020) incarcerated people were barred from receiving federal financial aid for higher education (the Pell Grant)

41% of incarcerated individuals have not completed a high school level education\*\*

\*As of 2005

\*\*As of 2003



Source: The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights: "Reentry Fact Sheet"

# VOLUNTEER PROCESS

## ***1) Complete the online volunteer application form***

All applicants must complete the online volunteer registration form. This form gathers essential information for a volunteer's journey with CPO.

## ***2) Screening Interview***

Prospective volunteers will be interviewed by the Volunteer Manager (VM). The VM will inform applicants if their skills align with a particular program in need of volunteers.

## ***3) Attend Concord Prison Outreach's new volunteer orientation***

CPO holds orientations to provide prospective volunteers with information about the organization, the effects of mass incarceration on communities, the benefits of prison education for incarcerated individuals, and guidance on volunteering within the prison system. **Please note: Participating in an orientation does not guarantee selection as a volunteer.**

## ***4) Matched to a program***

Oriented volunteers will be contacted when opportunities arise in the areas they've expressed interest in. Please note that it may take several months before volunteers are placed in a program, and some CPO programs require additional training.

## ***5) Attend site orientation & complete paperwork***

Once placed in a program, volunteers must complete additional paperwork and attend a mandatory site-specific orientation at the assigned jail or prison (Department of Correction (DOC) or Middlesex House of Correction (MHOC)). All volunteers are required to pass a background check to enter the institutions. **Please note that CPO has no control over the background verification process.**

## ***6) The facility processes your paperwork***

Once prospective volunteers submit the volunteer paperwork associated with the facility you would like to volunteer at, it will be processed for security clearance.

## ***7) Ready to volunteer!***

After the facility's staff processes your paperwork and you are approved as a volunteer, CPO's Volunteer Manager will be in touch with further details.

# CONCORD PRISON OUTREACH POLICIES

***Confidentiality:*** Concord Prison Outreach (CPO) volunteers may not use any information acquired during their time with CPO, including statements, data, and information gathered from students for any purpose.

***Equal Opportunity:*** CPO shall follow the spirit and intent of all federal, state, and local employment law. CPO is committed to providing equal opportunity for all employees and applicants without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, political affiliation, personal appearance, family responsibilities, matriculation, or any characteristic protected under federal, state or local law. Each person is evaluated based on personal skill and merit.

***Freedom from Harassment:*** CPO is committed to providing a work environment for all employees free from sexual harassment and other types of discriminatory harassment. Employees are expected to conduct themselves professionally and show respect for their commitment begins with the recognition and acknowledgment that sexual harassment and other types of discriminatory harassment are unlawful. To reinforce this commitment, CPO has developed a policy against harassment and a reporting procedure for employees who have been subjected to or witnessed harassment.

***Prohibition of Other Types of Discriminatory Harassment:*** It is also against CPO's policy to engage in verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of their race, color, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, or other protected category (or that of individual's relatives, friends, or associates) that: (1) has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or offensive working environments (2) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with individual's work performance; or (3) otherwise adversely affects individual's employment opportunities.

# CONCORD PRISON OUTREACH POLICIES

*Prohibition of Sexual Harassment:* CPO's policy against sexual harassment prohibits sexual advances or requests for sexual favors or other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature when: (1) submission to such conduct is made an express or implicit condition of employment; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct is a basis for employment decisions affecting the individual who submits or rejects such conduct; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an employee's work performance or creating an intimidating environment.

*Service at the Discretion of the Organization:* CPO accepts volunteers' service with the understanding that such service is at the sole discretion of Concord Prison Outreach. Volunteers agree that the organization may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to terminate the volunteer's relationship with Concord Prison Outreach or to make changes such as volunteer assignment.

*Supporting Volunteers:* CPO staff are committed to matching volunteers with programs that suit their interests and expertise. We offer support and encourage anyone who is feeling unsure, uncomfortable, or confused to contact the Volunteer Manager and their program leader at any time. We acknowledge that this work is challenging and will lend support whenever needed.

Our Volunteer Manager is available Monday-Friday to meet with volunteers who need support or additional resources.

Please contact Ellie DiMauro for any questions or concerns:

(o) 978-369-1865

(e) [ellie@concordprisonoutreach.org](mailto:ellie@concordprisonoutreach.org)

# VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

Our programs have been running for over 50 years in Massachusetts prisons. Agreement and adherence to volunteer responsibilities allow us to develop a foundation of trust among volunteers, staff members, students, and the Department of Correction. As you sign on to becoming a volunteer, you accept the following responsibilities:

- Be realistic and accept assignments that fit your interests, skill, and availability.
- Examine the time commitment required for your role and commit to working with Concord Prison Outreach to fulfill that commitment because consistency is crucial. If your attendance becomes inconsistent, we may terminate the volunteer opportunity.
- Volunteers must attend the Concord Prison Outreach orientation and a DOC or MHOC orientation at the program site.
- Follow all CPO policies, rules, and regulations set forth by the MA Department of Correction. Please note: When volunteering, you are a representative of Concord Prison Outreach. Negative behavior can affect the standing of all CPO programs.
- Volunteers must remain flexible; if there is a disruption in the prison, such as a lock-down, you may either not teach that day or have to wait to get in. If a disruption occurs while you are there, you may have to cut your class short. Always consult with officers and DOC staff and comply with their requests on all security related matters.
- Track the amount of time you spend volunteering with CPO.



# VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

- Do not correspond with the DOC or MHOC administrators regarding the class schedule or program concerns. Any changes and concerns should be sent to the VM. Please note: The only time it is appropriate for volunteers to email the DOC or MHOC is when they send materials for them to print or are contacted to complete the volunteer re-certification process.

## Volunteer Management:

- All volunteers are responsible for keeping CPO up to date with their email, telephone number, and mailing address.

## Disclosing criminal history:

- Previous encounters or having an incarcerated family member does not automatically disqualify prospective volunteers, but it must be disclosed to CPO and the DOC or MHOC.

## Extra Program Responsibilities:

- Program Leaders (PL) have extra responsibilities.
- Program Leaders must note the number of students attending each session and complete the PL survey after each session. PLs will be sent a survey by the VM at the start of their program. These numbers are crucial for donors and to measure the effectiveness of our programs.
- Volunteers may purchase **approved** materials and submit for reimbursement. Please check with a staff member about your program's budget before making a purchase. We have some supplies available at our office.

# VOLUNTEERING INSIDE THE PRISON

## Becoming a Volunteer:

- Volunteers must be at least 21 years-old.
- If you are on an incarcerated person's visiting list, you cannot volunteer.
- Formerly incarcerated people must wait six months to become a volunteer and receive special approval from the Superintendent.
- All volunteers go through a background check completed by the prison.
- CPO has no control over the result, both the length of time it takes or whether an individual will pass.

## Entrance Procedures:

- Vehicle:
  - Park in the area that is designated as visitor parking.
  - Always leave your phone in the car.
  - Make sure your windows are up and the doors and trunk are securely locked in your car.
  - Do not have any firearms, ammunition, or any other weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, explosives, or a pet.
- Be early:
  - Be at the prisons 30-45 minutes before the start of the scheduled program.
  - Being early ensures that you have time for COVID testing, temperature checks, and/or COVID health forms if that facility requires these for entry.
  - The prison runs on movement, which is the amount of time when incarcerated people are allowed to enter and exit areas in the prison.
  - Movement coincides with work and program schedules. If you're late, you may miss the opening and closing of the trap and will not be able to volunteer that day.

# VOLUNTEERING INSIDE THE PRISON

- Entering the prison:
  - Volunteers enter and present themselves at the control center to sign-in.
  - There is a sign-in sheet that asks for full name, residence, the reason for visit (name of the program), and whether the volunteer has been convicted of a felony.
  - A valid ID (driver's license or passport) is swapped for a visitor's badge.
- Lockers:
  - If going to a medium-security prison, bring two quarters to store your keys.
  - You may bring your non-hooded coat and the locker key with you behind the wall, in addition to the following personal items: a medical bracelet, religious medallion and wedding rings. You cannot bring class materials behind the wall; see below for guidelines.
- COVID-19:
  - All CPO volunteers must comply with the COVID protocols in place at the facility they are volunteering at.
  - These protocols may vary from facility to facility.
  - It critical to arrive to the facility 30-45 minutes early to allow time for any health screen checks and security processing.
  - Any violators of COVID protocols and procedures will not be allowed to continue to volunteer with CPO.

# VOLUNTEERING INSIDE THE PRISON

- The Trap & Being Searched:
  - In medium and maximum-security prisons, all volunteers are subject to being searched.
  - A search includes the use of a metal detector or pat search.
  - Volunteers will be asked to remove their belts, shoes, outerwear (coats, sweaters, jackets).
  - An officer will inspect the collar, sleeve cuffs, waistband, and pants cuff/hemline.
- Attire:
  - Volunteers must follow the DOC or MHOC Visitor Dress Code guidelines or they can be denied entry.
  - Business casual dress is required. No jeans, no revealing or tight clothing (spandex, leggings), no fatigue or camouflage clothing, no clothing that displays a gang affiliation, obscene, racist, or sexual content.
  - Visitor Dress Code Guidelines will be provided at the CPO Orientation.
- Classroom Location:
  - Depending on the prison's security level, volunteers may be escorted by a correctional officer or staff member.
  - Remember that surveillance cameras monitor the prison grounds and can listen and see what is going on in the classroom.

# VOLUNTEERING INSIDE THE PRISON

## Bringing in Materials:

- All materials brought into the prison must be pre-approved by the facility's administration and included on the program application.
- You cannot bring in anything that is not related to the program.
- Any items not explicitly approved in writing is considered contraband.
- If books are needed for a program, the VM will provide them.
- If CPO cannot mail the books directly to the prison, volunteers are responsible for bringing the materials and books to the prison a week before the start of the program to be scanned and searched.
- All handouts must be emailed to the prison's contact at least 48 hours before a given program. We recommend that volunteers send all handouts at the beginning of a term, i.e., before Week 1.
- Paper, pens, and folders must be requested in advance.
- Most prisons have storage boxes for each volunteer program. All materials, including print-outs for the program, will be kept in the box and closet while not in use.

## Communication with the DOC or MHOC :

- The DOC and MHOC request that all communication comes from the CPO staff and not directly from volunteers.
- The only time it is appropriate for volunteers to email the prison administration is when they send materials for them to print or are contacted to complete the volunteer re-certification process.
- Any questions about the program or facility must go through CPO Staff.

Please note: These rules are subject to change and often vary from facility to facility. The site-specific orientations will give an overview of that facility's specific rules.

*If you have any questions, please reach out to Ellie. Don't assume that something is ok, always double check!*

# NAVIGATING THE PRISON CLASSROOM

## Student Interactions:

- We hope that there is a positive bond between Concord Prison Outreach volunteers and students, however, personal boundaries need to be maintained for the program to function, as mandated by the Department of Correction and House of Correction guidelines.
- Concord Prison Outreach volunteers are granted access by the Massachusetts Department of Correction and the Middlesex House of Correction exclusively for the stated program's purpose. Contact beyond the original objective can lead to boundary violations and put all Concord Prison Outreach programs in jeopardy.
- The burden of responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries rests upon the shoulders of CPO volunteers. Breaking prison rules with a student can lead them to be severely punished, including forced isolation, prison transfer, or program revocation.

## Avoiding Boundary Violations

- The DOC and MHOC recommends practicing the following behaviors: maintain a professional distance, focus behavior on duties & assignments, do not become overly familiar with any student, do not share personal information, do not accept gifts or favors, and be knowledgeable of department policy and procedure, code of conduct, and facility rules and regulations (MA DOC/MHOC Appropriate Staff/Inmate Relationships, A Guide for Staff, Contractors and Volunteers, n.d).

# NAVIGATING THE PRISON CLASSROOM

## Additional recommendations:

- Physical contact cannot exceed a brief handshake, no hugging.
- Volunteers and students cannot exchange any non-class related materials, including candy, gum, letters (even thank you notes), possessions, gifts, and drawings.
- Rationale: We know it is difficult to turn down a gift, but accepting one creates a potentially unhealthy power dynamic for you and your students.
- Do not communicate with students through phone calls, mail, or email.
- You cannot communicate with an incarcerated person's family on their behalf.
- Do not agree to do any sort of favor, i.e., passing notes and/or contacting someone outside.
- Remember: the only materials that can be exchanged are class materials that have been pre-approved by the facility's administration.
- Do not exchange identifying information.
- Volunteers cannot reveal personal identifying information, i.e., address, cell phone number, full name, etc. Volunteers can use their first name with students, but do not disclose last name.
- Do not ask any student about their criminal sentence or details about their crime.

# LANGUAGE

## Words matter:

They shape perceptions and understanding, both of past and present events and of future possibilities and, therefore, future events. Semantic and public acceptance of terms like "formerly incarcerated" or "returning citizens" (rather than ex-felon, ex-offender, or ex-inmate) are of fundamental importance to the process of public opinion formulation, positive media images, effective social service delivery, and, most importantly, progressive policy change.

As an organization, Concord Prison Outreach follows [The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solution's](#) guidance to use people-centric language. We hope you'll want to, but we do ask that you use people-centric language while representing CPO.

We resolve to use humanizing language for individuals involved in the criminal legal system. Words like inmate, offender, convict, felon, and prisoner can dehumanize and evoke feelings of otherness and fear.

People in prison are people, and certain decisions in our language can help us recall and assert this in the face of the many forces making contrary assertions. We use the terms, people in prison, incarcerated people, people with past involvement in the criminal legal system, formerly incarcerated people, etc. Most often, though, in our context, people in prison are students. We can refer to them as a student, and by their first name.

However, remember that language is a matter of personal choice. People in prison may refer to themselves as a prisoner or use some of the other terms listed above. We should respect the language choices of those around us. There is no need to challenge someone (an incarcerated person) for referring to themselves or their peers as an inmate, etc.

We should refer to correctional officers as such or as CO's, not guards in a similar vein. The latter can simplify and minimize their jobs' complexity and goals and be perceived as disrespectful.



# ETHICAL VOLUNTEERING

## Power & Privilege:

CPO volunteers enter prisons from a place of privilege, and it is vital to recognize and understand our own privilege in relation to our work.

Volunteering in prison can be a fulfilling experience, but we must remember that it (our service) is not about us and what makes us feel good, but rather it is about providing an inclusive learning environment for the students to thrive. We must recognize that we may not know what is best for each student. Power and privilege are not something we can separate ourselves from; volunteers can come and go, a luxury our students do not have.

## Final Thoughts to Keep in Mind:

- Consistency is important. The students look forward to volunteers coming at the same time each week and prison staff are relying on us.
- Speak to the students as equals and as people with intelligence who are worthy of respect.
- Listen - ask for student feedback on materials, what they find helpful, what they are interested in.
- Respect students' concerns over their unique challenges and contexts; find a balance between being encouraging and recognizing that everyone has a unique situation.
- Avoid moralizing, don't lecture students, guilt them, etc. about past behaviors or their opinions.
- Reach out! This work isn't easy and can be emotional. We are here for you!

# WORKS CITED

Bazos, Audrey, and Jessica Hausman. "Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program." UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research, 2004, <https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-512>.

Couloute, Lucius, and Daniel Kopf. *Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People*. Prison Policy Initiative, 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.

Davis, Lois M., et al. *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?*. RAND Corporation, 2014, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR564.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.html).

Martinez-Hill, Juan and Ruth Delaney. Incarcerated Students Will Have Access to Pell Grants Again. What Happens Now? Vera Institute, 2021, <https://www.vera.org/news/incarcerated-students-will-have-access-to-pell-grants-again-what-happens-now>

Mici, Carol A. MA DOC Three-Year Recidivism Rates: 2016 Release Cohort. Massachusetts Department of Corrections, 2022, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/three-year-recidivism-rates-2016-release-cohort/download>