FINAL REPORT

Strengthening the Women's Prison Workforce: Recruitment and Training

JANUARY 2026

Morgan Philbin, PhD
Megan Lynch, MS
Sam Prawer, JD
Cyrus Ahalt, MPP
Brie Williams, MD, MS

UCSF
University of California
San Francisco

AMEND

Amend at UCSF (Amend), based at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine (UCSF), works to transform prisons by partnering with departments of correction and sharing public health expertise to reduce harm and promote the health and humanity of both incarcerated people and prison staff.

This report, "Strengthening the Women's Prison Workforce: Recruitment and Training" is the third in a three-part series by Amend aimed at identifying strategies to support and empower people incarcerated in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR)'s women's prisons to improve their health and wellness.

PREFERRED CITATION

Philbin M, Lynch M, Prawer S, Ahalt C, Williams B. *Strengthening the Women's Prison Workforce: Recruitment and Training* (Amend at UCSF, The Division of Health and Society, University of California San Francisco School of Medicine, Jan. 2026).

© 2026 Amend

Cover: Mural in Belfast, Northern Ireland, ©John Lucas for Amend

Report Contributors

Morgan Philbin, PhD is an Associate Professor of Medicine in the University of California San Francisco Department of Medicine whose research focuses on women's health, substance use, HIV/AIDS and criminal justice. She is a Program Consultant with Amend.

Megan Lynch, MS has over 10 years of experience working with US corrections systems, including developing and implementing a discretionary parole hearing preparation program. She is a Senior Program Manager at Amend.

Sam Prawer, JD has over 10 years of experience in policy development and 7 years working in state government, including at Maine Department of Corrections where he helped develop and implement policy reforms designed to bring about lasting change. He is a Senior Program Manager at Amend.

Cyrus Ahalt, MPP is Amend's Chief Program Officer and is responsible for all aspects of Amend's work advancing transformative change in US prisons in partnership with Departments of Corrections in the US and internationally.

Brie Williams, MD, MS is a Professor of Medicine in the University of California San Francisco Department of Medicine and a physician trained in internal medicine, geriatrics and palliative care. Dr. Williams is the founding director of Amend.

Additional Support

This report also benefited from the support of Emily Baglio, who conducted an initial literature review. As her involvement was during the initial phases of the project, this final report should not necessarily be assumed to reflect her perspective.

AMEND

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 5

Introduction 7

Section 1. Strengthening the Workforce by Enhancing Recruitment Practices 9

- **1.1** Develop mission-aligned job descriptions 11
- **1.2** Attract candidates through diverse channels 18
- **1.3** Leverage in-person recruitment events to identify mission-driven and qualified recruits 21
- **1.4** Broaden recruitment efforts to include candidates from backgrounds non-traditional to law enforcement 24
- **1.5** Streamline the application process from identification to hire to avoid losing qualified candidates 27

Section 2. Strengthening the Workforce Through Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Training 28

- **2.1** Expand onboarding and introductory training 30
- **2.2** Expand mentorship and coaching immediately following introductory training 33
- **2.3** Provide structured ongoing professional development and advanced training 34
- **2.4** Enhance trainer selection and accountability 37
- **2.5** Strengthen and expand learning objectives 38
- **2.6** Improve instructional design and delivery by developing assessment tools and practices that are consistently implemented across trainings 39
- **2.7** Increase opportunities for active learning 42
- **2.8** Update training materials regularly to reflect current best practices 43

Conclusion 45

Appendices 46

- **A1** Example Learning Theories 46
- **A2** Drafting Learning Objectives 48
- **A3** Scottish Prison Service Leadership Development Catalogue 49

Executive Summary

This report recommends strategies to maximize workforce development in women's prisons, focusing on recruitment and training to build a California Department of Corrections (CDCR) workforce equipped to support the health, wellness, and rehabilitation of incarcerated women. The recommendations form an integrated approach to recruitment and training to enhance outcomes for both staff and incarcerated individuals.

Recommendations are organized into two categories:

1. Enhancing Recruitment Practices

Building an effective workforce requires recruiting qualified, motivated candidates aligned with CDCR's mission and vision. This section addresses how CDCR can:

- Collectively define ideal staff characteristics (background, experience, training, personality traits) to create clear recruitment criteria
- Develop cohesive recruitment materials and messaging reflecting these criteria
- Ensure candidates fully understand position realities through accurate job descriptions that highlight mission-aligned personal qualities, including descriptions targeting female candidates
- Expand recruitment channels beyond existing approaches (in-person/virtual events, social media, websites) to reach candidates who might not initially consider law enforcement careers
- Streamline the application-to-hire process to secure qualified candidates

2. Implementing Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Training

Responding effectively to incarcerated women's diverse needs requires the development of an informed, competent workforce capable of maintaining safety and providing rehabilitative services. This section recommends:

- Applying evidence-based learning theories and practices in foundational and ongoing professional training
- Beginning training immediately upon staff arrival at women's prisons and continuing throughout careers for professional development
- Regularly updating training content to reflect current practices
- Strengthening and expanding learning objectives aligned with consistent assessment tools and practices
- Utilizing trainers experienced in both content and learning theories, evaluated by training experts

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Develop mission-aligned job descriptions

1.2 Attract candidates through diverse channels

1.3 Leverage in-person recruitment events to identify mission-driven and qualified recruits

1.4 Broaden recruitment efforts to include candidates from backgrounds non-traditional to law enforcement

1.5 Streamline the application process from identification to hire to avoid losing qualified candidates

2.1 Expand onboarding and introductory training

2.2 Expand mentorship and coaching immediately following introductory training

2.3 Provide structured ongoing professional development and advanced training

2.4 Enhance trainer selection and accountability

2.5 Strengthen and expand learning objectives

2.6 Improve instructional design and delivery by developing assessment tools and practices that are consistently implemented across trainings

2.7 Increase opportunities for active learning

2.8 Update training materials regularly to reflect current best practices

***Note**: This report does not address workforce retention, though this related topic has critical implications for workforce development and recruitment. Recommendations on international best practices for staff retention in women's prisons could be provided in a subsequent report.*

Introduction

This report provides recommendations for strengthening workforce development in women's prisons, focusing on recruitment and training as foundational to workforce readiness. These recommendations are designed to help ensure CDCR staff have the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to support the health, wellness, and empowerment of people incarcerated in women's prisons.

The Challenge

Departments of Corrections nationwide face significant workforce challenges. A 2021 Correctional Leaders Association study found turnover rates of 20-30% across most agencies, with 38% of staff leaving within one year and 48% within five years.[1,2] While CDCR-wide retention data are unavailable, California Institution for Women (CIW) reported approximately 10% annual turnover.[3] According to CDCR staff, some facilities, including Central California Women's Facility (CCWF), face chronic understaffing that hampers retention.

While outside the scope of the current report, it is important to note that CDCR's staffing model likely contributes to understaffing conditions because the classification system used to determine staffing levels doesn't reflect the realities of women's prisons. For example, incarcerated women require more medical transports due to different healthcare needs, yet current models don't provide adequate coverage for transport without resorting to modified schedules and lockdowns.

Impact on Incarcerated Populations

Understaffing, high turnover, and inadequate training create serious harms for incarcerated people. Inexperienced staff often lack understanding of the specific needs and experiences of people in prison, with UK research documenting more hostile and punitive interactions between new officers and incarcerated women.[4] Staffing shortages force modified schedules that confine people to cells for extended periods, restricting access to educational programs, healthcare, commissary and family visits, all critical activities for rehabilitation and mental health.[5,6] Moreover, prolonged cell confinement increases risks of violence,[7] mental health deterioration, and suicide.[8,9]

A Comprehensive Approach

While this report focuses on custody staff, the recommendations apply to all personnel including educational,

1 Correctional Leaders Association. 2020-2021. *Correctional Hiring and Retention Survey.* https://user-3imepyw.cld.bz/Staff-Recruitment-and-Retention-in-Corrections-Monograph/10/

2 National Institute of Corrections. Staff Recruitment and Retention in Corrections: The Challenge and Ways Forward. 2023. https://nicic.gov/weblink/staff-recruitment-and-retention-in-corrections-challenge-and-ways-forward

3 Personal Correspondence, Leadership Team CIW, December 2025.

4 Women in Prison. (2023, January). *Written evidence submitted by Women in Prison (PRI0032).* UK Parliament Committees. https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/114739/pdf/

5 Penal Reform International & Thailand Institute of Justice. (2024). Global prison trends 2024. https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PRI_Global-prison-trends-report-2024_EN.pdf

6 Women in Prison. (2023, January). *Written evidence submitted by Women in Prison (PRI0032).* UK Parliament Committees. https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/114739/pdf/

7 Ricciardelli R, Sit V. (2015). Producing Social (Dis)Order in Prison: The effects of Administrative Controls on Prisoner-on Prisoner Violence. 96(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885515618362

8 Fellner J. (2011). What Should We Think About the Study on the Psychological Impact of Confinement at Colorado State Penitentiary? A Human Rights Perspective. May/June.

9 Zhong SL, Senior M, Yu RQ et al. (2021). Risk factors for suicide in prisons: a systematic review and meta-analysis. 6(3) E164-E174. 10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30233-4

healthcare, and case management staff. Key strategies include developing a consensus on ideal recruit qualities, creating mission-driven job descriptions, providing relevant training, and improving workplace organization and climate to maximize retention. Healthcare and other professionals' perspectives should be incorporated into curriculum design to ensure relevance across all staff roles.

The Path Forward

The health and wellness of people in women's prisons depends on both 1) recruiting staff with the right mindset, background, and skills, and 2) providing training that equips staff to support incarcerated women in transforming their lives. Poor hiring and inadequate training create staffing churn that harms both staff and incarcerated people.

This report recommends strategies for identifying mission-driven recruits and developing training that can support successful careers in women's prisons. Given California's budget deficit, these recommendations constitute a long-range investment that will reduce turnover and improve health and wellness for both staff and incarcerated people.

Report Series

This report is the third in a 3-part series that includes:

- **Programming**: Opportunities to Optimize Programming to Support Health and Wellness in California's Women's Prisons
- **Best Practices:** Emerging Innovations to Optimize Women's Health, Wellness and Empowerment in Prison
- **Workforce Readiness:** Strengthening the Women's Prison Workforce: Recruitment and Training

Achieving the vision for a health-focused prison system that is gender-responsive and trauma-informed requires a professionalized and mission-driven workforce with specialized training about working in women's prisons. The recommendations in this report operate alongside the recommendations in the first two reports from this series (Titled: "Opportunities to Optimize Programming to Support Health and Wellness in California's Women's Prisons" and "Emerging Innovations to Optimize Women's Health, Wellness and Empowerment in Prison") will help CDCR create a workforce that can maximize the health and wellbeing of staff and people incarcerated in women's prisons.

The recommendations herein draw on a range of sources, including existing literature, CDCR recruiting, hiring, and training materials, attending a virtual recruitment event, and conversations with staff at the Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) and the California Institution for Women (CIW) regarding approaches to recruitment and training.

Section 1. Strengthening the Workforce by Enhancing Recruitment Practices

Building a strong workforce begins with recruiting highly qualified individuals whose goals align with CDCR's mission and vision. To achieve this, CDCR must define the qualities (including background, experience, training, and personality traits) that characterize effective, mission-aligned staff. Clear criteria enable development of cohesive recruitment materials, messaging, and strategies that reinforce alignment with CDCR's vision and mission. CDCR must also ensure candidates fully understand the position being filled by accurately communicating the responsibilities, benefits and challenges of each role. Because corrections is fundamentally a "people profession,"[10] effective staff must be able to maintain safety in carceral settings while supporting rehabilitation efforts.

A 2019 National Institute of Justice study[11] found that law enforcement agencies compete for candidates, with Departments of Corrections often at a disadvantage. To maximize recruitment success, CDCR should articulate a clear, compelling message about why candidates should join and what qualifications and qualities specific positions require. This approach will help differentiate CDCR from other law enforcement agencies and attract candidates genuinely committed to its mission (including people from non-traditional professional backgrounds) rather than applicants seeking any law enforcement role. This strategy also requires CDCR to actively cultivate and maintain visibility through consistent content plans and recruitment strategies integrated with its broader communications framework.

While Departments of Corrections offer a rewarding career for many, various factors can deter individuals from entering or remaining in the field. A study by the RAND Corporation and the University of Denver[12] analyzed insights from agency executives and academics regarding workforce readiness, identifying several primary needs, including:[13]

TABLE 1. PRIMARY NEEDS TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE READINESS

Clarify the mission of the corrections sector	• Create a clear, cohesive and common vision for the future, and tie workforce requirements to this mission. • Institutions usually prioritize custodial objectives over behavioral change, but this might limit their ability to recruit staff. • Shift toward increased human-services roles and expand preferred related competencies to attract a broader base of new talent.
Improve staff competencies	• Corrections sectors often suffer from low levels of professionalism. • Report suggests reevaluating existing competencies or creating new competencies for correctional positions that better align with the sectors' vision.
Improve staff training	• Levels of funding for workforce training were uniformly insufficient, especially compared to other criminal justice professions. • Assess and validate training approaches and develop a national curriculum.

10 Russo, J. (2019, December 1). *Workforce issues in corrections.* National Institute of Justice.

11 Russo, J. (2019, December 1). *Workforce issues in corrections.* National Institute of Justice.

12 Russo, J., Woods, D., Drake, G. B., & Jackson, B. A. (2018). *Building a high quality correctional workforce: Identifying challenges and needs* (RR2386NIJ). RAND Corporation.

13 Russo, J., Woods, D., Drake, G. B., & Jackson, B. A. (2018). Ibid

Improve work environment and conditions	• Workload standards and ratios (and strategies so agencies can meet them) are needed so staff can be supported and effective. • Younger employees want to be involved with decision making processes which is hard in a hierarchical system.
Develop future leaders	• The correctional sector can improve upon how it prepares staff for supervisory and management roles. • Create best practices for leadership development.

Few studies examine recruitment and training of staff in women's prisons. Available research highlights the need for staff with personal characteristics, background, and tailored training to support the health and wellness of incarcerated women. A Canadian study[14] found that staff in women's prisons often rely on everyday experiences rather than specific training for problem-solving. It also found that female correctional staff face distinct stressors compared to male staff, partly due to family responsibilities and socialization differences.[15] The study identified a prevailing atmosphere of distrust as one of the most significant barriers to meeting incarcerated women's needs, which can negatively affect the health and wellbeing of both staff and residents.

Several states have successfully addressed recruitment challenges. Idaho's Department of Corrections implemented the "PURPOSE" initiative, which significantly reduced vacancy rates, generated new candidate leads, and minimized staff workload,[16] (Figure 1). The initiative focused on three objectives: defining organizational direction and expectations, aligning individual and agency goals, and helping staff identify purpose in their work.[17]

FIGURE 1. RECRUITMENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN IDAHO AFTER ITS DEPARTMENT IMPLEMENTED THE PURPOSE INITIATIVE TO INCREASE RECRUITMENT.[18]

14 Hannah-Moffat M and Shaw M. 2021. An ideal Prison? Critical Essays on Women's Imprisonment in Canada. Fernwood Publishing. Black Point NS.

15 Pollock-Byrne J. (2014). Women's Crimes, Criminology, and Corrections. Waveland Press, Long Grove, IL.

16 Idaho Department of Correction. (2025). *Correctional Officer Workforce Update.* Idaho Department of Correction. https://www.idoc.idaho.gov/content/document/correctional-officer-workforce-update

17 Idaho Department of Correction. (2025). *Recruitment and retention.* Idaho Department of Correction. https://www.idoc.idaho.gov/content/about-us/strategic-direction/recruitment-retention

18 Idaho Department of Correction. (2025). *Correctional Officer Workforce Update.* Idaho Department of Correction. https://www.idoc.idaho.gov/content/document/correctional-officer-workforce-update

The recruitment process for correctional officers can be organized into 5 strategic steps:

1. Develop mission-aligned job descriptions
2. Attract candidates through diverse channels (e.g., virtual and in person recruitment events, CDCR website, print advertisements, and social media)
3. Leverage in-person recruitment events to identify mission-driven and qualified candidates
4. Broaden recruitment to include candidates from non-traditional backgrounds (e.g., social work, education)
5. Streamline the application-to-hire process to retain qualified candidates

The following recommendations address each step and function synergistically to maximize workforce readiness.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: DEVELOP MISSION-ALIGNED JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Rationale

Job descriptions are critical recruitment tools that define positions and enable candidates to assess their interest and fit. To attract mission-aligned staff, job descriptions should clearly convey the ideal candidate profile, including how skills and career goals align with CDCR's mission and vision. Descriptions should articulate preferred qualities, relevant experience, education, and personal characteristics.

In a competitive employment landscape, where many CDCR recruits also apply to police academies or city- or county-level facilities, job descriptions must emphasize core values that appeal to high-quality candidates. If CDCR seeks a workforce aligned with its mission, then this should highlight a dedication to improving the lives of incarcerated individuals, their families, and communities.[19]

Analysis of Current CDCR Staff Recruitment Website Description

Strengths: CDCR's website (see excerpt, Figure 2) highlights important personal qualities (emotional maturity, integrity, sound judgement) and appropriately foregrounds vision, mission, and equal opportunity information in custody staff descriptions.[20]

FIGURE 2. CDCR WEBSITE DESCRIPTION OF IDEAL PERSONAL QUALITIES FOR STAFF CANDIDATES

A **Correctional Officer** (CO) is an entry-level peace officer responsible for protecting the public, staff, and incarcerated individual while enforcing State and Federal laws, rules and regulations. In a correctional environment, correctional peace officers are expected to model ethical behavior that facilitates and promotes the Department's rehabilitative programs. A CO provides a service that can substantially impact the success of the various treatment programs an offender may participate in. COs are required to maintain safety and security efforts to prevent escapes; respond to emergencies; supervise incarcerated individuals; utilize de-escalation/communication techniques; assume an armed post and/or patrol grounds. COs are required to conduct these duties with the understanding that safety and security duties facilitate and support the Department's rehabilitative efforts and contribute to the public safety of the state. COs are required to transport incarcerated individual(s); conduct criminal and administrative investigations; maintain equipment and firearms qualifications. COs are required to document any incidents per policy and procedures and perform additional duties as required. Positions are located throughout the State of California and institutions operate 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

Gaps: The job description for CDCR custody staff consists primarily of a list of duties that is not directly tied to ideal candidate qualities. While the correctional officer position appropriately foregrounds the vision, mission, and equal opportunity information, and provides examples of how these values manifest in daily work—such as

19 https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/about-cdcr/vision-mission-values/

20 California Department of Human Resources. (2025). *Correctional Sergeant (JC500814) [Job posting]*. CalCareers. https://calcareers.ca.gov/CalHrPublic/Jobs/JobPosting.aspx?JobControlId=500814

"model ethical behavior" and *"facilitate and support the Department's rehabilitative efforts"*[21]—it would benefit from describing how these factors align with the rehabilitative work and career goals. For instance, the description could explicitly describe seeking individuals whose career goals align with CDCR's mission and who are committed to advancing the health, wellness and rehabilitation of people who are incarcerated for example through engaging in conversations about rehabilitation and behavior change and facilitating engagement in available rehabilitative programming. Additionally, outdated terminology (e.g., "offender") requires updating and there is a lack of facility-specific job postings, particularly for women's prisons (CIW and CCWF).

Best Practice Examples from Other States

The Maine Department of Corrections

FIGURE 3. EXAMPLE OF AN EXCERPT OF A CUSTODY OFFICER JOB DESCRIPTION FROM MAINE

A **Correctional Officer at Maine State Prison** is more than a job --- it's a calling.
As a Corrections Professional, you will carry a responsibility that extends beyond duty --- it's a commitment to service, integrity, and the protection of others.
In this role, you are entrusted by the public to protect the lives of those placed in your charge, safeguard the weak against oppression or intimidation, defend the peace against violence or disorder, and approach every interaction --- with residents, colleagues, superiors, and the public --- with honesty, fairness, and professionalism.
You will be expected to uphold confidentiality, exercise sound judgment, and demonstrate integrity, compassion, and self-restraint in all circumstances. Both in and out of uniform, your conduct will reflect the highest ideals of this profession.

The Maine Department of Corrections frames custody positions as a "calling, not just a job," emphasizing:

- Protecting lives and appealing to candidates' idealism and commitment to fairness
- Addressing underlying factors leading to incarceration (trauma, mental health)
- Requiring values aligned with improving lives and maximizing rehabilitation
- Promise: *"Bring your desire and commitment to be a positive influence and we will prepare you with the best training and education to begin a stable and rewarding career"*[22]
- Seeking training in counseling techniques, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices
- Highlighting supportive workplace culture and career development
- Welcoming candidates from diverse backgrounds

FIGURE 4. LANGUAGE FROM MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS' CORRECTIONAL OFFICER RECRUITMENT

There's a job and then there's purposeful, transformative work. Our aim is to create a workplace where you can learn, grow, and continuously refine your skills. Applicants demonstrate job requirements in differing ways, and we appreciate that many skills and backgrounds can make people successful in this role.

21 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2025). *Correctional Officer bulletin* (Revised 11/19/25) [PDF]. https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/por/wp-content/uploads/sites/162/2025/08/CO-Bulletin_Revised-11.19.25.pdf

22 Careers at State of Maine. Department of Corrections. Juvenile Program Officer Long Creek youth Development Center, South Portland. https://maine.wd5.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/Executive/details/Juvenile-Program-Officer_R25-00319?Department=473d696f7b721000e48cb8a2dab00000

The Washington Department of Corrections

Washington State seeks mission-driven staff whose goals align with their Department of Corrections, focusing on employees who experience "a high degree of personal satisfaction knowing they are creating environments in which all incarcerated individuals can learn to make choices that contribute to a safer society." [23]

Nevada County, California

States such as Oregon and Washington, along with certain California counties, have developed facility-specific job descriptions for women's institutions that include language explaining why they specifically seek female candidates. Nevada County in California explicitly articulates why women should consider correctional officer positions, creating targeted recruitment for female candidates. The CDCR's lack of such targeted recruitment materials represents a missed opportunity to expand the recruitment of women and highlight the unique skills they bring to the profession in general and to women's facilities in particular.

FIGURE 5. EXAMPLE NEVADA COUNTY JOB DESCRIPTION FOCUSED ON RECRUITING FEMALE OFFICERS [24]

Why Choose to be Correctional Officer?

- **Empowerment:** This is a chance to break barriers and be a trailblazer in the correctional field. We're committed to providing a supportive environment where women can thrive.
- **Career Development:** We offer extensive training, professional growth opportunities, and ongoing support. You'll have the tools you need to excel in your role.
- **Competitive Benefits:** We provide excellent pay, comprehensive health benefits, safety retirement plans, and paid time off.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** We value diversity in all its forms and encourage women of all backgrounds to apply.

Why Women?

It is critical for the health and safety Wayne Brown Correctional Facility to have a well balanced and diverse team that crafts a stronger, more balanced environment; and women bring unique perspectives and strengths to the job. As part of our commitment to gender equality and diversity, we are actively seeking women to fill these important roles, empowering them to build fulfilling careers in law enforcement.

Facility-Specific Job Postings for Women's Facilities

People incarcerated in women's prisons tend to be more verbal and have greater emotional needs due to frequent histories of trauma and victimization.[25] In response, research has identified personal characteristics that make individuals well-suited for working in women's prisons, including being treatment-oriented (versus punishment-oriented), having patience and positive interpersonal skills such as listening and effective communication.[26] Additional important attributes include being able to manage challenging situations without escalation and having relevant experience in mental health counseling, teaching, or social work.

Current Gap: CDCR lacks facility-specific job postings for its women's prisons (CIW and CCWF), missing opportunities to recruit candidates with appropriate skills and to differentiate these specialized roles. Research emphasizes the importance of identifying candidates who actively seek to work in women's prisons rather than

23 Washington State Correctional Industries. About CI: Careers. https://www.washingtonci.com/about-ci/careers.html

24 County of Nevada, California. County of Nevada Correctional Officer I (Female Only). https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/mynevadacounty/jobs/newprint/4886071

25 Schram P. J., Koons-Witt B. A., Morash M. (2004). Management strategies when working with female prisoners. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 15, 25-50.

26 Koons-Witt B. A., Burrow J. D., Morash M., Bynum T. (1997). Expert and offender perceptions of program elements linked to successful outcomes for incarcerated women. *Crime & Delinquency*, 43, 513-532.

those who accept such positions reluctantly or based solely on location.[27] Creating targeted job descriptions that emphasize these specialized competencies will attract candidates genuinely suited for this environment and committed to gender-responsive, trauma-informed correctional practice.

Strategic Recruitment Framework: Norwegian Four-Personas Model (Table 2)

Norway's Correctional Service identified four ideal candidate "personas" and developed targeted recruitment strategies for each: [28]

TABLE 2. EXAMPLE RECRUITMENT TARGETING APPROACHES FROM NORWAY [29]

Persona	Qualities	Example Background	Message
Caring and safe person	Safe and caring	Social worker or teacher	Cool head; warm heart
Wants meaningful change	Extensive work experience, confident	Previous career, often in military	Become something new
Idealist	Idealistic and passionate	Studying sociology; passion for community work	Do you want to help others help themselves?
The disciplined person	Confidence, takes responsibility, driven	Armed forces or sports	Do you have what it takes?

This "Persona" framework enables targeted messaging across recruitment platforms and maximizes recruitment of individuals whose career goals, skills, and personal attributes align with the department's mission and needs.

Action Area	Objective	Action Steps
Reframe Societal Perceptions of Correctional Positions	Expand views of custody staff beyond surveillance roles to emphasize life-changing impact	Revise job descriptions to highlight mission-driven nature of correctional work.
		Emphasize human-services approach and culture to broaden recruitment appeal.
		Frame positions as callings focused on rehabilitation, not just custody.
		Include language like *"create environments where individuals learn to make choices that contribute to stronger families and safer communities."*
		Feature staff testimonials about meaningful impact on lives, families, and communities.

27 Harding B. G. (2002). *Special issues in corrections: Staffing analysis for women's prisons and special prison populations.* Longmont, CO: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

28 Rekrutteringskampanje 2025 – strategi – englesk. 2025. Kriminalomsorgens hogsjoke og utdanningssenter KRUS.

29 Rekrutteringskampanje 2025 – strategi – englesk. 2025. Kriminalomsorgens hogsjoke og utdanningssenter KRUS.

Action Area	Objective	Action Steps
Modernize and Professionalize Job Description Content	Strengthen professionalism standards and eliminate outdated language	Remove outdated terminology (replace “offender” with “incarcerated individual” or “incarcerated person”).
		Explicitly connect personal qualities (emotional maturity, integrity, sound judgment) to daily rehabilitative work.
		Add concrete examples of mission manifestation: *“engage in conversations about rehabilitation and behavior change,” “facilitate participation in educational and vocational programs,” “support reentry preparation.”*
		Clarify that positions include a balance of security responsibilities with human services role.
Create Tailored Job Postings for Women’s Prisons	Develop facility-specific postings for CIW and CCWF highlighting specialized competencies	Create unique correctional officer job postings for women’s prisons emphasizing: • Treatment-oriented versus punishment-oriented mindset • Trauma-informed care and gender-responsive practices • Patience and advanced interpersonal skills (active listening, effective communication) • De-escalation and conflict resolution capabilities • Interest in developing a deep understanding of the impacts of trauma, mental health, and victimization across the life course
		Highlight preferred backgrounds (in addition to law enforcement backgrounds): mental health counseling, teaching, social work, case management.
		Specify additional differentiating qualifications of interest including knowledge in counseling techniques, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices.
		Emphasize seeking candidates who actively desire to work in women’s facilities.

Action Area	Objective	Action Steps
Develop Gender-Targeted Recruitment Materials	Increase recruitment of female candidates for women's prison positions	Create recruitment materials specifically targeting female candidates (model: Nevada County).
		Explicitly articulate why women should consider correctional officer positions.
		Highlight unique skills and perspectives women bring to the profession.
		Feature female staff testimonials and career progression stories.
		Partner with women's professional organizations and networks in recruitment efforts.
Implement Persona-Based Recruitment Targeting	Create personas of ideal recruits with tailored messaging for each	Adapt Norwegian four-personas model to CDCR context. Develop 3-5 candidate personas based on attributes such as: • Career motivations (idealism, meaningful change, safety) • Professional backgrounds (social work, military, education, mental health, law enforcement) • Personal values alignment with CDCR mission
		Develop targeted messaging for each persona, for example: • **The Changemaker:** "Transform lives and break cycles of incarceration" • **The Caregiver:** "Provide support and dignity in challenging circumstances" • **The Service Leader:** "Apply your discipline and leadership to create safer communities" • **The Impact Professional:** "Leverage your skills where they matter most"

Action Area	Objective	Action Steps
Highlight Knowledge Requirements and Professional Development	Attract candidates with relevant training and emphasize growth opportunities	Specify preferred knowledge areas: counseling techniques, trauma-informed care, restorative justice practices, de-escalation strategies, mental health first aid.
		Emphasize training provided: “We will prepare you with the best training and education to begin a stable and rewarding career that helps to change lives.”
		Showcase career advancement pathways from entry-level to specialized roles (mental health services, education programs, reentry coordination).
		Highlight a focus on building a supportive workplace culture and the existence of professional development opportunities.
		Welcome candidates from diverse backgrounds with transferable skills.
Ensure Mission-Vision Alignment Throughout	Frame all job descriptions to highlight mission-driven work	Lead with mission and vision statements in every job posting.
		Connect each major responsibility to mission outcomes.
		Include language about: • “Supporting individuals in developing skills for successful reentry” • “Creating environments conducive to rehabilitation and personal growth” • “Modeling ethical behavior and therapeutic relationships” • “Facilitating access to programs that reduce recidivism”
		Seek candidates whose career goals explicitly align with CDCR’s mission.
		Emphasize commitment to the health, wellness, and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals.

Action Area	Objective	Action Steps
Establish Continuous Improvement Process	Iterate based on data and feedback	Collect candidate feedback on job description clarity, appeal, and accuracy.
		Track metrics by job description version: • Application rates and completion rates • Quality of applicant pool (relevant backgrounds, mission alignment) • Diversity metrics (women, non-traditional backgrounds) • Offer acceptance rates • 90-day retention rates
		A/B test different messaging approaches.
		Benchmark against other states' evolving best practices.
		Update job descriptions quarterly based on data and recruitment outcomes.
		Survey new hires about accuracy of job preview at 30, 60, and 90 days.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: ATTRACT CANDIDATES THROUGH DIVERSE CHANNELS

CDCR's recruitment efforts include active recruitment practices that engage directly with candidates (job fairs, community events); passive approaches (print, social media, billboards), sector partnerships (military, police academies) and targeted outreach to specialists like mental health counselors or social workers.

Research demonstrates that employment events with current staff who engage directly with prospective candidates, social media, agency websites, and consultant partnerships are most effective.[30] Radio, traditional media, television commercials, and billboards prove less effective. A Norway Prison Service study found that 73% of recruits learned about positions through family and friends, 17% through work or school, 8% from social media, and 3% through print/digital media.[31] Although from abroad, these findings underscore the likely importance of personal engagement in recruitment.

Current Recruitment Materials and Opportunities for Enhancement

CDCR's passive recruitment (Instagram, Facebook, X, website, YouTube) provides standard information, but could strengthen emotional appeals by highlighting the meaningful nature of the work and CDCR's career development support. Materials currently overemphasize salary and benefits (see example, Figure 6), including on social media and the department's recruitment webpage. CDCR's recruitment videos need better prominence on its website; the first visible video is ten years old and contains only music, while newer videos resemble action films with dramatic music and voice-overs rather than conveying meaningful aspects of the work. Videos also use outdated language (e.g., "offender"). While informational, these materials are unlikely to recruit the mission-driven candidates needed

30 Celi T, Alarid LF, Dolny M, King-Mohr J. 2024. Recruitment and retention of Correctional Staff: A National Survey of Challenges and Strategies. January/February. Corrections Today.

31 Rekrutteringskampanje 2025 – strategi – englesk. 2025. Kriminalomsorgens hogsjoke og utdanningssenter KRUS.

to maximize incarcerated individuals' health and wellness.

FIGURE 6. EXAMPLE CDCR CORRECTIONAL OFFICER RECRUITMENT FLYER[32]

Exemplary Practices from Other Jurisdictions

Norway's social media recruitment emphasizes personal qualities, asking "Do you have what it takes?" followed by descriptors like "caring," "warm heart," "cool head," and "sets boundaries." (Figure 7a). Another (Figure 7b) asks, "Will you be a corrections officer? Do you want to help build a safer society?" These approaches highlight ideal candidate qualities and ensure recruitment of individuals whose mission (e.g., building a safer society) aligns with departmental goals.

FIGURE 7A AND 7B. EXAMPLE RECRUITMENT FLYERS FROM NORWAY'S DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS[33]

32 https://www.instagram.com/p/CvpiLFnrt5n/

33 Rekrutteringskampanje 2025 – strategi – englesk. 2025. Kriminalomsorgens hogsjoke og utdanningssenter KRUS.

Other models include Washington's "On the Job" graphic novel campaign showcasing officer perspectives and building relevance with potential candidates, particularly younger people.[34] Maine's substantial LinkedIn presence,[35] and North Dakota's YouTube videos emphasize their goal of recruiting staff focused on personal growth, rehabilitation, and supporting the community.[36]

FIGURE 8. THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS LINKEDIN HOMEPAGE

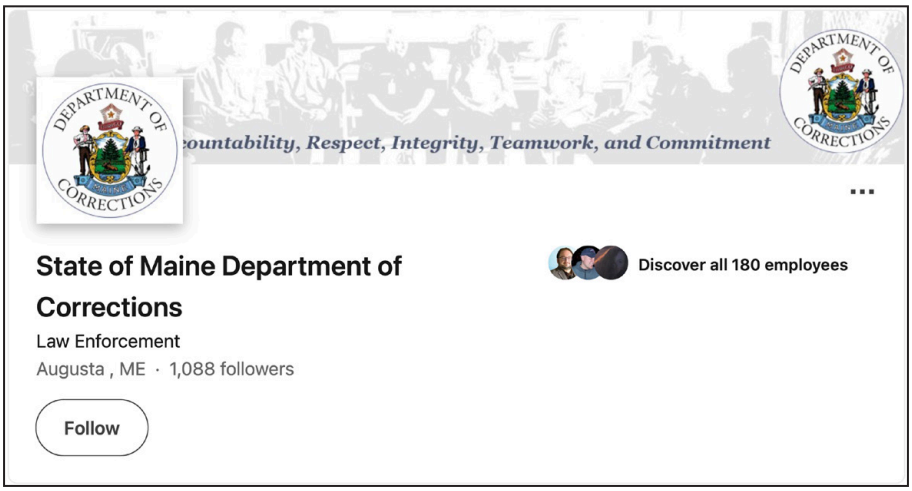
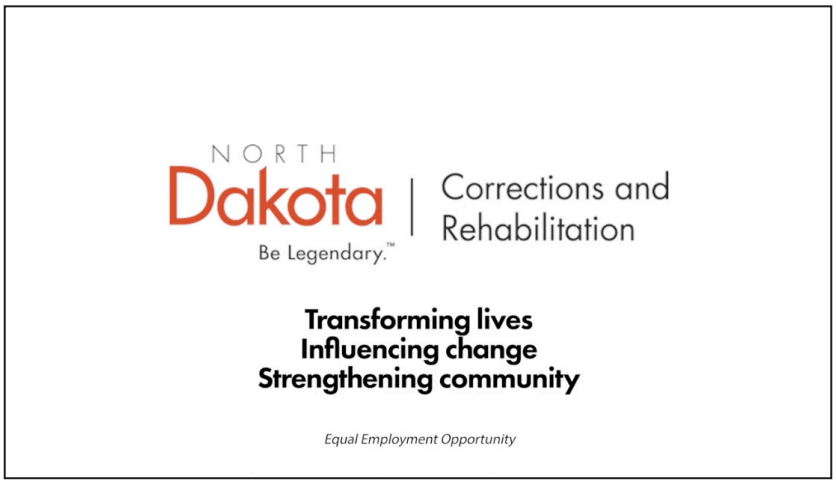


FIGURE 9. YOUTUBE RECRUITMENT VIDEO FROM NORTH DAKOTA FOCUSED ON MISSION-DRIVEN MESSAGING



These examples acknowledge that corrections is not an easy profession but also emphasize the high level of satisfaction that can be derived from helping others to change, grow and successfully return to the community. Creating recruitment materials that emphasize the mission-driven aspects of departmental positions will help recruit individuals who can build lasting careers within the organization. CDCR should create mission-driven recruitment materials that operate alongside active recruitment to identify qualified candidates needed to maximize incarcerated individuals' health and wellness.

Recommendation: Expand the reach of current recruitment approaches and re-frame the language on the relevant materials to align with CDCR's mission.

34 Wexler, J. (2025, March 17). *Rethinking recruitment: How corrections agencies are attracting a new generation.* Corrections1. https://issuu.com/gungnirbooks/docs/280125-on_the_job_assembly_lq

35 https://www.linkedin.com/company/mainedoc/

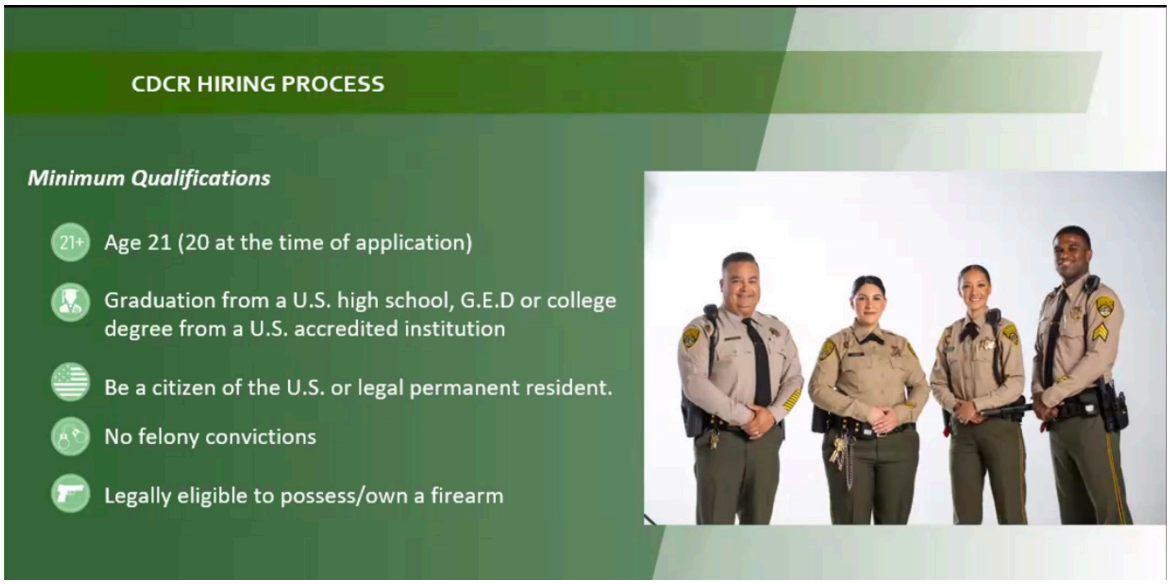
36 North Dakota Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2023, February 24). *DOCR recruitment video – Long version* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJD6wFeChZ8, Maine Department of Corrections. (n.d.). *Empowering women to consider correctional careers* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhghDicaNRs, North Dakota Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2025, June 2). *Strengthening communities starts here – Join the DOCR team!* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU5926N6s2I

Action Area	Action Steps
Recruitment Messaging	Reframe materials to focus on mission-driven candidate qualities rather than leading with compensation and benefits.
Passive Recruitment	CDCR employs many passive recruitment efforts; identify and expand best practices for proactive, continuous recruitment strategies across existing passive channels.
Recruitment Outlets	Expand existing footprint on, or develop a presence on, proven media platforms including LinkedIn, update YouTube videos to be mission-focused, and develop storytelling campaigns (e.g., graphic novels).

RECOMMENDATION 1.3: LEVERAGE IN-PERSON RECRUITMENT EVENTS TO IDENTIFY MISSION-DRIVEN AND QUALIFIED RECRUITS

CDCR conducts in-person and virtual recruitment events in spaces such as community gatherings, job fairs, and online sessions. Our team observed one of the online recruitment sessions.[37] While the online session demonstrated notable strengths, several improvements could maximize recruitment of ideal candidates. Figures 10a-10d are screenshots from CDCR's virtual recruitment event that our staff took while attending the event.

FIGURE 10A



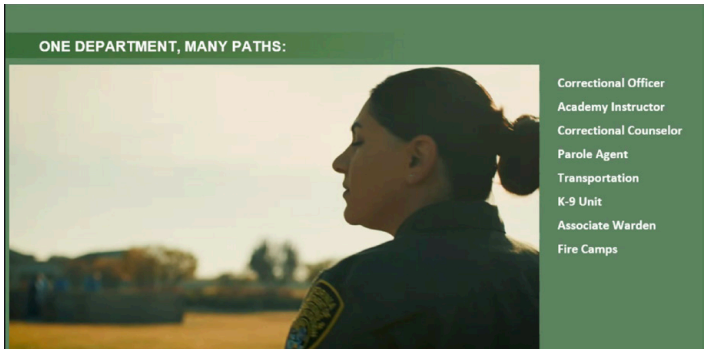
Strengths of CDCR's Online, Live Recruitment Events

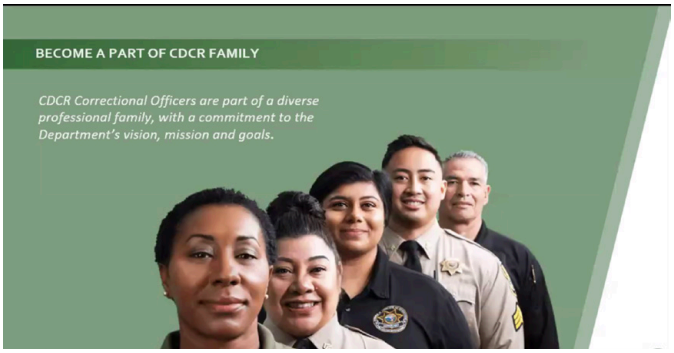
The presentation featured quality multimedia showcasing diverse staff across race, ethnicity, gender, and professional roles. Presenters were skilled and personable, clearly outlining testing requirements and application processes while maintaining engagement through surveys and audience interaction.

The event emphasized treating incarcerated individuals with respect and dispelling the "us versus them" narrative, noting "the only way for them to do better in the future is to treat them with dignity and respect." This mission-aligned messaging, captured in the slogan "Be the difference. Change lives. Change California," is critical for identifying suitable candidates.

37 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2025, November 19). *Virtual career fair* [Live session].

FIGURES 10B AND 10C





Presenters highlighted CDCR's variety of positions, acknowledged routine work and challenging hours, and positioned the agency as offering careers rather than jobs. They emphasized the need for staff with diverse backgrounds, particularly those with communication and de-escalation skills from people-oriented fields like hospitality. Competitive benefits including education and bilingual bonuses were also described.

Opportunities for Improvement of CDCR's Online, Live Recruitment Events

Gender Representation and Language

Female staff should participate in all recruitment events. Though presenters acknowledged the unusual absence of women in the event we observed, some language reinforced stereotypes, such as describing a female colleague as "vocal for being a lady" and referring to women as "little sisters." Such phrasing, even when unintentional, can deter female recruits by appearing dismissive of women's professional value.

Professional Culture and Terminology

Recruitment materials should avoid characterizing colleagues as "family." This terminology blurs professional boundaries, may reinforce "us versus them" culture, and can undermine accountability by suggesting special treatment.

Comprehensive Job Expectations

Presentations should address how the profession impacts mental and physical health, followed by descriptions of support services. Discussion of working in women's prisons and required skill sets would help candidates assess their suitability and normalize using support services.

Transparency Regarding Job Realities

Overtime was characterized as an optional income opportunity rather than addressing mandatory overtime frustrations. Presenters suggested recruits choose facility assignments, though this is not always accurate. Lack of transparency about job requirements can damage retention when new hires feel misled.

Academy Training Emphasis

Training discussions focused heavily on control tools, firearms, and fitness. This focus misses opportunities to highlight California Model skills like motivational interviewing, de-escalation, gender-responsive practices, and dynamic security. Emphasizing these skills would normalize their importance, shift perceptions about custody roles, and broaden the applicant pool beyond law enforcement backgrounds. The $1,500-$2,000 uniform expense presents a significant barrier for many prospective applicants.

Expanding In-Person Event Venues

Current CDCR recruitment events target general venues (high schools, state fairs) or law enforcement sectors (military events), potentially missing candidates with beneficial skill sets such as teachers, mental health professionals, social workers, librarians, and case managers. Holding events at colleges within relevant academic departments and at community events highlighting CDCR initiatives could expand recruitment reach and broaden public perceptions of law enforcement careers.

Recommendation: Adapt discussions about the job to attract people whose goals align with CDCR's mission.

Action Area	Action Steps
Job Reality	Ensure recruitment materials accurately represent work life.
	Align on-the-job experiences with recruitment promises to prevent retention issues.
	Address disconnects between recruitment messaging about staff-resident interactions and actual workplace expectations.
Career Variety	Describe diverse career paths within CDCR and opportunities for role transitions over time.
Advancement and Skills Development	Outline clear pathways to supervisor roles with typical advancement timelines.
	Highlight opportunities for officers to develop specialized skills and career differentiators.
Training Emphasis	Reframe academy training discussions to emphasize CA Model skills (motivational interviewing, de-escalation, gender-responsive practices, dynamic security) alongside traditional custody skills.
	Address $1,500-$2,000 uniform cost barrier through financial assistance programs or payment plans.
Gender and Client Inclusion	Ensure female staff participate in all recruitment events.
	Train presenters to use professional, non-stereotypical language when discussing colleagues of all genders.
	Eliminate familial terminology ("little sisters") from recruitment.
	Invite formerly incarcerated people to describe ways that correctional staff have supported them to change their lives for the better and to successfully reenter the community.
Professional Culture	Remove "family" terminology from recruitment materials to maintain professional boundaries and accountability standards.

Action Area	Action Steps
Transparency	Provide accurate information about mandatory overtime requirements
	Clarify facility assignment processes and limitations on choice
	Discuss mental and physical health impacts with available support resources
Venue Expansion	Target recruitment at colleges with social work, education, mental health, criminal justice, and social science programs
	Participate in community service events (beyond booth presence) to demonstrate CDCR's community commitment
	Engage with professional organizations serving teachers, counselors, case managers, and human services fields

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: BROADEN RECRUITMENT EFFORTS TO INCLUDE CANDIDATES FROM BACKGROUNDS NON-TRADITIONAL TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

Workforces thrive when they include individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and training disciplines. CDCR has engaged in numerous initiatives to maximize recruitment of women and people from non-traditional backgrounds, an approach that is commendable and should be expanded.

FIGURE 10D

Recruiting Women

Increased female staff representation has a positive impact on the health and wellness of incarcerated women.[38] Recruiting and retaining women requires dedicated effort,[39] including employers reviewing their mission, goals, policies and guidelines to ensure the workplace is conducive to non-male staff. Recruitment efforts should target women at schools and university career fairs, and at non-traditional venues such as women-focused organizations and community events. Active mentoring programs are important for women once hired, as is an employee-friendly management style that supports inclusion.

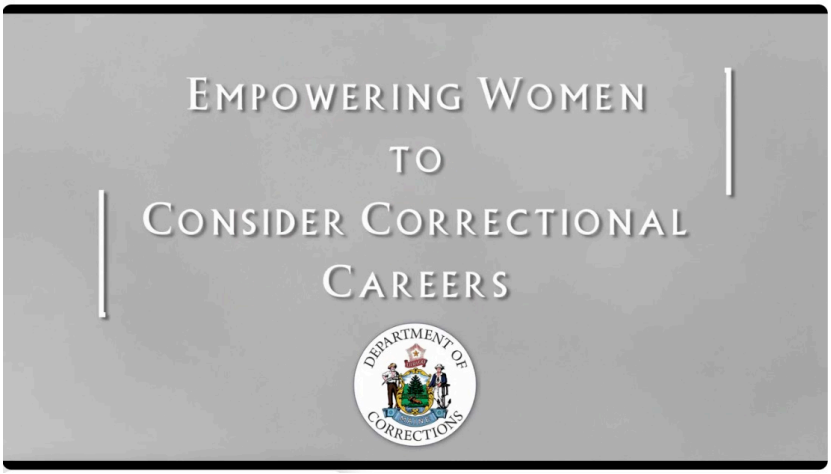
38 Bartels, L., & Gaffney, A. (2011). *Good practice in women's prisons: A literature review* (Technical and Background Paper No. 41). Australian Institute of Criminology.

39 Turner, T. (2005). *Recruiting and retaining women in corrections. Corrections Today Magazine*, 67(6), 104–107. Office of Justice Programs.

As of Fall 2025, women comprised approximately 17% of CDCR's sworn officers and 19% of correctional leadership. In fall 2023, CDCR launched an initiative to increase the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in law enforcement. This "30x30" pledge aims to achieve 30% female representation among correctional officer cadets by 2030. CDCR has also established working groups to improve gender equity and implement strategies to support women's advancement.

Over the past 18 months, CDCR has expanded its emphasis on recruitment, including establishing recruitment teams and creating mentoring systems. However, these efforts do not include a component specifically targeting recruitment for women's prisons or female staff recruitment. According to CDCR staff, current efforts include participating in recruitment events more relevant to women (e.g., women's seminars or breast cancer walks), positioning booths at county fairs near venues women frequently visit (e.g., beauty supply stores) and partnering with women-focused organizations to advertise during women's sporting events. However, there have not been significant shifts in recruitment approaches to substantially increase the pipeline of female staff.

FIGURE 11. YOUTUBE VIDEO FROM MAINE'S DEPARTMENT FOCUSED ON RECRUITING WOMEN



Maine's Department of Corrections has created recruitment videos specifically tailored to women,[40] posted on its webpage, YouTube, and LinkedIn accounts. This video feature women from various backgrounds (e.g., military, social work, probation) who hold diverse roles throughout Maine's Department of Corrections.

Recruiting Professionals With Diverse Workforce Backgrounds That Support CDCR's Mission

Creating a broader pool of individuals who could build careers in corrections will support CDCR's goal of strengthening its workforce. Students from disciplines such as social work, psychology, sociology, human development and family studies, and education are well equipped for positions within correctional systems. This approach could expand the candidate pool by targeting individuals who have not previously considered such careers and could facilitate a mindset shift regarding who is suited to be a correctional officer.

Individuals with diverse professional backgrounds represent a valuable addition to the workforce that will enhance the contributions of more traditional law-enforcement backgrounds. Examples of backgrounds and training that can support the mission-driven aspects of corrections work include teaching and social work.

Providing competitive compensation is essential for recruiting high quality staff, including individuals from non-traditional corrections backgrounds such as teachers and social workers. While CDCR staff have noted that individuals with social work or teaching backgrounds command higher salaries, they also provide invaluable skills

40 Maine Department of Corrections. (2025, January 28). *Empowering women to consider correctional careers* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU5926N6s2I

that can maximize the health and wellness of individuals incarcerated in women's prisons. CDCR should engage in targeted recruitment efforts to attract individuals with those backgrounds.

The department provides competitive pay-scales for correctional officers that often exceed private and state sector compensation for roles requiring similar educational training (e.g., high school diploma or associate or bachelor's degrees). The minimum starting salary for a correctional officer in California immediately following academy graduation is $66,120 with potential increase to $113,000. Additionally, CDCR offers numerous hiring incentives including retention differential pay, housing stipends, location incentive bonuses, and recruitment and retention incentives.[41] The following salary comparison (Table 3) demonstrates that these figures are commensurate with or exceed compensation for professionals whose skill sets would benefit departmental staffing, highlighting the feasibility of recruiting individuals from various backgrounds.

TABLE 3. ANNUAL SALARIES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SKILL SETS BENEFICIAL TO DEPARTMENTAL STAFFING

Location/Sector	Position	Salary Range
Fresno	Teacher (Fresno Unified) [42]	$62,000 – $78,000
Chino	Teacher (Chino Unified) [43]	$62,000 – $66,000
California-wide (State Hospital)	Security Guard [44]	$76,000 – $89,000
California-wide (State Hospital)	LCSW [45]	$85,700 – $120,800
Department	Correctional Officer	$66,120 – $113,000

Recruiting individuals from various backgrounds and professional experience will facilitate the success in maximizing the health and wellness of individuals in women's prisons. This approach will also expand the pool of qualified candidates as CDCR progresses from recruitment to interview and job offer stages.

Recommendation: Expand the reach of recruitment approaches to recruit people from a variety of backgrounds.

Action Area	Action Steps
Female Staff	Expand recruitment events, including targeting people from varied professional backgrounds, to maximize recruitment of female staff.
	Attend university-based recruitment events with a focus on majors that have a higher percentage of women (e.g., teaching, social work, psychology).
	Ensure female staff are well represented at staffing events.
People From Varied Professional Backgrounds	Attend college recruitment fairs and target individuals with educational training in a variety of fields (e.g., social science, psychology, education etc).
	Recruit people whose professional backgrounds align with the mission-driven nature of CDCR staff (e.g., LCSW, teachers).

41 https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/por/pay/
42 https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1755625869/fresnouorg/pr9b39bwk9ydt2mgf1yi/2025-2026TeacherSalarySchedules.pdf
43 https://www.chino.k12.ca.us/109035_3
44 https://www.joindsh.com/indeed/hpo-psh?utm_campaign=HPO-PSH&utm_medium=Job+Board&utm
45 https://joblink.socialworkers.org/e-california-department-of-state-hospitals-jobs.html

Action Area	Action Steps
People From Varied Professional Backgrounds, *cont.*	Provide salaries that align with positions of individuals whose skill set can benefit CDCR (e.g., teachers, LCSWs).
Diversity in Staff	Attract staff who represent the gender and ethnic diversity needed to build effective relationships with incarcerated people. Create streamlined approaches to target these groups including through tailored recruitment practices and incentives.

RECOMMENDATION 1.5: STREAMLINE THE APPLICATION PROCESS FROM IDENTIFICATION TO HIRE TO AVOID LOSING QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

After ensuring that recruitment materials and events reflect a clear, consistent message targeted at desired candidates, it is essential that CDCR maintains an efficient and effective process to advance candidates from application to job offer. This "application to job offer" pipeline is critical because it helps the department identify the most qualified recruits while enabling candidates to determine whether they wish to pursue a career in corrections.

Presenters at the recruitment sessions indicated that the process from application to academy admission often takes one to two years. This timeline is excessively long and results in CDCR losing top candidates who accept positions with other employers and pursue alternative career paths. Streamlining this process and maintaining frequent contact with recruits during the waiting period is imperative. While we were unable to access detailed information about the interview and selection process, several factors warrant attention to maximize the likelihood of hiring qualified candidates.

To streamline the hiring process, CDCR should utilize its vision for ideal candidates to identify high-quality applicants more quickly and expedite the advancement of those candidates through the hiring pipeline. Alongside assessing "hard" skills such as physical fitness and reading and writing abilities, CDCR should develop processes to evaluate recruits' "soft" skills, including active listening, empathy, self-motivation and integrity. This can be accomplished using structured interview questions and validated screening instruments; it should also include inquiries about candidates' motivations for joining the department. The selection of hiring tools to use during the assessment phase can define an entire workforce; employing validated screening instruments—and collectively defining the attributes of an effective correctional officer—can ensure quality candidates are hired.[46]

Implementing these recommendations will help ensure that CDCR engages the highest quality candidates before they accept positions with other employers and will allow CDCR to focus interview resources on these candidates. This approach will position CDCR as a more competitive employer that is more likely to recruit candidates whose skills and vision align with its mission.

Recommendation: Expedite the hiring process and avoid losing qualified candidates.

Action Area	Action Steps
Time to Hire	Streamline and accelerate the hiring process to avoid losing competitive candidates.
	Evaluate the possibility of eliminating steps in the selection process.
Recruit Engagement	Maintain contact with recruits throughout the hiring process to provide updates and keep them excited about the position.

46 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/15700760701822132?needAccess=true

Section 2. Strengthening the Workforce Through Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Training

Training serves as the cornerstone of a competent, confident and well-prepared workforce, particularly within the complex environment of women's correctional facilities. Effective training enables staff to maintain institutional safety, deliver rehabilitative services, and respond appropriately to the distinct needs of incarcerated women while supporting staff mental health and professional wellness. Comprehensive foundational and ongoing professional development enhances workforce retention, staff effectiveness, and outcomes for both correctional personnel and the individuals in their care.[47]

Training Quality And Instructor Competence Are Essential

Best practice training is mandated by international standards, including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the "Mandela Rules"). Training programs must develop competence in security and safety practices – including dynamic security, appropriate use of force, and de-escalation strategies such as negotiation and mediation – as well as first aid and the recognition of and response to psychosocial and mental health needs.[48] The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the "Bangkok Rules") establish gender-specific training requirements:[49]

- Staff in women's prisons require capacity-building to meet women's gender-specific needs, support safe and rehabilitative environments, and prevent gender-based discrimination, violence, and harassment.
- Training must include gender sensitivity, human rights, health issues, and trauma-informed approaches.
- Staff must be prepared to identify and respond to mental health needs, manage self-harm risk, support mothers and children in custody, and address HIV-related care and stigma.

Training Cultivates Workforce Excellence

Training drives staff effectiveness and safety, while promoting the well-being of both staff and incarcerated individuals, and producing positive institutional outcomes.[50] Structured programs in emotional self-regulation, communication, and biofeedback can reduce stress and improve physical and mental health outcomes, including lower blood pressure and cholesterol, reduced fatigue and hostility, and enhanced motivation, outlook, and productivity.[51] Training also strengthens professional practice: staff who received Skills Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR) demonstrated greater application of evidence-based correctional techniques, and their clients had lower recidivism rates.

Learning Theory Informs Training Design

Maximizing training impact requires applying evidence-based learning theories that guide how adults acquire,

47 Harvard Division of Continuing Education. (2022, November 1). *Why is professional development important?* Harvard Professional & Executive Development. https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/why-is-professional-development-important/

48 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). *The Nelson Mandela Rules: The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* (SMR). United Nations. https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf

49 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2011). *United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).* United Nations. https://www.tijbangkokrules.org/pdf/Bangkok_Rules_English.pdf

50 Charles R. Robinson, Christopher T. Lowenkamp, Alexander M. Holsinger, Scott VanBenschoten, Melissa Alexander & J.C. Oleson (2012) A random study of Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR): using core correctional practices in probation interactions, *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 35:2, 167-188,DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2012.674823

51 McCraty, R., Atkinson, M., Lipsenthal, L., et al. (2009). New hope for correctional officers: An innovative program for reducing stress and health risks. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, 34, 251–272. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10484-009-9087-0

retain, and apply knowledge and skills. Decades of research in education, organizational learning, and adult development have identified principles that enable correctional agencies to design training that strengthens the workforce, improves safety, and supports professional growth. Understanding these principles ensures that training both informs and transforms, shaping behaviors, skills, and decision-making in real-world correctional environments. Appendices A1 and A2 provide examples of learning theories and taxonomies and their application to correctional officer training.

Diverse Instructional Strategies Enhance Learning Outcomes

Effective training employs varied instructional strategies to engage learners, enhance retention, and support skills application. Key approaches and their optimal applications include:

- **Instructor-Led Instruction:** Optimal for introducing new concepts, demonstrating procedures, and providing structured practice with feedback, particularly for complex topics.
- **Interactive Learning:** Effective for engaging learners in discussions, role-plays, or problem-solving exercises, enabling peer learning, diverse perspectives, and skills practice.
- **Experiential Learning:** Ideal for deepening understanding, developing practical skills, and fostering engagement, particularly when applying theoretical knowledge to real-world situations.
- **Independent Reflection:** Valuable for providing time to think independently before, during, and after learning activities, including reflecting on past experiences, personal reactions, and the application of new knowledge to professional roles.

FIGURE 12. OVERVIEW OF DIVERSE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT CAN IMPROVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By integrating evidence-based content with robust learning theory and diverse instructional strategies, training can build a highly competent, resilient, and professional workforce capable of meeting the unique demands of working in women's prisons while supporting safety, rehabilitative outcomes, and staff retention.

Review Of CDCR Curriculum For Working In Women's Prisons

We conducted a review of CDCR's curriculum materials for training staff to work in women's facilities. Curriculum materials reviewed include:

- Inservice Training – Working Effectively with Female Offenders, Version 1.0, A8378
  - » Instructor Guide

- Basic Correctional Officer Academy – Incarcerated Women, Version 5.0, 11064291
  - » Instructor Guide
  - » Participant Workbook
  - » Slides
- Becoming Trauma Informed: A Training Program for Correctional Professionals, 2023
  - » Facilitator's Guide
- Safety Matters: Managing Relationships in Women's Facilities, Session 2
  - » Facilitator's Guide

This review identified multiple opportunities for CDCR to strengthen its workforce by optimizing its training framework. The recommendations in this section are organized into sequential steps for effective onboarding and quality training delivery:

1. Expand onboarding and introductory training
2. Expand mentorship and coaching immediately following introductory training
3. Provide structured ongoing professional development and advanced training
4. Enhance trainer selection and accountability
5. Expand learning objectives
6. Develop assessment tools and practices that are consistently implemented across trainings
7. Increase opportunities for active learning
8. Update training materials regularly to reflect current best practices

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: EXPAND ONBOARDING AND INTRODUCTORY TRAINING

Departments of Corrections nationwide experience high staff turnover rates, creating operational instability and increased training and overtime costs. A Correctional Leaders Association survey reported that most correctional agencies face annual turnover rates of 20–30%, with 38% of staff departing within their first year and 48% leaving within one to five years.[52]

Structured onboarding, phased training, and ongoing skill development during the first year of employment address this challenge by improving retention, accelerating job readiness, and strengthening workforce stability. This approach establishes a clear learning pathway from foundational knowledge to advanced skill-building through mentorship, coaching, and progressive training. It also demonstrates institutional investment in staff development, reinforces professional identity, and creates consistency in expectations and practices across women's facilities.

The Critical Need For Specialized Training In Women's Facilities

All staff assigned to women's correctional facilities benefit from specialized training that addresses the distinct characteristics of women's incarceration. Gender-responsive training equips personnel with foundational knowledge, practical skills, and relational approaches necessary to maintain safety while engaging with incarcerated women in humane, respectful, and effective ways.

52 Correctional Leaders Association. 2020-2021. *Correctional Hiring and Retention Survey.*

At CIW, gender-responsive training is offered quarterly. While this provides ongoing access, it does not ensure that staff receive the training at the point when it is most critical—when they first begin working in a women's prison. Staff may spend weeks or months in housing units before accessing this training, increasing risks to safety, consistency, and staff confidence. Incorporating gender-responsive training into onboarding ensures that staff begin their assignment with a shared baseline of knowledge and expectations tailored to women's prisons.

Refining Training Scope For Maximum Effectiveness

The department's current in-service training for women's facilities staff encompasses strong and relevant topics, including women's pathways to prison, gender-responsive and strengths-based practices, professional relationships, trauma-informed care, communication and de-escalation skills, and motivational interviewing. However, this breadth of content exceeds what can be meaningfully absorbed in a 16-hour introductory training.

Introductory training should prepare staff to work safely, effectively, and professionally during their initial weeks on the job. When excessive information is introduced simultaneously, learners struggle to retain key concepts, and instructors lack sufficient time to employ active learning exercises, resulting in concepts that are introduced but not fully understood or applied.

A 16-hour introductory training should focus on core foundational topics essential for success in working with women in prison, reserving advanced or specialized content for subsequent training phases. Introductory training should provide essential context about women in custody, clarify expectations for staff conduct and professional boundaries, and introduce core operational approaches that support safety, rehabilitation, and workforce effectiveness.

Recommended Focus Areas For a 16-Hour Introductory Curriculum

Building on CDCR's existing in-service training curriculum, an introductory-level training curriculum should emphasize the following foundational areas:

- **Orientation and Role Clarity**
  - » Department mission and values.
  - » The dual role of correctional officers in safety and rehabilitation.
  - » Expectations for professional conduct, communication, and boundaries.
- **Women's Pathways to Prison**
  - » Common pathways into custody, including trauma, victimization, substance use, and mental health conditions.
  - » How these pathways influence behavior in institutional settings.
- **Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Practices**
  - » Core principles of gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches.
  - » Understanding trauma's cognitive and behavioral impacts, including hypervigilance, mistrust, and emotional reactivity.
  - » Practical strategies for reducing re-traumatization, such as respectful communication, offering choice when possible, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and using present-focused interactions.
- **Operational Policies Requiring Special Consideration in Women's Facilities**
  - » Policies and procedures affecting privacy, dignity, and safety, including unclothed and clothed body search procedures, gender-responsive considerations in the use of force continuum, and cross-gender supervision.

- **Introduction to International Correctional Best Practices**
  - **Dynamic Security:** Building safety through professional relationships, active listening, early intervention, and de-escalation.
    - Building Professional Relationships
      - Establishing trust through consistency, fairness, and respectful daily interactions.
      - Demonstrating professionalism while acknowledging the relational needs common in women's facilities, being personal but not private.
      - Understanding how strong professional relationships contribute to safety, cooperation, and unit stability.
    - Effective Communication Skills
      - Using active listening as a safety and engagement tool.
      - Communicating clearly, calmly, and respectfully.
      - Managing tone, body language, and word choice to reduce escalation and misunderstanding.
    - Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation
      - Recognizing personal stress responses and emotional triggers, understanding the window of tolerance.
      - Applying techniques to remain composed during conflict or emotionally charged interactions.
      - Understanding how staff emotional regulation shapes the environment.
    - Early Intervention and De-Escalation
      - Identifying early signs of distress, conflict, or relational tension.
      - Using relationship-based approaches to address issues before they escalate.
      - Applying introductory de-escalation strategies aligned with trauma-informed and gender-responsive practice.
    - Safety Through Engagement
      - Maintaining awareness through routine interactions and presence on the unit.
      - Balancing authority with approachability to support both safety and rehabilitation.
  - **Normalization:** Promoting dignity, responsibility, and pro-social behavior through everyday interactions and routines.
  - **Progression:** Supporting gradual increases in responsibility and autonomy using gender-responsive approaches to facilitate individual growth.

A streamlined, foundational introductory training supports workforce stability, institutional safety, and long-term staff development. By focusing on essential concepts and skills required in women's prisons, CDCR can enhance early job readiness, reduce role confusion, and strengthen staff confidence.

Recommendation: Provide gender-responsive training upon assignment to a women's prison.

Action Area	Action Steps
Gender-Responsive Training and Staff Onboarding	Make gender-responsive training a required component of onboarding for all staff assigned to women's prisons. Ensure the training is completed prior to or immediately upon assignment, so staff enter positions with the foundational knowledge, skills, and expectations necessary for safe and effective practice.

Action Area	Action Steps
16-Hour Introductory Training	Refocus the 16-hour introductory training on a core set of foundational topics essential for working safely and effectively in women's housing units, reserving advanced content for later training phases.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: EXPAND MENTORSHIP AND COACHING IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING INTRODUCTORY TRAINING

Foundational training provides an essential starting point for preparing staff to work in women's correctional facilities; however, classroom instruction alone cannot build the relational, communication, and decision-making skills required for long-term success. Mentorship and coaching provide critical, practice-based learning opportunities that support diverse learning styles and help staff apply training concepts in daily practice. Developing a robust mentorship and coaching model aligns with the peer mentorship pillar of the California Model and strengthens workforce readiness. While mentoring occurs at CDCR facilities, the process is often informal and not codified.

A mentorship and coaching model would build on existing field training support and formalize early, sustained guidance for staff assigned to women's prisons. Mentorship is grounded in peer learning, pairing new staff with experienced staff who have demonstrated strong competency in skills most critical for women's facilities, including empathy, communication, professional relationship-building, and gender-responsive practice.

The mentorship model includes:

- **Structured job shadowing**, with new staff observing mentors, and mentors observing new staff, in housing units and other operational settings.
- **Regular reflection and coaching conversations**, individually and as teams, focused on what went well, challenges encountered, and strategies for continued skill development.
- **Clear identification of growth areas**, paired with concrete guidance and practice opportunities to support improvement.

Example From Other Jurisdictions

The Maine Department of Corrections provides formal shadowing for all new custody staff during their first weeks on the job.[53] The shadowing process bridges the gap between theory and real-world practice, and field training officers (FTOs) work directly with new staff during that time to provide mentorship. FTOs are specially trained and selected based on demonstrated professional conduct, commitment to departmental goals and objectives, effective written and communication skills, and the ability to work collaboratively. FTOs are also overseen by FTO supervisors, who provide training and evaluation to ensure their effectiveness.

While early career support is a central focus, mentorship and coaching are valuable tools that should remain available throughout an employee's career. When staff experience challenges, whether identified by supervisors, training indicators, or self-referral, they should have clear pathways to access coaching or mentorship support. This positions mentorship as a development tool rather than a corrective measure.

A mentorship and coaching model should be reinforced through:

53 Maine Department of Corrections. Field Training Officer Program, Chapter 4: Training and Staff Development. 2011. https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov.corrections/files/inline-files/4.09%20%20FIELD%20TRAINING%20OFFICER%20PROGRAM.pdf

- **Preparing supervisors to measure the impact of training on performance.** During staff training, share a summary of the learning objectives and a brief overview of the training with supervisors. Provide supervisors with questions to ask and a list of behaviors to observe.
- **Offering opportunities for participants to earn certification or units** that require a demonstration of skills and knowledge.
- **Marking and celebrating learner growth.** Measure and celebrate what matters by tracking the number of employees who have benefited from learning new skills, celebrating career growth tied to learning and development, or writing letters to supervisors detailing the new skills and knowledge attained.

Action Area	Action Steps
Mentorship and Coaching	Implement a structured mentorship and coaching framework for staff assigned to women's prisons that begins immediately after introductory training and includes job shadowing, guided observation, and regular coaching conversations focused on applying gender-responsive and relational skills in practice.
	Identify and prepare experienced staff to serve as mentors and coaches based on demonstrated proficiency in communication, professional boundaries, relationship-based supervision, and gender-responsive practice, and provide them with training, guidance, and oversight to ensure consistent and effective mentorship.
Supervision	Provide supervisors with tools to observe and support skill development, document progress, and recognize staff growth, reinforcing mentorship and coaching as a routine part of professional development rather than a corrective process.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: PROVIDE STRUCTURED ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCED TRAINING

While introductory training equips staff with foundational knowledge and skills for working in women's prisons, the complexity of these environments requires ongoing learning and professional development. Staff encounter a wide range of challenges, including responding to trauma, managing conflict, supporting mental health, and maintaining safety, all while building professional relationships. Without continued opportunities to develop and refine these skills, knowledge retention diminishes, confidence can wane, and staff may struggle to consistently apply gender-responsive and trauma-informed practices.

A structured approach to ongoing training reinforces core competencies introduced in the first weeks of employment while allowing staff to expand their expertise, practice advanced skills, and adapt to the dynamic realities of women's correctional environments. It contributes to professional development by providing a clear learning pathway, recognition for skill proficiency, and opportunities to pursue specialized topics aligned with personal interests and career goals. At the organizational level, ongoing training strengthens the workforce by enhancing staff effectiveness, promoting safety, and supporting retention, signaling that growth and career development are departmental priorities.

Example From Other Jurisdictions

Maine provides a successful example through its provision of discrete training for supervisors and leaders designed to establish a consistent leadership development approach throughout the department. The leadership training

comprises several modules that cover the department's core mission and values, skill sets and tools for effective leadership, and leadership culture. Modules are divided into five day-long classes, spread over several months, providing structured, continuous learning that allows participants to apply new skills, reflect on their learning, and bring those experiences back to enhance subsequent classes. Maine also reinforces accountability and cultural alignment by providing additional training for managers who struggle to model or support culture change.

Scotland offers a comprehensive training suite for prison staff that encompasses trauma-informed and gender-responsive practice, leadership development, and specialized skill-building. Examples of some of the leadership development courses offered in Scotland are included in Appendix A3. This approach enables correctional officers to develop specialized roles tailored to their experience, interests, and demonstrated competencies.

At HMP Stirling, for example, correctional officers serve in roles such as recovery officers, who support substance use recovery programming; safety officers, who work with women at heightened risk of self-harm or suicide; and gym officers, who focus on physical education and wellness. These roles demonstrate how Scotland utilizes advanced training and role development to support staff professionalization, empowerment, and ongoing growth, thereby enhancing outcomes for women in custody.

Opportunities for specialized roles in CDCR's women's prisons are numerous and could include child development training for staff assigned to visiting areas, enhanced women's mental health training for staff working in Enhanced Outpatient Program or Psychiatric Inpatient Program units, and advanced trauma-informed and grief-response training for staff assigned to programming roles.

Building a Continuum of Learning

Layering ongoing professional development with mentorship and coaching creates a continuum of learning: introductory training establishes foundational skills, mentorship provides real-world guidance and feedback, and advanced or follow-up training ensures staff continue to grow, adapt, and excel throughout their careers. This combination builds a workforce better prepared to meet the unique needs of women in custody while fostering a safe, supportive, and professional institutional culture.

Areas for advanced or subsequent training could include:

- **Human Behavior Change and Trauma-Informed Response**
  - » Advanced understanding of trauma and mental health.
  - » Understanding the human behavior change cycle.
  - » Understanding coping mechanisms, risk factors, and triggers in the behavior of people incarcerated in women's prisons.
- **Responding to Self-injurious Behavior**
  - » Recognizing and responding appropriately to self-injurious behavior, including strategies to manage staff emotional responses.
- **Conflict Resolution, De-Escalation, and Emotional Regulation**
  - » Enhanced relational and communication skills.
  - » Applying de-escalation techniques to prevent conflict and promote safety.
- **Progression and Normalization**
  - » Supporting expanded autonomy and responsibility.
  - » Reinforcing gender-responsive approaches to policy and practice.

- **Relationships and Professional Boundaries**
  - » Expanding relational skills introduced in introductory training.
  - » Building trust while maintaining professional boundaries.
  - » Reinforcing consistency, follow-up after setbacks, and long-term relationship management.
- **Gender-Responsive Assessment and Case Management**
  - » Training in sensitive interviewing techniques for victimization, mental health, and relationship histories.
  - » Application of motivational interviewing and gender-specific case management strategies.
  - » Emphasizing respectful, trauma-informed engagement while maintaining safety and professional standards.

Design Features of Ongoing Training

- **Required and Optional Modules**
  - » Certain topics—such as trauma response, conflict resolution, and progression practices—are prioritized as mandatory for all staff.
  - » Additional modules provide staff opportunities to explore specialized topics or areas of professional interest, encouraging ongoing growth and career development.
- **Integration with Mentorship and Coaching**
  - » Ongoing training complements mentorship and coaching by giving staff structured learning content to apply in practice.
  - » Mentors and coaches reinforce advanced skills, guide reflection, and help staff integrate new knowledge into daily routines.
- **Applied Learning and Reinforcement**
  - » Scenario-based exercises, role-plays, and skill demonstrations support retention and practical application.
  - » Refresher sessions or booster modules reinforce learning, particularly for complex or high-risk topics.
- **Career-Long Development Pathways**
  - » Staff can see a clear pathway for professional growth, including recognized milestones and skill certifications.
  - » Ongoing professional development fosters workforce retention, strengthens staff capability, and enhances overall unit safety.

Action Area	Action Steps
Advanced Training Catalogue	Identify a small set of advanced training topics that are required for all staff working in women's prisons—such as trauma response, conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and progression practices—and ensure staff receive regular refreshers or booster training.
	Provide optional advanced training modules that allow staff to deepen skills in areas such as responding to self-injurious behavior, professional boundaries, case management, or behavior change, supporting both institutional needs and individual career interests.

Action Area	Action Steps
Training as Career Growth	Create simple mechanisms to acknowledge completion of advanced training, such as certificates, skill recognition, or eligibility for mentorship or leadership roles, to reinforce professional development and retention.

RECOMMENDATION 2.4: ENHANCE TRAINER SELECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Research demonstrates that when staff are trained in core correctional practices, the incarcerated individuals they work with experience lower rates of recidivism.[54,55] However, not all training is equally effective. Training quality impacts both staff performance and outcomes for incarcerated individuals. One of the most important factors influencing training effectiveness is the quality of instruction. Even the best-designed curriculum will fail if it is not delivered skillfully. Strengthening trainer selection and accountability presents a clear opportunity for CDCR to enhance the impact and effectiveness of its training programs.

Trainer Selection

The in-service curriculum requires prior experience with the training to teach it; however, experience alone does not guarantee instructional effectiveness. Trainers should have a proven record of successfully applying the learning outcomes in practice. For example, they should possess a documented history of building professional relationships with women in custody; excellent and respectful communication and de-escalation skills; and an ability to apply trauma-informed and gender-responsive principles in daily practice. In addition, trainers must possess the instructional skills needed to engage adult learners, facilitate discussion, and support skill development beyond lecture-based delivery.

Trainer Accountability

Our review of CDCR's training materials reveals limited measurement of whether learning objectives are met or whether participants demonstrate readiness to apply new skills. Although we did not observe training delivery, facilitator guides suggest that much of the learning experience is passive, with participants listening to trainers present slides. This approach does not allow for assessment of whether participants have acquired the knowledge and skills essential to their role or how they plan to apply new knowledge or skills in their daily practice. CDCR's training must do more than transmit information—it must support observable changes in practice.

Trainers are not responsible for staff behavior after training concludes; however, they should be accountable for creating learning environments that allow skill demonstration, feedback, and assessment. With appropriate tools and guidance, trainers can evaluate whether participants understand and can apply key concepts during training. Just as corrective action and guidance should be provided to officers performing duties in housing units, trainers should also be supported and evaluated through structured feedback and performance expectations.

Together, clearer standards for trainer selection and meaningful accountability mechanisms create the foundation for higher-quality training delivery. The action areas that follow outline concrete steps to operationalize these principles and strengthen CDCR's training system for women's prisons.

54 Chadwick, N., Dewolf, A., & Serin, R. (2015). Effectively training community supervision officers: A meta-analytic review of the impact on offender outcome. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 42(10), 977–989. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854815595661

55 Labrecque, R. M., Viglione, J., & Caudy, M. (2023). The Impact of Community Supervision Officer Training Programs on Officer and Client Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Justice Quarterly,* 40(4), 587–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2022.2120062

Action Area	Action Steps
Standards for Trainer Selection	Select trainers who demonstrate proficiency in the skills the training aims to build—such as trauma-informed communication, gender-responsive practice, professional boundaries, and relationship-based supervision. Require documented evidence of these competencies, not just prior attendance at the training.
Trainer Preparation Process	Provide trainers with development, coaching, and certification that ensure they can model desired skills, facilitate active learning, and accurately assess learner performance. Reinforce expectations through periodic observation and feedback.
Trainer Accountability	Require trainers to assess and document learner performance against the stated learning objectives—not merely attendance or course completion. Use structured assessment tools, observation checklists, and performance-based activities to gather evidence of learning.
Strengthen Training Quality	Collect and analyze trainer-reported data (e.g., objectives accomplished or frequently unmet) to identify training gaps and make improvements in curriculum, delivery methods, and trainer support. Use these insights to guide continuous improvement and target additional trainer development where needed.

RECOMMENDATION 2.5: STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Training design—including clear objectives, well-aligned content, and engaging learning activities—directly impacts what staff learn and how effectively they apply knowledge on the job. CDCR can maximize training impact by clarifying objectives, employing diverse teaching methods, incorporating assessments, and connecting lessons directly to work in women's facilities. Stronger instructional design will improve staff performance, maintain engagement, and support safer, more effective correctional practices.

Aligning Objectives with Job Requirements

Nearly every learning objective in the women's facilities' Basic Corrections Officer Academy (BCOA) and in-service training curricula requires students to "identify" information. However, correctional officers must do more than identify information—they must analyze situations, apply knowledge and experience, and evaluate intervention effectiveness. Learning objectives should mirror the cognitive level required in the role.[56]

Learning objectives should align with educational frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy to measure knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and creativity,[57] with action verbs reflecting the desired cognitive level. For example: "Learners will develop the skills and knowledge necessary to break down situations involving conflict between incarcerated individuals and determine appropriate trauma-informed de-escalation strategies." Here, "break down" corresponds to the ability to analyze information and examine relationships—requiring learners to apply reasoning, analyze situations, and select the best course of action.

Stating Objectives as Outcomes

Learning objectives should describe outcomes rather than activities. Optimizing objectives to specify what learners

56 Association of American Medical Colleges, *Writing Learning Objectives* https://www.aamc.org/system/files?file=2019-07/learning-objectives.pdf

57 Adams N. E. (2015). Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning objectives. *Journal of the Medical Library Association : JMLA*, 103(3), 152–153. https://doi.org/10.3163/1536-5050.103.3.010

should be able to do upon completion improves clarity, skill retention, and workplace integration. For example:

- **Current objective:** You will identify the components of professional relationships with female offenders. (In-service training objective 4.)
- **Optimized objective:** Learners will develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form professional relationships with women in custody.

Clear, outcome-focused objectives provide goals for training design and delivery, serve as foundations for assessing learning during training and evaluating outcomes, and increase consistent knowledge retention.[58]

Action Area	Action Steps
Redesign Learning Objectives	Rewrite existing objectives using Bloom's Taxonomy or a comparable framework, shifting from knowledge-level verbs (e.g., "identify") to verbs that reflect deeper learning and application (e.g., explain, analyze, demonstrate, evaluate, design).
Integrate Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Competencies	Embed expectations related to relational skills, communication, professional boundaries, etc., directly into learning objectives so that trauma-informed and gender-responsive practice becomes an explicit outcome of training.
Align Learning Objectives with Real Job Tasks	Ensure each objective is tied to key responsibilities such as communication, de-escalation, supervision, and crisis response, with verbs that match the level of cognitive complexity required on the job.
Map Objectives to Curriculum Content and Practice Opportunities	Systematically connect each learning objective to the curriculum content, activities, and assessments that support it to ensure learners receive adequate and aligned opportunities to develop and demonstrate proficiency.

RECOMMENDATION 2.6: IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND DELIVERY BY DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND PRACTICES THAT ARE CONSISTENTLY IMPLEMENTED ACROSS TRAININGS

Across both the BCOA and in-service training curricula, performance is assessed through knowledge review in the form of multiple-choice questions at the end of the training. While experienced trainers may incorporate additional assessment during their instruction, guidance and tools should be included in the facilitator's guide and instructional material to ensure this occurs consistently.

As explained in Amend's CDCR Curriculum and Training Review & Recommendations,[59] formative assessments and strategies[60] enable trainers to measure knowledge and skills during training using informal assessment tools. These include discussion and questioning, informal quizzes, observing practice and application, providing real-time feedback, and correcting misunderstandings. Facilitator guides can assist trainers in using the outcomes of these informal assessment tools to adapt their instruction and tailor their strategies to meet the needs of the group, thereby improving learning outcomes through the integration of real-time feedback.

Trainers should be provided with the tools and resources to formally measure participant learning during and after

58 Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.), Airasian, P.W., Cruikshank, K.A., Mayer, R.E., Pintrich, P.R., Raths, J., & Wittrock. M.C. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

59 Trowbridge, T., Osorio, J., Ahalt, C., & Williams, B. (2025, December 19). *CDCR curriculum and training review & recommendations*. Amend at UCSF.

60 Wiliam, D. (2017). *Embedded Formative Assessment* (2nd ed.). Solution Tree Press.

each training session, through direct observation or evaluation. This helps trainers address learning gaps promptly and improves overall training outcomes[61] by allowing them to adjust, re-review challenging concepts, and offer additional practice when needed. Measurement of learning should be tied to the learning objectives. An example of an assessment tool that could be copied into a facilitator's guide is included below:

Example Formative Assessment Tool

Training Module: Introduction to Normalization
Assessment Type: Scenario Practice
Purpose: Evaluate the learner's ability to apply normalization principles when working with women in custody, including promoting autonomy, supporting everyday decision-making, maintaining professional boundaries, and applying policies in ways that reinforce responsibility and dignity.

Part 1: Observation Checklist

Rubric Key: 1 = Needs Improvement, 2 = Developing, 3 = Proficient, 4 = Strong

Instructor Directions: Rate the learner on each dimension observed during the scenario. Add notes as needed.

Competency Area	Observable Behaviors	Rating (1-4)	Notes
Respect for Autonomy & Dignity	Encourages appropriate choice and independence	1 2 3 4	
	Treats the woman as a capable adult rather than as a problem to manage	1 2 3 4	
Normalization in Daily Interactions	Supports participation in routine activities (e.g., schedules, responsibilities, problem-solving)	1 2 3 4	
	Avoids unnecessary control or over-direction	1 2 3 4	
Professional Boundaries	Maintains clear, consistent boundaries while supporting independence	1 2 3 4	
	Provides guidance without rescuing or infantilizing	1 2 3 4	
Relational Skills	Communicates expectations clearly and respectfully	1 2 3 4	
	Demonstrates follow-through that reinforces trust and accountability	1 2 3 4	
Decision-Making & Application	Applies policy in ways that support normalization and progression	1 2 3 4	
	Uses discretion appropriately to reinforce responsibility and skill-building	1 2 3 4	

61 Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam (1998) *Assessment and Classroom Learning, Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice,* 5:1, 7-74, DOI: 10.1080/0969595980050102

Part 2: Instructor Feedback Summary

Strengths Observed: (Provide 2–3 specific examples.)	Recommended Follow-Up: ☐ Additional scenario practice ☐ Refresher on normalization practices ☐ Coaching or mentoring ☐ No follow-up needed
Areas for Improvement: (Describe concrete next steps or skills to practice.)	

Part 3: Learner Self-Reflection (Optional but Encouraged)

What part of the scenario felt most comfortable?
What part felt challenging?
What will you do differently in similar real-world situations?

Additionally, summative assessment strategies measure proficiency and application of learning after the training has concluded.[62] Training evaluations that align with learning objectives and measure the impact of the training are useful summative assessment tools. Evaluation results can be used to inform the design and delivery of future training sessions. Summative training evaluations could include:

- Asking participants to estimate what they knew and could do before the training, and what they know and can do after the training.
- Asking participants to anticipate when and how often they will use what they learned.
- At the end of each training, asking both trainers and participants to reflect in writing on what they have learned and how they will apply it in their roles.

62 Trowbridge, T., Osorio, J., Ahalt, C., & Williams, B. (2025, December 19). *CDCR curriculum and training review & recommendations*. Amend at UCSF.

- Conducting surveys 6-12 months after the training, asking questions like:
  - » What have you done differently because of the training?
  - » What barriers have you encountered in applying new skills?
  - » Have you seen improvements in your work since the training?
- Applying the Kirkpatrick Model[63]
  - » This four-level framework is designed to assess training programs, starting with immediate results and progressing to long-term results.

Action Area	Action Steps
Formative Assessments within Training Delivery	Embed routine checks for understanding, scenario-based demonstrations, and opportunities for self-reflection into every training module, emphasizing trauma-informed approaches that promote psychological safety and learning over grading.
Strengthen Trainer Capacity	Equip trainers with the skills, tools, and guidance needed to assess learner progress, adapt instruction in real time, deliver constructive feedback, and apply assessment protocols consistently across facilities.
Summative Assessment Results	Collect and analyze learner performance data to identify strengths and gaps, refine curriculum design, update learning objectives, and guide trainer development. Implement documentation and reporting processes that support statewide quality improvement and reinforce accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 2.7: INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE LEARNING

Much of the curriculum across both the BCOA and in-service trainings relies heavily on lecture and PowerPoint slide-based instruction.[64] This is a missed opportunity to leverage active learning techniques, which engage learners and demand more cognitive effort, resulting in deeper, long-term mastery of new concepts and practices. Outcomes include improved skill acquisition and better application to real-world situations.[65]

In a few places, in-service training already includes active learning opportunities (see example below).

FIGURE 13A AND 13B. SECTION IV.C. ACTIVITY 5: GENDER-RESPONSIVE PRACTICE

C. Activity 5: Gender-Responsive Practice

How do these principals relate to your institutional practice?

Divide the participants into 6 groups and assign a principle to each. Ask each group to list some of the tasks or practices they see in their daily work. Direct them to list as many as possible.

Reconvene; Ask group 1 to read their list 1 by 1 and poll the other groups: "who else has this?"

List individual tasks/practices on whiteboard; noting how many times it is mentioned; pointing out common tasks/practices.

Some examples include:

- The Re-entry Hub programming at all three female facilities
- The Long-Term Offender Pilot Program at CCWF
- The Substance Abuse Programs
- Instructor to develop more examples

63 Kirkpatrick, D. L. (1994). *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
64 We were not provided with any slides for our review of the in-service training that is used for training staff in women's facilities.
65 Lang, James M. 2021. *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning.* 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

While an important first step, this activity misses a critical opportunity to ask participants to reflect on their own work practices, rather than merely identifying external programs or services. This activity could be revised to incorporate individual reflection, small-group discussion, and the application of the material to real-world situations. The revised activity would also align more closely with a revised learning objective, such as: *By the end of the training, learners will have developed the skills and knowledge necessary to employ the six principles of gender-responsive practice in daily operations.* These adaptations would also address the gender-responsive principles originally published in partnership with the National Institute of Corrections[66], whose value lies in their adoption and embodiment by all individuals working in women's prisons.

Incorporating New Instructional Methods

Consider new instructional methods to support active learning and provide opportunities to practice. Creative activities, such as drawing and brainstorming, can add variability and increase engagement. Including visual elements, such as pictures, illustrations, or video, will enhance learning and foster improved audience engagement.[67] Other strategies include additional pair and small group discussions, individual reflection exercises, case examples, storytelling, demonstrations, and peer teaching. It is important to keep learner needs and adult learning theory in mind when designing exercises.[68]

Action Area	Action Steps
Lecture and Slide-Based Instruction	Shift the training model away from passive, lecture-heavy delivery by limiting slide use and integrating visual supports, discussions, demonstrations, and scenario-based exercises that better engage learners and deepen comprehension.
Active Learning Methods	Introduce a broader range of interactive strategies, such as group work, case examples, role-plays, creative problem-solving, and individual reflection. Rebalance training time to ensure active learning constitutes a significant portion of each module.
Integrate Trauma-Informed and Gender-Responsive Principles	Design exercises that model the relational, communication, and boundary-setting skills required in women's prisons, ensuring activities promote emotional safety, trust, collaboration, and real-world application of trauma-informed and gender-responsive practices.
Strengthen Trainer Capacity	Equip trainers with the skills and tools needed to lead active learning, through instructor development, facilitation guides, coaching, and ongoing feedback, and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of learning activities to drive continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 2.8: UPDATE TRAINING MATERIALS REGULARLY TO REFLECT CURRENT BEST PRACTICES

CDCR's in-service training curriculum has not been updated since 2014. To ensure staff are trained in the most effective approaches, critical trainings, like those focused on working with women in custody, should be reviewed and (if needed) revised annually. Training materials should reflect both current industry standards and the organizational values CDCR expects staff to uphold, including the use of gender-responsive, trauma-informed,

66 Bloom, B., Owen, B., & Covington, S. (2003). *Gender-responsive strategies: Research, practice, and guiding principles for women offenders.* National Institute of Corrections. https://www.cawtarclearinghouse.org/storage/4626/Gender-Responsive-Strategies.pdf

67 Kosslyn, S. M. (2007). *Clear and to the point: 8 psychological principles for compelling PowerPoint presentations.* Oxford University Press.

68 Knowles, MS (1981). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy.* New York: Cambridge Adult Education Co. (Follett Pub. Co.)

and person-centered language when referring to incarcerated women.[69] Regular updates help maintain relevance, improve learning outcomes, and reinforce a professional, trauma-informed, and gender-responsive culture within facilities.

Action Area	Action Steps
Annual Review of Training Content	Establish an annual review process led by a multidisciplinary team to assess all training modules, identify outdated content, and integrate current best practices and research.
Content Alignment with Best Practices and Industry Standards	Update all materials to incorporate methods, operational realities, and relevant case studies that align with the skills and knowledge staff need to safely and effectively work in women's prisons.
Respectful and Person-Centered	Revise all terminology and phrasing in training materials to reflect trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and person-centered language, and provide guidance for trainers on consistent use.

69 For example, the in-service training included use of the word "offender" which should be updated to "incarcerated person."

Conclusion

This report provides recommendations to optimize workforce readiness within California women's prisons through improvements to recruitment and training. It emphasizes the importance of recruiting, hiring, and training a mission-driven, effective workforce. While focused primarily on custody staff, these recommendations are also relevant to other CDCR areas, including healthcare, and should be implemented where applicable.

Considerations Beyond This Report's Scope

Staff Retention. Research demonstrates that retention is tightly intertwined with recruitment and training. CDCR staff identified mandatory overtime and lack of schedule control, staff health and wellness concerns, and limited professional development opportunities as primary retention barriers. CDCR should conduct exit interviews with departing staff and hold focus groups at CIW and CCWF to identify retention strategies. A review of retention best practices could be the subject of a future report.

Vetting and Assignment Processes. This report lacks access to specific details of CDCR's vetting and hiring process. An evaluation of CDCR's vetting processes for hiring decisions and prison assignments should be undertaken to ensure they achieve their intended purpose: recruiting a highly professional, talented, and empathetic workforce capable of supporting incarcerated women in transforming their lives.

Discipline and Removal. Given the well-publicized history of harm against people incarcerated in women's facilities, CDCR must maintain clear protocols for staff discipline and removal, a subject that may also benefit from external evaluation.

Cultural Disconnect. CDCR should investigate the disconnect between how staff-incarcerated person interactions are described in recruitment materials and the behaviors expected once staff begin working. CDCR should conduct analyses to explore behaviors staff feel pressured to exhibit and identify root causes of the mismatch between stated expectations and consequences when staff behave with kindness and support toward incarcerated individuals. Understanding these root causes will provide critical insight into necessary training modifications.

Overall, optimized recruitment and training will help CDCR's women's prisons deliver cutting-edge gender-responsive and trauma-informed services through well-trained, supported staff, ultimately benefiting the health and rehabilitation of incarcerated women.

Appendices

A1: EXAMPLE LEARNING THEORIES

Learning theories can help tailor curriculum design and delivery to specific training goals and learners.

Adult Learning Theory[70]

Adult Learning Theory posits that adults learn most effectively when training is relevant to their real-life responsibilities, when they can draw on their own experiences, and when they have some autonomy in the learning process. Adults engage more deeply when instruction focuses on practical application, scenarios, and solving real challenges. Effective adult learning environments are collaborative, respect learners' existing knowledge, and provide opportunities for reflection, practice, and immediate use of new skills.

Adult Learning Theory

Concept	Practice
Adults bring knowledge and experience.	Build on experience and best practices.
Adults want learning to be relevant.	Identify problems and inspire solutions.
Adults learn best when internally motivated.	Engage your audience's challenges, opportunities, and values.
Adult learning is social.	Support peer networks with group work, accountability and reflection.
Adult learning is applied.	Engage learners in relevant scenarios and activities.

Transformative Learning Theory[71]

Transformative Learning Theory is based on the premise that learning can transform perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors. Learners change their thinking based on new information, task-oriented problem solving, self-reflection, and communication.

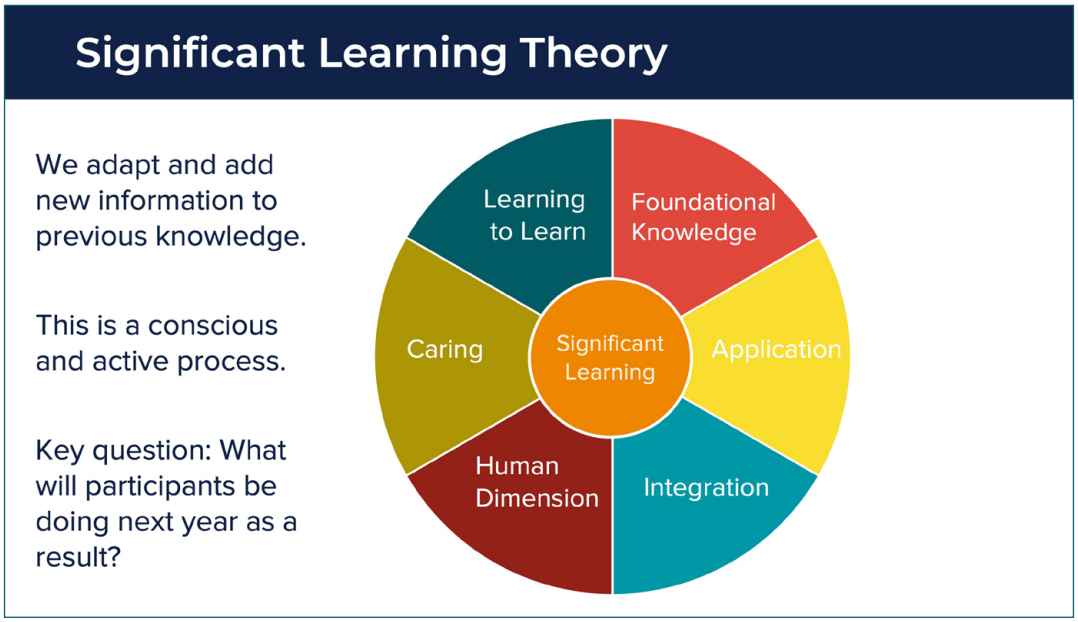
For change to occur, how learning happens is as important as what is being learned. Transformative Learning Theory training strategies include:

- Letting learners **discover** new knowledge
- Using examples that connect to **real experiences**
- Encouraging **interaction**, like group discussion and problem-solving
- Allowing **time** to reflect on and question assumptions
- Being a **co-learner**, modeling curiosity and reflection

70 Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge Adult Education.
71 Mezirow, J. (1997). *Transformative learning: Theory to practice. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1997(74), 5–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401

Significant Learning Theory[72]

Significant Learning Theory builds on the idea that the most impactful learning goes beyond information acquisition; it integrates multiple dimensions that shape how a person thinks, feels, and acts over time. Effective learning experiences build foundational knowledge, develop practical skills, foster personal and interpersonal growth, encourage deep understanding and integration of ideas, and motivate learners to continue applying what they've learned. When these dimensions reinforce one another, learning becomes more meaningful, lasting, and transformative.

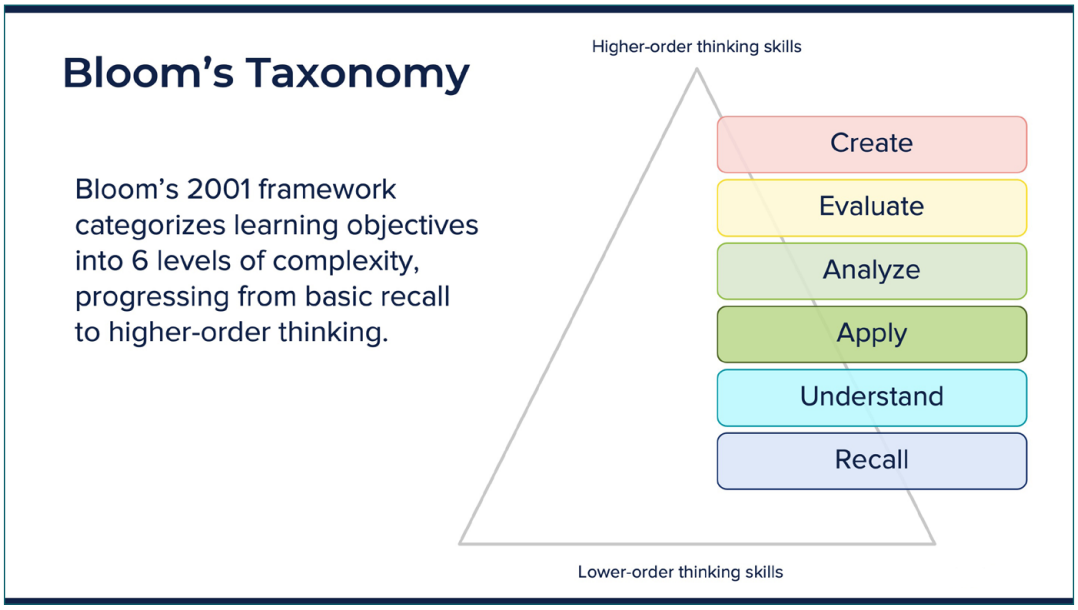


72 Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses* (Revised and updated ed.). Jossey-Bass.

A2 DRAFTING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Using ordered thinking helps define learning objectives.

Learning objectives guide curriculum design and assessment. Bloom's Taxonomy organizes learning into six progressive levels of thinking, from basic to complex: recall, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and creation. It emphasizes that deeper learning comes from moving beyond recalling facts to applying knowledge in real-world situations, examining relationships, making informed judgments, and ultimately generating new ideas or solutions. This framework enables educators to design objectives and activities that foster higher order thinking and real-world competence.[73,74]



73 Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* Longman.

74 Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook I: Cognitive domain*. David McKay Company.

A3: SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CATALOGUE[75]

Online Development For All

Alongside the Leadership Unlocked department, the following self-development courses are available to book and access via the **Leadership Development MyLO catalog**:

- Accountability And Growth Mindset in Coaching
- Building Effective Teams
- Change Management
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Coaching, Mentoring and Supervision
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- Collaborative Relationships
- Communication Skills
- Conducting Training Needs Analysis
- Conflict Management
- Creating a Coaching Culture
- Dare to Disagree
- Difficult Conversations
- Difficult Conversations and Conflict Management
- Effective Decision Making
- Emotional Intelligence
- FLMDP
- Gathering and Analysing Information and Written Communication Skills
- How to Have an Honest Conversation
- Hybrid Working
- Managing Change and Continuous Improvement
- Mentoring
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) - When are they needed
- Performance Management
- Performance Reviews
- Personal Productivity Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Recognising a Skill vs Will Performance Issue
- Remote Working
- Supervision
- The Power of Storytelling
- The Scrum Methodology Time Management
- Unconscious Bias
- Understanding Leadership
- Understanding Ourselves and Connecting with Others
- Understanding Self and Others (Insights Discovery)

75 Scottish Prison Service. (2025). *Scottish Prison Service College prospectus 2025/26* [Prospectus].

Morgan Philbin, PhD
Megan Lynch, MS
Sam Prawer, JD
Cyrus Ahalt, MPP
Brie Williams, MD, MS

www.amend.us