

Department of Corrections: Citizen's Academy

Building Public Trust & Understanding Through Proactive Community Engagement

Project Team: Amanda Blissett, Heather Davenport, Lisa Dierking, Stephen Hall, Alison Notter, Laura Wilmesher

96%

Approximately 12,000 Missourians return to local communities every year

2400+

Second-chance employer network supporting successful reentry.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Missouri communities need clear, accessible, and proactive education about how the Department of Corrections (DOC) supports public safety through rehabilitation and reentry to build trust and understanding by 2030.

RATIONALE

While DOC provides information on its website, passive communication is not sufficient to build trust—particularly in communities with limited exposure to the criminal justice system. DOC has driven an internal culture transformation across facilities over the last decade. Continuing this momentum into communities will ensure safety and ease concern, as **96% of all incarcerated Missourians eventually return to local communities.**¹

EXISTING CORE INITIATIVES

Vocational & Academic Training

- **Vocational:** 21 industries operating on a working capital revolving fund with zero tax dollars from general revenue.²
- **Academic:** HiSET, Associate's, and Bachelor's degree programs in partnership with 5 universities.

2013 RAND Study: Participants in correctional education programs had **43% lower odds of recidivism** compared to non-participants.³

Reentry & Transition Centers

Every state prison houses a Reentry Center offering assistance with housing, employment, essential IDs, government benefits, and medical services.⁴

State & Local Partnerships

- **State Agencies:** Partnerships with 10 state departments (including DHEWD, DSS, DED).⁵
- **Local Orgs:** Humane Societies (*Puppies for Parole*), faith organizations for volunteers, and 2,400+ second-chance employers.⁶

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Social Media Campaign

QUICK WIN • LOW COST

A low-cost, high-yield campaign highlighting positive initiatives and humanizing stories to emphasize residents' personhood.

- Can be produced in-house using existing facility AV equipment with residents at the helm, or with a marketing firm for expanded reach.
- Focus on rehabilitation & programs, rather than purely recruitment.

2. Locally Focused Speaker Series

TOWN HALL DIALOGUE

Local town hall meetings hosted at neutral, accessible venues.

- Allows community members to learn, ask questions, and foster mutual understanding.
- Address family supports, reentry services, and feature former residents sharing their lived experiences.
- Promote events effectively via the unified social media campaign.

3. Citizen's Academy

DEEP IMMERSION

Multi-session immersive academies held in partnership with local civic groups (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus).

- Deep-dive curriculum covering DOC initiatives paired with facility tours.
- Can fulfill ethics or continuing education credentials for social workers and other professionals.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Corrections maintains many impactful initiatives across its facilities. To build genuine community trust, DOC must transition from passive communication to strategic, proactive outreach on the advent of **Reentry 2030**.