

FREE TO WORK

Each year, approximately 10,000 people are released from South Carolina prisons. Research shows that individuals who have employable skills or a job waiting for them are significantly more likely to succeed outside of prison.

Under the direction of [Gov. Nikki Haley's office](#), [S.C. Department of Corrections \(SCDC\)](#) and the [S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce \(DEW\)](#) created several initiatives to help returning citizens learn a skill and understand how to successfully search for a job. By helping individuals prepare for employment, they gain confidence, purpose and direction, reducing the recidivism rate. In order to participate in many of these programs, specific requirements must be met by the participant, including a disciplinary-free record and non-violent offenses for incarceration.

Each year, approximately 10,000 people are released from South Carolina prisons. Participating in a pre-release work program reduces the rate in which individuals return to prison.

Education

SCDC offers several academic programs to help participants complete an appropriate level of education – a necessary step toward employment – including:

- [High school education and GED adult education certification](#)
- Associates Degree in divinity services
- [Special education](#)
- [Self-Paced in Class Education \(SPICE\)](#)
- [WorkKeys® Testing](#)

Skills Training

Inmates can learn and refine skills while serving their time by practicing a vocation which gives them something tangible to offer a potential employer. Some of the vocational programs include:

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|---------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| • Auto body | • Construction | • Office Skills |
| • Auto Mechanics | • Equipment Operator | • Plumbing |
| • Barbering | • Electrical | • Small Engine Repair |
| • Carpentry | • Horticulture | • Upholstery |
| • Construction Engineering Management | • HVAC | • Welding |
| | • Masonry | |

“We are proud of the rehabilitative work taking place behind the wire and thankful for the businesses and organizations that help these individuals succeed once they return to the community.”

-Bryan Stirling, Director, S.C. Department of Corrections

“The goal is that everyone who leaves the fence has a job.”
-Gov. Nikki Haley

“They are learning life-long skills that will provide them with new and exciting opportunities allowing them to provide for their families and, equally important, keeping them from returning to prison.”

-Cheryl Stanton, Executive Director, S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce

Simulated Employment

The opportunity to simulate a workplace environment allows participants to learn crucial soft skills as well as critical skills, making them even better employees once released. Some of the simulated employment opportunities include:

Apprenticeship Programs

SCDC has been certified as an apprenticeship site in South Carolina. Apprentices must reach 2,000 hours of job-specific training.

Division of Industries

Division of Industries employs and trains inmates returning to society with skills that will allow them to be productive citizens. There are three programs within the Division of Industries:

Traditional

Manufacturing of goods such as desks, book cases, signs, etc. that are sold to government offices, school districts and nonprofit organizations.

Service

Rebuilding and reupholstering furniture and other textile recycling projects, the planting of tree seedlings for the public and private sector, and license plate manufacturing for the state.

Prison Industry Enhancement

Placing inmates in realistic work environments, pays prevailing wages and gives them a chance to develop marketable skills that will increase their potential for rehabilitation and meaningful employment on release.

Employment Preparation

In addition to preparing ex-offenders with a skill set, DEW and SCDC began to collaborate on ways to help individuals close the gap between learning a skill and finding a job. From effectively explaining skills on a resume or job application to learning the value of dressing and speaking professionally to effectively communicating circumstances to potential employers, it was clear that training was needed to ensure individuals returned to society with the knowledge to help them find employment.

Second Chance Initiative

Started as a pilot project in a Columbia facility, the Second Chance program is expanding to additional facilities. Through this initiative, DEW provides a full-time employee, training and materials to assist returning citizens in work-skills training. Ninety days prior to release, ex-offenders are taught employment and soft skills in class for one hour each day. During the last 30 days, participants work directly with a DEW counselor to become registered in the SC Works system, craft a resume and apply for jobs online once released. The skills they learn through the Second Chance Initiative help leverage the skills they've acquired through the work programs.

Inmate Closet

SCDC provides suits and dress clothes to returning citizens to ensure they are prepared for interviews and work opportunities immediately upon release.

Job Fairs

As part of the Second Chance Initiative, behind-the-fence job fairs are conducted where ex-offender friendly businesses come on-site to discuss employment opportunities and make hiring decisions.

Employment Tools

All returning citizens are given an overview of the SC Works online system, as well as contact information for the SC Works center closest to their return destination.

Participants in the Second Chance Initiative receive a folder at the time of release that includes a Federal Bonding letter, several copies of their resume, a letter of explanation that outlines their personal situation, information on the SC Works centers across the state and a case manager from their local SC Works center, and any other information or available resources relevant to that individual. Other tools available to returning citizens include:

Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

Hiring returning citizens helps businesses receive a tax credit. This federally funded program, administered by DEW, provides employers with a 40 percent tax credit on eligible employees' first year of wages after they have worked 400 hours.

The Federal Bonding Program

This free-of-charge insurance policy provides Fidelity Bonding insurance coverage for high-risk workers. While many individuals just need a second chance to prove themselves, this policy protects businesses in case of loss of money or property due to worker dishonesty.