

Rhode Island Department of Corrections



Correctional Officer Applicant Success Guide

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1. **Becoming a Correctional Officer** - If you are interested in becoming a Correctional Officer, there are some basic minimum requirements you must meet before entering the screening process.
 - Must be at least 18 years of age
 - Must be a high school graduate or have a General Equivalency Diploma (GED)
 - Must possess a valid photo identification card
 - Must possess a valid social security card or alien registration card
 - Must not have any felony or domestic violence convictions
 - Must not have any misdemeanor convictions within three years of the application date
 - No use of illegal drugs (must pass a drug screening test)
 - Must be fluent in English
2. **Correctional Officer Job Specifications** - To be responsible for safeguarding the custody and well-being of inmates confined at the Adult Correctional Institution; to supervise their conduct and to maintain order and discipline among them; to carry out plans for their training and rehabilitation; and to do related work as required.

SUPERVISION RECEIVED: Works under the general supervision of a superior officer from whom are received general and specific orders, instructions and assignments; work is reviewed by frequent inspections for effectiveness and conformance to institutional policies, rules and regulations.

SUPERVISION EXERCISED: Supervises the work and training of inmates.

EXAMPLES OF WORK PERFORMED:

- Safeguard the custody and well-being of inmates confined in a State Correctional Institution.
- Supervise the conduct of and maintains order and discipline among inmates.
- Assist inmates on matters pertaining to their adjustment to institutional conditions and to assist them in their personal, emotional and adjustment problems or to direct them to the proper persons for guidance. To carry out plans for the training and rehabilitation of inmates.
- Operate devices for locking and unlocking security doors, cells and close custody facilities and to be accountable for all keys used for these purposes.
- Make regular and irregular inmate counts and to make reports thereon to a superior officer.
- Carry firearms in the performance of outer perimeter security duty and emergency assignments.
- Maintain proficiency in the use, care and operation of firearms.
- Responsible for strict control over rifles, tools and other items, which are hazardous from the custodial standpoint.
- Exercise constant vigilance to observe any unusual activities or movements of individuals or groups indicative of attempted escape and riot, strike or minor irregularities and to report same to a superior.
- Inspect inmate quarters to see that they are in sanitary and orderly condition.
- Directly supervise inmates in housing units, in recreational fields and assembly areas, as required by the duties of the post to which assigned.
- Search inmates and living quarters for the detection of pilferage and to prevent the possession of contraband.
- Conduct orientation training for newly committed inmates
- Complete related work as required.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT:

KNOWLEDGES, SKILLS AND CAPACITIES:

The ability to...

- Acquire knowledge of the practices, methods and techniques of adult correctional and custodial work
- Safeguard and supervise inmates and to maintain discipline
- Cooperate and work with other employees engaged in carrying out plans for the rehabilitation of inmates
- Meet and deal effectively with others in resolving problems related to assigned functions
- Observe the attitude and mental, physical and other reactions of inmates
- Use firearms and related capacities and abilities.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:

Education: Graduation from a senior high school; and

Experience: Employment in private or public work involving the supervision of others and the enforcement of rules and regulations.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENT: The following conditions of employment must be met at time of appointment: Successful completion of the twelve-week correctional officer training program. Must be capable of performing (with or without reasonable accommodations) the essential duties as evidenced by a physician's certificate from a physician designated by the Department of Corrections. In accordance with RIGL 42-28.3-1, no person shall be appointed temporary, probationary, or permanent until they shall have been evaluated and tested by a certified psychologist and receive a satisfactory rating which shall be in writing.

No such appointee shall be given a permanent appointment to a position within this class unless he/she shall have met all of the above requirements. "Every effort will be made to reasonably accommodate an individual who has a disability. Therefore, nothing in this specification shall be interpreted to prohibit the use of such accommodation in order to perform the essential functions of this class."

3. The Selection Process

- Complete Correctional Officer candidate applications** (both preliminary and supplemental)
- Physical Agility Test** - See information contained within this document.
- (BCI/NCIC) records check** – Conducted by the Rhode Island Department of Corrections Records and Identification Section.
- Written Examination** - Applicants must successfully complete a written examination, which measures interpersonal skills and cognitive reasoning. The examination is designed, prepared, and scored by an independent, professional research company.
- Background Investigation** - Applicants will then undergo an extensive background investigation conducted by a member of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections regarding their past employment record, education, criminal history, consumer credit history, community reputation, military service, and overall character.
- Oral Interview Panel** – Applicants that successfully pass the physical agility assessment, written examination, and background investigation will appear before a structured oral interview board. The structured oral interview consists of a series of questions administered by departmental members and conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Applicants receive ratings for each question posed. Additionally, applicants will be evaluated on oral communication,

interpersonal skills, effectiveness under stress as well as appearance and demeanor. See information contained within this document.

- g. **Psychological Assessment** - Applicants deemed eligible to continue in the process are administered a written psychological examination, along with a follow-up interview by a licensed psychologist. All evaluations are interpreted by a licensed psychologist retained by the Department of Corrections.
- h. **Medical screening, including drug screen** - Applicants deemed eligible to continue in the process must pass a complete medical examination and be found medically qualified by a physician designated by the Rhode Island Department of Corrections.
- i. **Conditional Offer of Employment** - Applicants who have successfully completed all phases of the selection process will receive a Conditional Offer of Employment as either a candidate or alternate candidate to participate in the Rhode Island Department of Corrections Training Academy.
- j. **Recruit Orientation Program** - The Recruit Orientation Program is a structured program required for all candidates/alternate candidates who have received Conditional Offers of Employment. This program will commence approximately two (2) weeks prior to the start of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections Training Academy.

The program will focus on preparing each candidate/alternate candidate for success in the Training Academy. A final Physical Agility Pre-Academy Assessment will be conducted during the Orientation Program. Any candidate that fails this assessment shall be dismissed from the Academy and their Conditional Offer of Employment shall be rescinded. Candidates/alternate candidates will be provided with information and instruction to assist them in general readiness to attend the Training Academy and familiarization to the Department of Corrections facilities.

Candidates/alternate candidates are required to attend all sessions. Any candidate/alternate candidate who fails to attend the mandatory sessions and/or fails the physical assessment test will have his/her Conditional Offer of Employment revoked resulting in removal from the selection process.

- k. Complete twelve-week, non-residential pre-service Training Academy.
4. **Tips for Excelling on the Exam** - To ensure that you score as well as you can, there are a few tips you should consider prior to taking an exam. They include:
- a. **Prepare yourself:**
 - Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam.
 - Eat a good breakfast, lunch or dinner before coming to the exam site.
 - Minimize distractions by insuring that you allot sufficient time to travel to the exam site, and you know exactly where to go for the exam.
 - b. **Understand the following about the Exams:** The exams require NO previous knowledge about the correctional officer job or the Rhode Island Department of Corrections.
 1. The exams are designed to measure your aptitude to succeed as a correctional officer.
 2. If you are not sure about the right answer to a question, make your best guess. If you leave an answer blank, it will be automatically marked wrong.

3. When you make an educated guess about an answer to a question, your first response is usually best. Going back over the question and changing the answer does not generally improve your score.

c. **Relax and do your best.**

If you still have questions about the exam, the twelve-week program or working in a correctional facility, consider coming to one of the Academy sponsored information sessions detailed in this guide. **BEST OF LUCK!**

5. Physical Agility Testing Requirements (Entrance)

The Rhode Island Department of Correction's Training Academy has designed a rigorous training regime, administered daily throughout the academy that challenges candidates to significantly improve their overall physical condition. Candidates should be in the best physical fitness at all times, as it is a requirement from the day they start their training at the Training Academy as they train through many different types of conditions that they must endure and be able to sustain. Conditioning and training takes strong commitment and dedication on the candidates' part and is necessary because they must be able to cope with dramatic increases in heart rates due to stress or physical exertion and later, as their way of survival in the profession they have chosen.

The information provided is designed to assist anyone who wants to improve their fitness in order to successfully pass the Departments Physical Fitness Test and succeed in the Training Academy and/or process. This information is about the type of training required to properly prepare for the rigors of the Academy and it offers tips that should help a person with average fitness prepare for training and avoid injury.

The Physical Fitness Test measures muscular strength and endurance (sit-ups and push-ups), and aerobic power (300 meter run and 1.5-mile run). To best prepare, applicants should adhere to the tips and guidance of exercise training to maximize their results and to avoid injuries. Listed below are some key points regarding the requirements of the position and the physical agility testing standards.

The physical training within the Training Academy prepares candidates for demanding positions with safety and security responsibilities. Job duties are carried out under dangerous conditions in which officers must be able to defend themselves and others. Correctional officers must be proficient in the use of various types of firearms and be physically capable of controlling those persons in their custody even when the officer is unarmed and outsized. Further, Correctional officers may be required to perform at a consistently high level for extensive periods of time.

Successful completion of the physical agility test ensures that all candidates are at a minimally acceptable level of physical fitness to meet the physical demands of mandatory training and the performance of job duties.

General Information

- Physically condition yourself to perform these tests
- Avoid heavy physical exercise (48) forty-eight hours prior to testing
- Refrain from smoking and drinking caffeine on the test day
- Do not eat a large meal within (2) two hours of testing
- Tests are performed in this order:
 - Sit-ups
 - 300-meter run
 - Push-ups
 - 1.5-mile run

Note: You will be given at least a (15) minute rest period between each event.

- *You must obtain a passing score in all four events. Failure in one event results in your removal from the selection process.*

This test is administered prior to your entry into the twelve-week pre-service program. The Cooper Institute Standards are initially tested at the 40th percentile. A correctional officer must be able to respond to a variety of physically demanding activities requiring physical strength and endurance. To insure you can successfully complete the rigorous twelve-week pre-service training program as well as perform your duties once you graduate from the Academy, you will be required to meet the physical agility requirements detailed on the charts below:

MALE – 40th Percentile				
Assessment Battery	Age 18-29	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59
1-minute push-up	29	24	18	13
1-minute sit-up	38	35	29	24
300 Meter Run (sec)	59	59	72	83
1.5-mile run (min)	12:38	13:04	13:49	15:03

FEMALE – 40th Percentile				
Assessment Battery	Age 18-29	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59
1-minute push-up	15	11	9	7
1-minute Sit-up	32	25	20	14
300 Meter Run (sec)	71	79	94	N/A
1.5-mile run (min)	14:50	15:38	16:21	18:07

Physical Fitness Test

- **Sit Ups** - This is a measure of the muscular endurance of the applicant's abdominal and hip flexor muscles. Applicants must lie on their backs, knees bent, with fingers interlocked behind their head, heels flat on the floor. Another applicant will hold their feet down. The applicant's heels will be approximately the distance between the applicant's outstretched thumb and small finger from the buttocks. From the "down or starting" position on their back, the applicant will raise their upper body, fingers interlocked behind their head, and touch their elbows to their knees at the "up" ending position. This will be recorded as one (1) correct sit-up. Applicants will then lower themselves until their shoulder blades touch the mat. Applicants may rest only in the "up" position. The applicant score will be the total number of correct sit-ups completed in one (1) minute.
- **300 Meter Run** - This is a measure of the applicant's anaerobic power capacity. Applicants will run 300 meters at a maximal level of effort. Time used to complete the distance will be recorded in seconds.
- **Push-Ups** - This is a measure of the applicant's muscular endurance of the upper body (anterior deltoids, the pectorals and triceps). The applicant's hands are placed slightly wider than shoulder width apart, with fingers pointed forward. The administrator of the event will place one (1) sponge on the floor below the applicant's chest. Starting from the "up" position (elbows extended), the applicant must keep their back straight always and lower their body to the floor until their chest touches the sponge. The applicant then

returns to the "up" position. This is recorded as one (1) correct push-up. Resting should be done only in the "up" position. The total number of push-ups with correct form completed in one (1) minute is recorded as the score.

- **1.5 Mile Run** - This test is used to measure the efficiency of the cardiovascular system and how it responds to imposed physical demand. The applicant must run or jog 1.5 miles in the shortest time possible. All scores are individually recorded.
6. **Oral Interview Panel Preparation** - This information is being provided to help prepare you for Rhode Island Department of Corrections oral interview. Be sure to read through this information carefully. By understanding what to expect during the process, you will be more self-confident; self-confidence, in turn, will increase your chances of performing well during the assessment.

The Oral Interview - The oral interview consists of a series of questions that will assess the skills and abilities necessary to perform the duties as a Correctional Officer within the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. These questions may range from hypothetical scenarios to specific questions about how you tend to deal with situations. Your answers will be evaluated by a panel of staff members. During the oral interview, a panel member will read a question aloud to you. If you don't understand the question or need it repeated, you'll need to ask for it to be repeated. The panel members cannot explain the question or provide a portion of the question. They will be required to read the question in its entirety. After you have completed all interview questions and left the room, the panel will discuss your performance and provide a rating for each question.

Panel Members - Your performance during the interview process will be evaluated by a panel of staff members, who are acquainted with the essential duties, skills and abilities of a Correctional Officer. All members underwent a training seminar before participating in the oral interview process. You can therefore be confident that these panel members will be fair and competent judges of your abilities.

Areas of Measurement - The oral interview is designed to assess the most critical job-related skills and abilities. Some of the dimensions that may be assessed in the oral assessment include the following: interpersonal skills, teamwork, judgment, problem-solving, integrity, community orientation, stress tolerance, information obtained through your background investigation, and flexibility. Although some questions will require you to respond to hypothetical scenarios, at no time will you be assessed on your knowledge of department procedures, or any other specific job knowledge.

Preparation - Here are a few steps you can take to prepare for the structured oral interview:

- Practice listening to scenario-based questions with multiple parts and record yourself answering the question. Review the recordings and assess your performance accordingly.
- Watch yourself practice your responses in the mirror. Identify any distracting mannerisms and try to correct and/or bring them under control.

Typical questions asked by the panel are listed below:

1. Why do you want to be a Correctional Officer?
2. What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses?
3. What did you think of the Facility Tour?

The above questions allow the panel to gauge an applicant's personal characteristics, oral communication skills, and the ability to respond decisively and effectively to situations. The panel will develop questions based on the applicant's background investigation and criminal records check. All applicants are encouraged to be honest and forthright throughout the entire screening process. Applicants that do not honestly answer the panel's questions or do not fully disclose information and details regarding their work history, criminal record or issues contained in their background will not pass the final board.

Suggestions for Responding to the Oral Interview Questions

- Familiarize yourself with the roles and responsibilities of the position. This will help you learn as much as you can about the position and what will be expected of you. You may be asked questions regarding how you will handle certain hypothetical situations that relate to the law enforcement profession. Therefore, it is important to understand what duties you will be responsible for on the job.
- Ask yourself the following questions: How will I handle problematic situations as a correctional officer? How will I communicate information to others? What do I know about important issues related to law enforcement? Where do I stand (and what justification do I have for my stance) on critical issues in the field?
- After listening to the oral assessment question, take some time to formulate an organized response. Do not be afraid to pause for a period to carefully consider your answer and to organize it in a way that is meaningful and that will ultimately make sense to those individuals who are rating your response. The more organized and well thought out your answers, the more favorably they will be viewed by assessors.
- Answer the question as it is asked. It is common for candidates to answer a question other than the one posed. Oral interviews are stressful, and it is not uncommon for a candidate to misunderstand or misinterpret the question and then provide an answer that is completely off-base. Be sure to listen carefully to the question and provide an answer for that specific question. Do not go outside the bounds of the question or ramble on about unrelated issues.
- Provide a complete response to each question. It is common for a candidate to answer a question and repeat the same answer over and over. Offer an answer that is complete but do not reiterate your response multiple times. Keep your answer concise but ensure that you provide a comprehensive response to the question that is posed.
- Ensure that you answer each question fully within the time limit.
- Speak clearly. Oral communication skills are obviously paramount. Oral communication is usually rated independently of your answers to the individual questions. Thus, if you communicate poorly, the assessors will not penalize you on your answers to each question. That said, the rating of oral communication and presentation is an important element of the overall oral interview process. Convey a professional demeanor by speaking clearly and demonstrating good posture and appearance. Good communication skills will only accentuate your response to a question.
- Provide an honest answer to each question and be yourself throughout the interview.
- After a question is read, a stopwatch may be started. Thus, you will have a certain, predetermined time in which to respond to a question.
- In many cases, you will not be allowed to ask for clarification regarding a question, and the assessors will usually not ask you to clarify an answer that is incomplete or confusing. Therefore, you must be prepared to answer the questions to the best of your ability with only the information given to you in the question.

Assessment-Day Instructions and Tips - The following are instructions and advice that will help you on the day of the assessment:

- Be on time for the interview. Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the site as this will give you one less thing to worry about.
- Do not bring cellular phones into the interview. They will only distract you.
- Bring photo identification.
- Dispose of any gum, candy or mints. You do not want this to interfere with your speech or cause an unnecessary distraction.
- Dress and prepare appropriately for this opportunity. Treat it as you would a formal job interview.
- It is natural to be nervous. Be sure to keep a positive attitude and an open mind as you progress through the interview, so assessors can see you perform to the best of your ability.

Security/Integrity Issues - You will be competing with several other candidates for the position. Any information you divulge about the structure of the assessment, specific questions or otherwise will provide another candidate with an unfair advantage—in addition, this may be a violation of policy. Keep the content and structure of the oral assessment confidential. By participating in this process, you implicitly agree not to divulge information about the nature of the questions nor the way they are administered. A panel of four or five diverse members of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections conducts this interview. The Director or his/her designee chairs the interview panel. Before each applicant is interviewed they are required to tour a secure facility, which will become a topic of questioning during the final interview.

7. **Grooming/Personal Appearance:** The U.S. Department of Labor has conducted extensive research in employment interviewing and they have concluded that:
 - a. A well-groomed professional appearance by job applicants, helps them to make a positive impact on interview panels.
 - b. A confident demeanor and complete honesty always helps the applicant.

8. **Resources** - There are a variety of publications, available at your local bookstore, public library or by searching the Internet, which can further assist in your preparations for the entrance examinations and job interviews. Partial lists of these publications/websites are detailed below:

Written Examination Preparation

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date</u>
Correctional Officer Examination Preparation Book	Norman Hall	Adam Media Corp	2005
Barron’s Correction Officer Exam	Donald Schroeder	Barrows Educational Series	2014
Master The Corrections Officer Exam	Peterson’s	Petersons	2010

Interview Skill Website Reference

Correction Officer Interview Questions www.mockquestions.com

9. **Academy Sponsored Information Sessions** - After reviewing this guide, you may still have questions about the application process, examinations, the pre-service training program or working as a correctional officer. To address these questions, the Training Academy is offering informational sessions throughout the application period. The information sessions, which will be held at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections Training Academy, will include the following:
 - a. Mission of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections
 - b. Corrections Philosophy
 - c. Correctional Officer’s Duties
 - d. The Application Process
 - e. Written examination
 - f. Physical Agility Test

Any applicant who fails to successfully complete the applicant selection process is encouraged to reapply for future Rhode Island Department of Corrections Recruit classes.