
Policy Number: 205.120
Title: Work Release Program
Effective Date: 10/15/2025

PURPOSE: To provide a structured transitional release program that allows incarcerated adults who have served at least half of their incarceration time to reside in work release facilities or other approved programs/residences in the community during their final year of incarceration. Approved adults may work at paid employment, seek employment, or be enrolled in vocational programming or educational programs under the supervision of the work release unit while continuing to serve their terms of imprisonment.

APPLICABILITY: Incarcerated adults; adult facilities; work release unit; work release facilities.

DEFINITIONS:

Approved programs/residences - applicable programs or residences approved by the work release director.

Work release facilities - local law enforcement facilities and residential community corrections facilities, that have been approved by either the department's licensing and inspection unit or are under a Minnesota Department of Human Services or Minnesota Department of Health licensing rule, that the department contracts with to provide housing and programming for offenders in the work release program.

PROCEDURES:

A. Work release program management

The work release program is managed by the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) Work Release Unit, which:

1. Administers contracts with work release facilities to house and provide programming for participants;
2. Establishes program guidelines for work release facilities;
3. Screens potential participants, and reviews and approves applications from those who wish to participate in the program; and
4. Oversees the supervision of participants accepted into the program.

B. Work release criteria

1. To be eligible to apply, applicants must:
 - a) Have served at least one-half of their incarceration time;
 - b) Have no more than 18 months remaining until release;

- c) Have a Minnesota Screening Tool Assessment Recidivism Risk (MNSTARR) score of high, medium, or low risk; or
 - d) Be currently classified at a medium or minimum-security.
2. Eligibility considerations
- Work release unit staff consider the following factors when reviewing applications to determine potential candidates for this structured transitional release program:
- a) Case review, self-reported assessment recommendations, and completion of required programs, including substance use disorder treatment directives;
 - b) Progress toward literacy mandates and education goals;
 - c) Participation in cognitive-behavioral classes and self-improvement opportunities; and
 - d) Work history prior to confinement and participation in institution work assignment.
3. Exclusionary criteria
- Incarcerate people are not eligible for the program if any of the following exclusionary criteria apply:
- a) Exclusions for institution discipline history
 - (1) Have received discipline resulting in restrictive housing, segregation, or extended incarceration time within the last six months;
 - (2) Have a pending, suspended, or active discipline penalty.
 - (3) Have a pending discipline report.
 - b) Exclusions for other court or criminal-justice obligations
 - (1) Have a detainer or are wanted by another jurisdiction;
 - (2) Have a current sentence from a state other than Minnesota or from a federal jurisdiction;
 - (3) Are serving a sentence under a statute that prevents early release;
 - (4) Are planning to apply, or have applied, for interstate supervision;
 - (5) Committed a new criminal offense while on an early release program during this incarceration;
 - (6) Have engaged in escape-related conduct within the last five years, including such examples as: escape from custody, absconding from non-custody placement, or absconding while on bail; or
 - (7) Have committed multiple person offenses against the same victim, including, for example, violation of protection orders, and are assessed as medium or higher risk.
 - c) Other exclusionary criteria

- (1) Have victim impact or community notification requirements, or significant victim or community safety related concerns;
- (2) Have a community notification level assigned or requires an end of confinement review committee (ECRC) review;
- (3) Has health-related limitations that affect ability to sustain full-time employment and/or vocational programming;
- (4) Have fewer than 60 days remaining to participate in work release; or
- (5) Have been denied transitional release status by the work release unit, facility case review, a work release facility, or the hearings and release unit (HRU).

C. Procedures for approving participation

1. Application

Interested and eligible applicants must complete a work release application (available on the work release intranet site) and mail it to the work release unit through U.S. Mail.

2. Screening

A work release agent screens each application and the applicant's electronic file to determine eligibility and makes a recommendation to the work release director.

3. Victim Services & Restorative Justice (VSRJ) Notification

When an applicant is serving a sentence for a person-related crime, a work release agent notifies VSRJ of work release consideration.

4. Denial Notification

The work release unit notifies the applicant by letter if the application is denied. This letter and application are retained in the applicant's electronic file.

5. Acceptance Notification and Orientation

A work release agent conducts an orientation session with applicants who are conditionally approved for work release status to explain the expectations, requirements of the program, and available placement options. At the orientation session, the agent provides the applicant with an approval notification letter. The applicant signs the notification letter, and the agent retains the signed copy in the applicant's electronic file along with the application.

5. Referral to MINNCOR Bridge Program or other community-based employment programs

Applicants may be referred to the MINNCOR bridge program or other community-based employment programs prior to securing independent employment, in order to support accountability and facilitate an accessible transition to work release. Those referred typically lack previous employment or institution work history, have served extended periods of incarceration, or possess extensive criminal histories. Those appearing before the supervised release board may be considered for the bridge program as part of the step-down process. Applicants may also choose to participate in these programs voluntarily.

6. Referral to work release facility
The work release unit refers the application to one of the contracted work release facilities for placement and retains the referral packet in the applicant's electronic file. The facility may accept or reject an applicant for placement.
7. Program review team approval
Once a work release facility approves the placement, the applicant's caseworker prepares a work-release plan in the correctional operation management system (COMS) and submits it to HRU.
8. Authorization of work release status
Once the work release facility approves the placement, the applicant's facility caseworker prepares a release plan in the correctional operation management system (COMS). The caseworker then submits the proposed placement and conditions of release for work release supervision to the HRU for authorization. Once HRU staff approve, the work release approval is complete.
9. Transport to work release facility
Participants must be transported to the assigned work release facility and remain there until they are transferred to supervised release or to another approved residence or program.
 - a) The assigned work release facility must contact the correctional facility to arrange transportation for the participant to the work release facility.
 - b) On the day of transfer to work release status, the participant must sign the work release agreement and conditions of work release (see Policy 106.112, "Approval and Modification of Release Plans").
10. Electronic surveillance
Participants in this program are subject to electronic surveillance, as determined by the work release unit. This includes such examples as participants who:
 - a) Have more than eight months to serve in the program;
 - b) Have a MnSTARR score of high risk or have articulable transition concerns; or
 - c) Are participating while at approved programs/residences other than work release facilities.
11. Termination from the work release program
The work release director may rescind a participant's work release status at any time if new information is discovered that makes the participant ineligible. This may include, but is not limited to criminal court or records information, or any medical condition that prevents continued employment or full participation in the programming at the work release facility.
12. Records of application

Work release unit staff, caseworkers, and sentence administration unit staff retain signed applications, approval and denial letters, conditions of work release, and program completion or termination reports in applicants' electronic files; and case review reports, case notes, discipline records, and custody status and sentence administration information in ODocS.

D. Rules for incarcerated people on work release status

1. All participants on work release status must:

- a) Reside in a work release facility or other approved program/residence;
- b) Fully participate in and successfully complete the program;
- c) Adhere to all rules and regulations of the work release facility in which they reside; and
- d) Adhere to all rules included in their individual work release agreement.

2. Consequences for rule violations

Participants who violate any of the rules of their supervision are subject to:

- a) Having the rules of their supervision restructured and additional rules imposed;
- b) Revocation of their work release status;
- c) Imposition of extended incarceration time under the Incarcerated Person Discipline Rules (303.010l); and
- d) Prosecution for escape under Minn. Stat. § 609.485.

E. Financial Obligations

1. Work release requires participants to pay a portion of any net pay while on work release status toward room and board. Room and board charges are the responsibility of the participant and taken directly from money generated by employment or income while on work release status. Payments are not accepted by a third party on behalf of participants.
2. When participants complete or are terminated from work release, no future earnings are applied toward outstanding room and board obligations.
3. The office of financial management (OFM) processes funds for work release participants according to Policy 300.100, "Incarcerated Person Accounts."
4. Prior to closing out a participant's work release account, gate money can be applied toward outstanding obligations, if the participant's gate balance is more than \$100.
5. Any outstanding financial obligations will remain open on a participant's account as a facility obligation. This amount will be recouped if a participant returns to a correctional facility.

STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY SECURITY AUDIT STANDARDS: None

INTERNAL CONTROLS:

- A. The signed work release approval or denial letter, release agreements, work release conditions, and completion and termination reports are retained in the participant's electronic file.
- B. Case notes, case review reports, discipline records, custody status, and sentence administration are recorded and retained in ODocS.

REFERENCES: Minn. Stat. §§ [241.26](#); [244.065](#); [609.485](#)
[Policy 106.112, "Approval and Modification of Release Plans"](#)
[Policy 300.100, "Incarcerated Person/Resident Accounts"](#)
[Policy 303.010, "Incarcerated Individual Discipline"](#)

REPLACES: Policy 205.120, "Work Release," 07/07/20
All facility policies, memos or other communications whether verbal, written, or transmitted by electronic means regarding this topic.

ATTACHMENTS: [Work Release Application](#) (205.120A)
[Work Release Program Manual for Incarcerated People](#) (205.120B)
[Incarcerated Individual Discipline Rules](#) (303.010I)

APPROVALS:

Commissioner of Corrections