

**2008 Innovations Awards Program**  
**APPLICATION**

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 08-M-17MN

**Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:**

State: Minnesota

Assign Program Category (applicant): Corrections, Reentry (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name  
EMPLOY
2. Administering Agency  
Minnesota Department of Corrections/MINNCOR Industries
3. Contact Person (Name and Title)  
Brenda Chandler, Administrative Director
4. Address  
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9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.  
MINNCOR's EMPLOY program focuses on reducing offender recidivism by helping participants capitalize on work skills learned while incarcerated. EMPLOY provides one-on-one and small group work readiness and soft skill instruction; job search training; job retention assistance; and trade-specific job leads to help offenders find, gain, and retain employment upon release. EMPLOY reduces recidivism and enhances public safety.
10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008 to be considered.

EMPLOY has been operational since July 2006.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

MINNCOR Industries, the Department of Corrections' correctional industry program, has provided work experience and skills to incarcerated offenders over but has never focused on helping inmates find employment upon release. Recidivism studies show that employed individuals are less likely to reoffend but finding employment can be more difficult for individuals with a felony record. EMPLOY's focus has been to connect with industry-specific employers that have a need for skilled laborers. Once connected to employers in the community, we can help inform them not only about the skills our offenders have but also to the barriers offenders face upon release, which will hopefully gradually increase the employment avenues for our released offenders. Many MINNCOR industry jobs require offenders to work on the same equipment / machinery that employers already have on the work floor.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

- ❑ EMPLOY staff market to inmates to inform them about the program through brochures, posters, a video, and facility presentations.
- ❑ Offenders must meet the following criteria and apply to the program:
  1. Employed by MINNCOR for at least six months within the last five years of their incarceration, ending any work assignment positively and not due to termination.
  2. Remain segregation-free during the last year of the offender's sentence.
  3. Complete a resume with the assistance of EMPLOY staff prior to release.
- ❑ Literature is sent to offenders upon acceptance into the program, then at one year and six months before release.
- ❑ Offenders meet with EMPLOY's job search coordinator prior to release to finalize their resume and receive individual job search assistance with job application completion, interviewing skills, answering the conviction question, job retention skills, etc.
- ❑ After release, offenders are sent a professionally prepared portfolio containing 25 copies of their resume, job search organizational tips, several job leads relevant to their skill, and community resource information.
- ❑ Follow-up / retention services are provided at one month, six months, and one year after release. Offenders are encouraged to contact EMPLOY staff for any job search needs that occur within one year of their release whether it's more job leads, resources needed, or obtained employment.
- ❑ EMPLOY staff continually market to and connect with employers to build mutually beneficial relationships. Because of this effort, released offenders are provided with possible job leads in their specific trade and county of residence while helping employers find skilled workers.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

EMPLOY provides an organized, methodical approach as well as tracking success of released offender employment. It also represents a proactive approach in having staff dedicated to community job developing, versus this effort being a collateral duty for supervising agents and transitions staff.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Program start-up costs mainly involved staffing costs (\$250,000); printing literature costs for marketing materials (\$5,000); video production for two videos (\$9,000), and training materials (\$1,000) = Total \$265,000

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Annual costs: \$400,000

16. How is the program funded?

MINNCOR Industries has been financially self-sufficient since fiscal year 2003. EMPLOY is fully funded by MINNCOR.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

The existence of the program did not require passage of legislation; however, there was legislation passed that allowed the Department of Corrections to obtain access to employment information of released offenders through the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Equipment used consists of various Microsoft software used for data collection, mainly in a database and/or spreadsheets. Presentation software is also used for multiple-group presentations for offenders, employers, and occasionally for internal staff and executives.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Although EMPLOY is unique in many ways, the original form of this program was modeled after the Wisconsin Department of Correction's Badger Industries Program.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Several other state correctional industries have implemented some type of employment reentry model in the interest of reducing recidivism and enhancing public safety. Some of the models include an employment portfolio, certification programs, and providing employment-related information and assistance upon release.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

Yes, the foundation of this program's services has been fully implemented. There is room for growth in terms of participant numbers, which could require more staff in the future. Also, small changes have been added along the way to improve services that offenders receive, but the foundation, general process, and basic targeted population have been determined and implemented.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

- As of 2/1/08, EMPLOY has had 263 participants since start up, of which 189 are still incarcerated. Twelve have been released for over one year and are still working. EMPLOY's success rate has been approximately 70% employment of released offenders compared to 40-45% of offenders who were not EMPLOY participants or MINNCOR workers.
- EMPLOY offers the opportunity to meet one-on-one with program staff to create a resume, practice interviewing skills, and work on the soft skills necessary in the job search process.
- EMPLOY provides offenders with the tools necessary to gain and maintain employment and prepare for release. EMPLOY also educates community employers about offender barriers and issues. Employers get involved and are willing to participate in offender transition from incarceration to living law-abiding lives in the community.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The program has grown with the number of staff involved and has expanded in services and instruction offered to offenders prior and post-release; an expanded marketing campaign to inform offenders about EMPLOY; and expanded marketing strategies focused on private companies in the community.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Funding could potentially be a problem for other states. Not all state correctional industry programs are financially self-sufficient.