

South Dakota Governor's Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force Tribal Communities Subcommittee

Discussion Questions – Integrated Narrative December 2025

1. What is DOC already offering?

Based on documentation from the **State Penitentiary Rehabilitation Task Force**, public records, and independent research, the South Dakota Department of Corrections (DOC) currently offers a wide range of **staff-led, DOC-funded, volunteer-led, and partner-supported services**, including several that specifically serve American Indian inmates.

Core DOC Offerings (All Inmates, Including American Indian Inmates)

Education (Staff-Led)

- General School Program with GED preparation
- Adult Basic Education and literacy classes
- Inmate tutor-supported instruction
- Library services with educational and reading resources

Treatment & Health Services

- Mental health counseling and therapeutic services
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment, including sex offender treatment
- Medical and dental services

Reentry Services

- SAFER Reentry Initiative: risk/needs assessments at intake, individualized case plans, pre-release planning, and reentry coordination
- Work and education credits tied to participation
- Transitional planning (with noted capacity constraints)

Work & Vocational Programs

- **South Dakota State Penitentiary (Sioux Falls):**
 - Pheasantland Industries: upholstery, printing, sign and decal shop, license plate manufacturing, book bindery, machine shop, Braille unit, garments, data entry
 - Institutional support jobs (food service, clerical, custodial, maintenance)
- **Mike Durfee State Prison (Springfield):**
 - Vocational trades: welding, auto body repair, automotive repair, horticulture
 - Governor's House / DakotaPlex Program (in partnership with SD Housing Development Authority)
 - Long-Distance Parenting Program

DOC-Funded Program Needing Revitalization

- **M-2 (Man-to-Man) Mentorship Program** — Established in 1972, funded by DOC but currently underutilized and in need of restructuring, particularly given reduced face-to-face visitation.

Volunteer-Led and Peer-Supported Programming (Major Strength)

South Dakota's correctional system benefits from an unusually **deep, long-standing volunteer base**—over 30 programs supported by volunteers, many with 7–25 years of service.

Native American / Cultural Programming

- **NACT (Native American Cultural Teaching)** — 25 years of service connecting Native inmates to cultural teachings, spirituality, and identity.

Leadership, Personal Development, and Peer Support

- Leaders of Tomorrow (LOT)
- Author of My Life (AOML)
- Claim Your Power (trauma- and ACEs-informed)
- Unified Program Leadership Council (UPLC): inmate-led, multi-program governance structure with DOC staff and volunteer participation
- Peer Mentors for crisis support

Conflict Resolution & Violence Prevention

- Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)
- Compassionate Outreach Group (interfaith)

American Indian–Specific Services (as reflected in public record)

- Cultural and spiritual programming access
- Tribal spiritual leader visits and ceremonies (policy-based, uneven in practice)
- Tribal parole/supervision partnerships (e.g., **Sisseton/Wahpeton Oyate**, 10+ years)
- Native-focused grant funding streams and subgrants
- Peer-to-peer mental health companion models

Key Gaps Identified

- **Significant disparity in vocational access** between Sioux Falls and Springfield
 - Limited consistency and scale of culturally specific programming
 - Services are **not well connected across all nine South Dakota reservations**
 - Overreliance on off-reservation reentry placements
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2. What are we doing right, and what could we improve?

What DOC Is Doing Right

- **Structured reentry continuum** beginning at intake (SAFER) reflects national best practice.
- **Successful tribal parole supervision model** (Sisseton/Wahpeton Oyate) demonstrates respectful, effective state–tribal partnership.
- **Robust volunteer ecosystem** delivering leadership, culture, faith, and violence prevention programming.
- **Peer-led models** (LOT, AOML, AVP, UPLC) that build internal capacity and leadership.
- **Grant-seeking and external partnerships** expanding SUD and reentry services.
- Recognition—at least in policy—of **cultural and spiritual needs** of Native inmates.

Where Improvement Is Needed

Access & Infrastructure

- SDSP operating at ~182% capacity in a 144-year-old facility
- Elimination of evening volunteer hours limits access for working inmates
- Frequent lockdowns disrupt programming
- Inadequate classroom and ceremonial space

Reentry & Continuity Gaps

- No standardized, DOC-wide reentry guide
- Case managers overwhelmed; reentry folders only recently initiated

- Five-year volunteer contact ban blocks critical post-release support
- Weak continuity onto reservations (transport, IDs, supervision MOUs)

Cultural Responsiveness

- Cultural programming allowed but not consistently accessible
- Limited Indigenous staffing, tribal liaisons, or peer reentry coaches
- Insufficient race- and tribe-disaggregated outcome data

Collaboration & Communication

- Facility coordinators operate in silos
- Volunteers lack structured input into policy changes
- Administration no longer regularly participates in volunteer meetings

Economic Self-Reliance (Beyond DOC Alone)

- Need stronger pipelines to tribal colleges, apprenticeships, and on-reservation employment
- DOC role should be supportive and collaborative, not directive

3. What are some “quick wins” to propose and adopt?

Immediate, Low-Cost / No-Cost Actions (December-Ready)

- 1. Designate the Sisseton/Wahpeton Oyate parole program as a flagship model**
 - Compile outcomes and create a replication framework for other tribes.
- 2. Restore evening volunteer hours**
 - Immediate expansion of access; zero fiscal impact.
- 3. Adopt a standardized DOC reentry checklist**
 - Pilot already supported at SDSP; formal adoption standardizes preparation.
- 4. Approve pending AVP workshops**
 - Delays directly correlate with preventable violence.
- 5. Formally recognize the Unified Program Leadership Council (UPLC)**
 - Ready-made partner for program coordination and policy feedback.
- 6. Reduce the 5-year volunteer contact ban**
 - Even a 1–2 year reduction would dramatically strengthen reentry outcomes.
- 7. Establish quarterly volunteer roundtables**
 - Leverages over a century of combined expertise.
- 8. Prioritize M-2 program revitalization**
 - Funding already exists; requires restructuring, not new dollars.
- 9. Pilot a Tribal Cultural Liaison role (6 months)**

- Coordinates ceremonies, tribal contacts, and volunteer approvals.
- 10. Ensure ID issuance before release**

- Removes a major barrier to housing, employment, and benefits.

11. Create a rapid MOU template for tribal supervision

- Reduces bureaucratic delays in parole placement.
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4. What additional information would be helpful moving into next year?

To support evidence-based decision-making, the Task Force should request:

- 1. Race- and tribe-disaggregated outcome data (3–5 years):**
 - Program enrollment, completion, recidivism, parole outcomes.
- 2. Inventory of Native-specific programming and capacity**
 - Frequency, staffing, volunteers, ceremonial access.
- 3. Copies of existing tribal MOUs**
 - Plus a summary of barriers encountered.
- 4. Map of release destinations**
 - Identifies where Native individuals are returning.
- 5. Vocational expansion plans**
 - Especially whether Springfield-level trades will reach SDSP.
- 6. ACA compliance status**
 - Including chaplaincy and cultural service standards.
- 7. Workforce development partnerships**
 - Apprenticeships, CDL training, tribal college pipelines.
- 8. St. Francis House expansion coordination plan**
- 9. Budget and grant pipeline overview**
- 10. Input from formerly incarcerated Native individuals and tribal leaders**
 - Listening sessions or surveys to center lived experience.
- 11. Implementation of a Rehabilitation Card Status** - A physical card that shows the positive progress you've been making, instead of focusing on the charge or crime committed. So you're able to show that at a job interview and have a conversation of what you've been working on and the lessons you've learned from your past. That you are willing to do what's necessary to build a new life that's positive, meaningful and rehabilitated life. That you are committed to doing better.
- 12. Seek information to determine if currently incarcerated inmates had learning/disability-related plans (IEPs/504s) before prison** - Intention for

information is determine if accommodations and support are needed to successfully complete educational or vocational opportunities to be offered.

Cross-Cutting Principle (Applies to All Questions)

Programs matter—but **connection, consistency, and mutual support matter more.**

The path forward requires:

- Respect for tribal sovereignty
- Trust-based partnership
- Shared responsibility for outcomes
- Replication of what works
- Alignment across all nine reservations

One side cannot sustain a relationship alone. Sustainable success depends on **working together—state and tribal partners—as equals, for the benefit of current and future generations.**