

Nebraska Department of Correctional Services - Reentry Services
VOCATIONAL & LIFE SKILLS (VLS) PROGRAMS
GRANT ANNOUNCEMENT – APPLICATION FOR FUNDING
September 2026 – June 2027
Applications due: July 31st, 2026

The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) is soliciting applications for Vocational and Life Skills (VLS) training programs to provide services to individuals who are currently incarcerated, under parole supervision, or under probation supervision. Eligible program participants may access services for up to 18 months following release or discharge from supervision. This grant solicitation seeks programs that bridge the transition from NDCS facilities to the community, aligning with this strengths-based framework.

Statutory Authority

The Vocational Life Skills program is promulgated in the [Nebraska Administrative Code, Title 71, Chapter 1](#).

Eligibility

Applicants are limited to community-based organizations, community colleges, federally or state-recognized Native American tribes, or nonprofit organizations that provide vocational and life skills programming to adults who are incarcerated, recently incarcerated (within the prior 18 months), or under probation or parole supervision. All applicants must provide clean, safe spaces with the capacity to accommodate the individuals they serve.

Deadline and Contact Information

Applicants must submit their applications in PDF format with all required supporting documentation to Trisha Larkin at trisha.larkin@nebraska.gov **no later than July 31st, 2026 at 5:00 P.M.** Applications in Microsoft Word will NOT be accepted. For questions regarding the application or application submission, contact Trisha Larkin, 402-657-2780 Monday through Friday 7:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. or e-mail trisha.larkin@nebraska.gov.

Grant Award

Notification of grant award will be provided on or before August 31st. The grant award will begin September 1, 2026 and runs through June 30, 2027. A one-time allocation of \$365,000 is available. These funds represent previously appropriated Vocational & Life Skills grant funding being redistributed due to changes in contracted service providers. There is no set limit on the number of organizations that may be awarded.

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Section 1

Vocational Life Skills Program Overview

Reentry is not a singular program but a comprehensive, strengths-based approach to preparing individuals for successful reintegration. The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) embraces the 5-Key Model for Reentry and Well-being Development™ emphasizing holistic personal development and sustainable community reintegration. The 5-Key Model for Reentry and Well-being Development™ is a transformative approach to rehabilitative services built on the fundamental belief that every individual has within themselves the strengths necessary to become the best version of themselves. This model indicates that healthy thinking patterns, positive relationships, positive social engagement, meaningful work trajectories, and effective coping strategies are key components of well-being for any individual; and when included as part of the reentry process, has the ability to increase an individual's likelihood of reintegration success. For more information, please visit Wellbeing & Equity Innovations' [website](#).

Priority will be given to applicants that incorporate elements of the below themes into their programs, services, or trainings.

- Career pathways through vocational training, job readiness, and placement support. Programs may offer such items as industry-recognized certifications, and job placement assistance.
- Access to safe and affordable housing for a supportive transition. Housing assistance programs may provide transitional housing options, rental assistance, and connections to supportive housing services.
- Program or services aspects which may provide education regarding community healthcare service providers, information on preventative care, and education on maintaining overall health and wellbeing.
- Life skills that include enhanced emotional regulation, stress and anxiety mitigation strategies, and enhance self-efficacy approaches which promotes resilience and self-care.
- Promoting and encouraging connections with family, mentors, and community resources.
- Enhancing financial literacy and educational advancement which may include GED preparation, digital literacy, vocational training, and post-secondary education programs which increases economic mobility and stability.

Section 2

Timeline and Data Requirements

July 10th, 2026	Grant Announcement – Seeking Applicants
July 31 st , 2026	Grant Applications Due
August 3 rd , 2026 – August 14 th , 2026	Review, Evaluation of Applications
August 31 st , 2026	Notification of Grant Awards
September 1, 2026	Funds available

VLS Meeting Schedule for Grant Cycle 6

November 6, 2026	Quarterly Meeting
February 5, 2027	Quarterly Meeting
May 7, 2027	Closeout Quarterly Meeting

The Vocational & Life Skills (VLS) Program grant review team will consist of individuals from NDCS and State Probation.

Applications will be ranked following a review of each response, to include thoroughness, applicability to the NDCS Reentry Services and statutory requirements, and ability to meet requirements set forth in the application, using the points noted in section 4. The grant review team may follow-up to clarify information provided.

Grant Award Financial Reporting Requirements

(subject to change as presented with award notification)

This grant is based on a reimbursement plan for all grant approved monthly expenses. The monthly expense is due by the 15th of the following month and within 60 days of the service provision. At the close of each fiscal year, all expenses through May 31st must be submitted no later than June 8th. Normal reimbursement time to grantee is within 45 days, with all reporting requirements fulfilled accurately. NDCS will make payment to the grantee when the invoice and proper documentation have been received.

Program Payment

Upon each reimbursement request, applicant agrees to submit documentation that verifies that all services are rendered as outlined in the grant application and agree to submit any additional documentation as requested by NDCS. Applicant is required to bill on a monthly basis for services rendered. Payment will be within 45 days after receipt of said documents and monthly billing.

Billing on a Monthly Basis/Rate for Services Rendered

This may be a rate per person, per class/activity/intervention, etc., or based on meeting defined objectives each month, etc.

Justification for the amount must be in sufficient detail to confirm the amount is reasonable and appropriate. During the review and evaluation process, NDCS will request any additional or clarifying information as needed.

Application Instructions

1. Providers who wish to submit an application shall submit the application cover page, program proposal, budget, budget summary and references. (Section 4)
2. Completed grant application forms (section 4) shall be emailed in PDF format to trisha.larkin@nebraska.gov. Supplemental information such as brochures, research, and data may be attached as PDF files.
3. Applications are due no later than **5:00 P.M.** Central Standard Time, on **Friday, July 31st, 2026**.
4. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated from August 3rd, 2026- August 14th, 2026. During the review process, a representative of NDCS may contact the applicant for further information.
5. Applicants that have been selected may be required to meet with the grant review team prior to final award notification. Notification will be provided on or before August 31st, 2026.
6. Questions regarding the application may be directed to Trisha Larkin at trisha.larkin@nebraska.gov or by phone at (402) 657-2780.

A. Application Cover Page

In submitting this grant application, I hereby certify that:

1. I have received sections 1-5 of the NDCS Reentry Services Grant Application
2. Attached to this application form are completed section 4
3. This grant application is submitted by, or on behalf of, the party that will be responsible for the delivery of services should a grant be awarded
4. The provider, if selected, will comply with the requirements set forth in NAC Title 71, Chapter 1 and the application
5. All information provided is true, accurate, and complete to the best of my knowledge

Signature of Authorized Official	Date
Printed/Typed Name of Signatory: _____	
Applicant/Organization: _____	
Title: _____	
Email Address: _____	Phone: _____
Website Address: _____	
Mailing Address: _____	

B. Program Narrative

Each application will be evaluated based on the thoroughness and applicability of responses provided for each section below.

1. Organization Mission
 - Provide your organization’s mission statement and describe how it relates to increasing public safety and preparing individuals for successful reentry.
2. Experience with Target Population (15 points)
 - Describe your experience working with individuals who are currently or formerly incarcerated or on parole, or under State Probation supervision.
 - Identify the length of time providing these services.
 - If no prior experience, explain your current client population and how the skills and opportunities your organization provides align with the needs of the target population.
3. How does your organizational mission and specific proposed program(s) align with the 5-Key Model for Reentry and Well-being Development™ (20 points)

Wellbeing and Equity Innovations (WEI) Information can be found at <https://wellbeingandequity.org/5-key-model>.

Fully describe each program/service in detail which must include:

 - How your organization’s mission and specific programs align with the 5-Key Model.
 - Specifically link your program objectives and intended outcomes to one or more of the 5-Key model.
4. Program Description (50 points)

Describe in detail the proposed program, including:

 - Research or data supporting its efficacy
 - Program service delivery method
 - Program duration

- Certifications, licenses, or degrees participants may earn
 - Specific activities/interventions supporting self-sufficiency (e.g., employment counseling, financial literacy, education, occupational training)
 - Learning objectives and participant outcomes, including:
 - At least two program goals with three measurable objectives for each.
 - Monthly benchmarks linked to invoicing.
 - Locations of service delivery
 - Client eligibility criteria and screening tools
 - Completion criteria and current success rates
 - Projected number of participants
 - Transportation plan demonstrating ability to ensure timely transportation for individuals releasing from NDCS facilities. At a minimum, the plan must identify how program staff will transport individuals to their approved parole plan or approved residence upon release, the service area covered, staff responsible for transportation, procedures for scheduling and coordinating transportation, and plans for addressing transportation needs outside normal business hours.
5. Program Funding & Sustainability (10 points)
- Indicate whether the program is existing or new.
 - For existing programs, describe current funding sources and success data.
 - For new programs, explain how sustainability will be achieved post-grant funding.
6. Program Logic Model (5 points)
- A Logic Model is a visual representation that illustrates how a program's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes lead to long-term success. It helps ensure that programs are designed with clear, evidence-based pathways to achieve their intended impact.

Example Reentry Logic Model

Component	Description
Inputs	Certified vocational instructors delivering hands-on training in high-demand trades, utilizing the WEI 5 Keys of Reentry and Well-Being Now Next Later curriculum to address employment barriers.
Activities	Industry-recognized job training that includes classroom instruction, practical skill development, and employer partnerships to facilitate work-based learning opportunities.
Outputs	Number of participants earning industry certifications that align with Nebraska's labor market demands, demonstrating measurable workforce readiness.
Short-Term Outcomes	Participants securing employment-ready skills within six months, improving financial literacy through structured budgeting workshops, and accessing transitional housing placements.
Long-Term Outcomes	Sustained employment for at least one-year post-release , enhancing reentry success by fostering economic independence and stable community reintegration.

By incorporating a logic model into program planning, organizations can clarify their goals, ensure service alignment with expected outcomes, and demonstrate effectiveness.

Prospective successful reentry indicators to consider when completing your organization’s Reentry Logic Model may include:

- Consistent Employment – Maintaining stable, full-time employment for at least 12 months post-release.
- Housing Stability – Securing and retaining permanent housing within 45 days of release.
- Financial Independence – Demonstrating the ability to budget, save, and manage personal finances responsibly.
- Community Engagement – Actively participating in positive community groups, mentorship programs, or volunteer opportunities.
- Educational Advancement – Completing a GED, vocational certification, or post-secondary education within one year of release.
- Healthcare Access – Engaging in regular physical and mental health check-ups, including substance use treatment if necessary.
- Legal Compliance – No new criminal convictions or probation/parole violations within the first two years post-release.
- Positive Social Networks – Maintaining supportive relationships with family, mentors, and peers who encourage pro-social behavior.
- Personal Development – Setting and achieving personal goals related to career, education, and wellness.
- Self-Sufficiency – Demonstrating the ability to meet personal needs without reliance on emergency assistance programs.

Please provide a Program Logic Model for your organization using the table below.

Program Goal: Enter a short, clear statement of what the program aims to achieve.				
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	
List the specific resources necessary to achieve the program goal:	List the specific actions necessary to achieve the program's goal:	List the desired outputs to result from the activities; usually quantified as numbers:	Short Term: List the desired results to occur within 3 months of an activity. Short-term outcomes typically relate to learning.	Long Term: List the desired results to occur 6 or more months after an activity. Long-term outcomes typically reflect the ultimate change or goal the program aims to achieve.
Input 1:	Activity 1:	Output 1:	Short Term 1:	Long Term 1:
Input 2:	Activity 2:	Output 2:	Short Term 2:	Long Term 2:
Input 3:	Activity 3:	Output 3:	Short Term 3:	Long Term 3:
External Factors: List the external factors that may influence the program’s success at achieving outcomes and goals (e.g., climate, economic structure, political landscape, changing policies and priorities).				

C. Budget Summary and Narrative

Complete each of the following sections applicable to this grant request by providing the required financial information and a narrative as to how this budget item will be used in meeting the grant objectives. Grant funds cannot be used for construction.

A. Personnel – list each position by title and name of employee, if available. Show the annual salary rate and the percentage of time to be devoted to the project. Compensation paid for employees engaged in grant activities must be consistent with that paid for similar work within the applicant organization.

Name/Position	Annual Salary	% Time Devoted	Grant Amount

B. Fringe Benefits – Fringe benefits should be based on actual known costs or an established formula. Fringe benefits are for the personnel listed in budget category (A) and only for the percentage of time devoted to the project.

Name/Position	Annual Benefits	% Time Devoted	Grant Amount

C. Travel – Itemize travel expenses of project personnel by purpose (e.g., staff to training, advisory group meeting, secondary work location). Show the basis of computation (e.g., two people attending two days training at \$X lodging, \$X meals, \$X mileage). Indicate source of Travel Policies applied and are they in accordance with Federal Travel Regulations ([GSA Current Travel Rates](#)).

Purpose of Travel	Location	Item	Computation	Grant Amount

D. Supplies – List items by type (office supplies, postage, training materials, copying paper, books, and expendable equipment costing less than \$1500).

Supply Items	Computation	Grant Amount

E. Consultants/Contracts –

Consultant Fees - For each consultant enter the name, if known, service to be provided, hourly or daily fee, and estimated time on the project. Consultant fees in excess of \$450 per day require additional justification and prior approval from the NDCS.

Name of Consultant	Service Provided	Computation	Grant Amount

Contracts – Provide a description of the product or service to be procured by contract and an estimate of the cost. Applicants are encouraged to promote free and open competition in awarding contracts. A separate justification must be provided for sole source contracts in excess of \$50,000.

Item	Location	Computation	Grant Amount

F. **Other Costs** – List items (e.g., telephone, reproduction, rent, participant transportation) by major type and the basis of computation. For example, computation would identify the square footage and the cost per square foot for rent or a monthly rental cost and how many months to rent.

Description	Computation	Grant Amount

Budget Summary

Category	Grant Amount
A. Personnel	
B. Fringe Benefits	
C. Travel	
D. Supplies	
E. Consultants/Contracts	
F. Other Costs	
Total Project Costs:	

Program Evaluation Components/Requirements

Program evaluations will be conducted by the Nebraska Center for Justice Research at the University of Nebraska Omaha to identify how programs meet the objectives of increasing successful reentry and obtaining and maintaining employment. The evaluation team will follow the evaluation guidelines specified in LB 896 that includes both process and outcome evaluation procedures. Evaluation activities include a review of program materials, site visits, observations of programming, interviews with key staff and participants, and analyses of recidivism, desistance, and cost-benefit. The qualitative process evaluation results will be used to contextualize the quantitative outcome evaluation results. Additional details on these evaluation activities are provided below.

The evaluation portion of the grant is funded through NDCS. Evaluation expenses are not necessary or allowable in the grant proposal. Information from the evaluations and data collection procedures employed under this grant may help your program secure additional outside funding in the future.

Evaluation Expectations

Programs are expected to comply with evaluation procedures. This requires the ability to use a data management system and work within set data protocols. In addition to the list below, other evaluation-related activities may be added as needed. Failure to comply with evaluation and/or data requirements may result in a partial or total loss of funding.

I. Review of Program Materials

A review of program materials will occur near the beginning of the evaluation cycle. *The evaluation team will request copies of all program materials prior to scheduling the first site visit.* This will allow the evaluation team to educate themselves on program operations and provide a foundation to assess fidelity to program models.

II. Site Visits

Evaluators will tour each program at the beginning of the grant cycle. *The evaluators will contact program leads to schedule a site visit. Program staff will provide evaluators with an overview of the program and describe how program materials are used by the program (intake forms, program handbooks, fliers, et al.).* The evaluation team will be available for additional site visits as needed to provide help with any questions or concerns with the evaluation process.

III. Program Data Collection

Programs will be responsible for entering data in the NDCS data management system. Training will be provided on the data entry and collection procedures. User guide materials will be made available in the event of staff turnover. Data monitoring may occur monthly, or as frequently as needed, to ensure that all the required information can be gathered with minimal additional impact on program staff and resources. The NDCS VLS program manager and evaluation team will be available as needed to help with any data questions or evaluation concerns. Additional data on participants will be collected from other sources to measure successful reentry, desistance, and additional outcomes relevant to the cost-benefit analysis (e.g., official agency data, employment).

The following variables must be collected for each participant in the program and uploaded to the data management system monthly, or more often if participant information changes.

- First and last name
- NDCS ID, if available
 - Date of birth and demographics will need to be collected if ID is not available

- Program/service offerings provided
- Location of program offerings
- Dates of program offerings (start and end dates)
- Program ending status (successful completion, incomplete, etc.)

Programs will be required to complete monthly progress reports for each client to send with their monthly invoice.

IV. Programming/Services Observation

The evaluators will need to observe aspects of programming during the grant cycle. *They will contact program leads to schedule the observation at a time that is convenient for the program.* During the observation, they will be assessing several criteria that can enhance the participant experience, such as facilitator preparedness, facilitator rapport, facilitator.

V. Interviews with Key Staff

The evaluators will conduct interviews with a minimum of two key program staff each year. The interviews will be semi-structured and will take place on site. The interviews will touch on topics such as the respondent's background experience, program fidelity tools, screening and assessment details, program goals, successes, and challenges. *The evaluators will reach out to program leads to schedule these interviews.*

VI. Interviews with Program Participants

The evaluators will conduct interviews with a minimum of two program participants each grant cycle. These will be semi-structured interviews that may take place on site or in the community. The interviews will touch on topics such as how the participant got involved with the program, screening and assessment details, perceived program usefulness, and the participant's goals in participation. *The evaluators may reach out to program leads for assistance in scheduling these interviews.*

VII. Successful Reentry and Desistance Analysis

The evaluators will conduct a successful reentry analysis per the guidelines specified in LB 896. The evaluators will likely measure successful reentry based on individuals who return to NDCS facilities at six months, one year, and three years. The evaluation team recognizes that successful reentry measurement can be limited by institutional administrative data and focuses on a 'failure event' rather than a success. Thus, the evaluators also plan to provide desistance measures that assess progress towards movement away from criminal behavior. *Other than regular data entry, these outcome evaluation efforts will not require any additional work on behalf of VLS grantees.*

VIII. Cost-Benefit Analysis

The evaluators will conduct a cost-benefit analysis as specified in LB 896, if applicable. A cost-benefit analysis is a quantitative way to assess the financial costs and benefits of a program intervention. Costs may include program staff, participant needs, and the facilities required to provide a space for the intervention. Benefits may include positive monetary gain because of the intervention, such as holding employment and contributing to taxes, or reduced incarceration and healthcare costs. *To conduct this analysis, the evaluators may request cost information from the NDCS accounting staff and the program staff.*

- A. This grant shall be in effect for the designated period of September 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027, unless otherwise terminated or suspended by NDCS.
- B. Total grant funding is contingent upon the continued appropriation of these funds for FY 27.
- C. The terms and conditions of award and budget may be modified only by written amendment, executed by both parties.
- D. Program and financial records will be maintained in accordance with the Secretary of State Record Retention [Schedule 124](#).
- E. The Grantee assures NDCS the grant-funded program will be conducted and adhered to in accordance with all applicable state/federal statutes and regulations.
- F. Administration and performance of the project shall be executed in accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat 83-904 and Nebraska Administrative Code Title 71, Chapter 1, Vocational and Life Skills Program.
- G. Grantee will work in coordination with NDCS and the evaluators to evaluate the program's efficiency and effectiveness.
- H. Participation in program visitation and evaluation by and under the direction of NDCS will be supported by the grantee.
- I. Services must be based upon a grant-proposed program.
- J. Grantee shall make its employees aware of the provisions in Neb. Rev. Stat 28-322.01 through 28-322.03 providing it is a felony for individuals working for or under contract with the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services to engage in sexual contact or penetration with an inmate or parolee, and that no inmate nor parolee is legally capable of giving consent to any such relationship.
- K. Grantee is required to ensure work eligibility status of their employees using the E-Verify Program, or an equivalent federal program designated by the United States Department of Homeland Security or other federal agency authorized to verify the work eligibility status.
- L. Grantee shall comply with all applicable local, state, and federal statutes and regulations regarding civil rights laws and equal opportunity employment (Neb. Rev. Stat. §48-1101 to 48-1125).
- M. NDCS will conduct criminal background checks on all grantee staff members who wish to enter facilities. Grantees are encouraged to employ individuals with criminal histories. Criminal records will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and grantee staff will not be denied access based solely on their criminal record. Each employee will need to submit paperwork yearly, for annual background verification.
- N. Grantee will comply with all fiscal and data evaluation reporting requirements listed in the grant announcement. Other data may be requested as determined through the program evaluation process.
- O. Grantee will attend all program evaluation training offered by NDCS or NCJR unless approved otherwise by NDCS.
- P. Grantee will attend all quarterly meetings and roundtable meetings. At least one representative from your organization must be in attendance at these meetings.
- Q. The grantee shall submit a State of Nebraska Substitute Form W-9 & ACH Enrollment Form for the purpose of payment on expenses.
- R. Grantees will have safeguards in place to prohibit employees from using their positions for personal gain or conflicts in interest.
- S. All expenses must be previously approved budget items from the grant application.
- T. Grantee shall scan and submit all grant payment documents electronically to: DCS.VLSGrants@nebraska.gov along with an updated NDCS Grant Financial Report.

- U. If grant funds are not expended in accordance with the instruction and terms and conditions of the proposed grant program, NDCS may require that all grant funds or any portion thereof be returned by a means to be determined by NDCS.
- V. Only the organization will be reimbursed; individuals will not be reimbursed.
- W. Grantees are subject to an annual review by NDCS staff and are required to submit requested information. NDCS will notify grantees in advance of the review and documentation that is necessary.
- X. The grantee shall submit a signed Drug Free Workplace policy.