



## **Workforce Development -Bringing Masonry Training into the Iowa Department of Corrections**

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### **Project Description**

Every construction trade is finding it more difficult to secure a trained workforce. As the state association for the masonry industry, the Masonry Institute of Iowa (MII) has worked to increase awareness of the masonry trade especially in the Iowa high schools. With the current labor shortage though, MII is broadening this focus to include training in the prison system.

### **Project Objective**

To create a workforce development initiative within the Iowa Department of Corrections that introduces and trains current inmates in masonry using the NCCER masonry curriculum as an effort to increase the workforce.

### **Background Information**

For the last five years, MII has worked with the Iowa prison system to implement this training program and has overcome tremendous hurdles to bring training into the prison system where an outside organization (MII) facilitates the training. Planning started in 2019 to make this training feasible. Right as MII was to start the training in 2020, covid hit. Due to covid, the prison system shut down those coming into the prison for over a year. Then an incident in the Anamosa penitentiary (two employees were killed) led to the prison system being shut down once again. At the time, the goal was to offer the full masonry training through NCCER (Levels 1,2,3) along with on-the-job experience at Anamosa Penitentiary.

From this incident, discussion was held to move the location of the training to Mt. Pleasant Corrections Facility as Anamosa was no longer an option. Mt. Pleasant houses over 1,000 inmates and is considered a minimum-security facility (Anamosa was high security at the time). These inmates have sooner release dates than those at the former proposed site. Because of this, the Iowa Department of Corrections (DOC) and MII decided to offer only CORE and Level 1 masonry training at this time. Currently, discussion is being held regarding adding Level 2 and how it could work if able to be offered.

Once the decision was made to move the training to Mt. Pleasant, MII and the DOC worked to put logistics together: how inmates would be selected, where training would be held, who would be teaching CORE, finding a masonry instructor, etc. As the program was to commence, other hurdles also had to be overcome – NCCER no longer offered paper testing, and it took time to work through the DOC's IT department to get access to the testing site. Then NCCER shut down the testing site for relaunch. Because of these hurdles, CORE did not start until late summer of 2023. This was behind the initial anticipated schedule. Additionally, the masonry training location available is a covered shelter, so a winter course was not an option and the first training was condensed into six weeks (approximately 3-4 days a week of training before it got cold).

Though, there were many hurdles that needed to be overcome, the first masonry training class started in August of 2023. The first class started out with 13 trainees but due to changes in the prison system regulations on who could qualify for MLO (which they needed to be located in, in order to do the masonry training as it was located in the MLO area), and only six qualified to transfer over. These six inmates completed the training and received their Level 1 Masonry training certificates from NCCER.

To date, three of these inmates have been released from prison that were from the initial training group. The DOC is currently working with MII on how to track release and if they enter the masonry industry. The goal is to have better tracking in place going forward and MII is looking at the DOC to facilitate this. There are also several tax credits and other incentives for employers to hire those with a record; MII is working on understanding and distributing this material to potential employees.

*About NCCER:* NCCER is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) education foundation created in 1996 as The National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER). It was developed with the support of more than 125 construction CEOs and various association and academic leaders who united to revolutionize training for the construction industry.

*About Iowa's Prison System:* Iowa currently has nine prisons with nearly 9,000 inmates housed at these locations. Recidivism is over 37% in the Iowa prison population. One of the ways the Department of Correction is working to lower this statistic is with quality training programs to help inmates become employable once released. Because of the lack of funding, the prison system is looking to partner with industry to offer additional skilled training through industry.

*Masonry Institute of Iowa (MII):* MII is the only non-profit association for masonry in the state. Membership includes contractors, suppliers, and distributors, and one of the Association's initiatives is workforce development. MII is 40 members strong including several donors to the MCAA Foundation. MII is in the process of becoming NCCER accredited (waiting for audit).

## **Scope of Project**

Inmates incarcerated in the Iowa prison system will have the opportunity to receive masonry training through the Masonry Institute of Iowa and its partners using NCCER curriculum. Goal going forward is to have the inmates complete CORE and Masonry Level 1 prior to release.

The NCCER masonry training program hours include:

- 70 hours of Core Curricula
- 125 structured hours of Level 1 - *hours based on training from the first course that was taught fall of 2023*
  - o 105 hours hands on training
  - o 20 hours of classroom study
  - o Additional hours of self study

All Level 1 NCCER curriculum includes completion of the Core Curricula, a 70-hour introduction to the skilled trades. This introduction will help give a baseline to those entering the training that have never worked in construction. Currently, the DOC is teaching this class with grant funds paying for the testing.

All inmates, regardless of instructor, will be taught the same material. NCCER supplies the PowerPoints, teaching lessons and tests so that instruction remains consistent throughout the program. Due to the change of venue and how their Closed Caption TV and AV systems work, there is no longer an option to play any recorded videos/PowerPoints to aid in instruction.

Each NCCER module in a course workbook includes a multiple-choice test that must be passed. This testing is done online and costs \$2.60/test. If the test is not passed, the student has the option of retaking it. Each module also includes a hands-on “performance profile” to show their proficiency in the subject matter. Instructors pass/fail these performances and all modules must be completed to pass.

Timeline of the project going forward: Level 1 will be taught two times a year for 2024 (spring/fall) and then three times in 2025 (spring/summer/fall). Each section will have 12 or 13 inmates working through the program. Currently the first group of 2024 has started the CORE curriculum. Twelve inmates are participating. Grant funds from the MCAA Foundation have been used to pay for the instruction and testing to date.

The goal is to use grant money to get the training program launched, and with the success of finding more workforce, to make the program self-sustainable with industry support going forward. Discussion has been had in regards to looking at other DOC sites to implement masonry training and to grow the program in the future. Mt Pleasant was picked because of the willingness of staff to help implement a new training program.

## **Summary of Qualifications**

*Masonry Institute of Iowa:* Jenny Irlmeier, Association Director of the Masonry Institute of Iowa, will be the point of contact for the program and the liaison with the Department of Corrections

and the masonry industry. The Masonry Institute of Iowa is currently working on accreditation with NCCER and Jenny is the Master Trainer with the NCCER training curriculum to certify craft instructors and coordinate NCCER paperwork.

*Steve Blow, instructor:* Former Department of Corrections (DOC) employee, Steve was the on-staff maintenance/bricklayer and is now retired. He is a paid independent contractor for MII to teach the NCCER curriculum. He, along with several DOC employees, have gone through NCCER instructor training and are equipped to teach and proctor NCCER coursework.

*Department of Corrections:* The prison system has several highly skilled instructors that can teach the core curriculum. The Department of Corrections will coordinate signing up inmates for the program, logistics within the prison system and scheduling of training times. Jennifer Seils is the contact at the Department of Corrections apprenticeship programs. Joe Garvey is currently the CORE instructor with Tisha Blint and Tony Kuempker, the other two points of contacts, at Mt. Pleasant.

*Other Volunteers:* Mason contractors BAC 3 IA training center and suppliers will be supporting this initiative and donate their time and materials for this training on an as-needed basis.

### **Anticipated Impact**

Though this model is only being implemented in Iowa, it is a good model for other states to replicate and show how industry can be a leader in training and workforce development initiatives. Masonry is a highly skilled craft and not just anyone in the construction industry can pick up a trowel and start teaching – many instructors in the prison system teach a variety of construction coursework and unfortunately the state does not have current staff to teach masonry. This is the first scenario for the Iowa DOC of letting industry lead the training.

### **Budget**

MIl is asking for \$9,800 to continue the training through 2025.

### **BUDGET**

NCCER Testing: \$2400

Instruction: \$7400

\$9,800 total

- NCCER Testing: each test costs \$2.60 (Core has 9 tests. Masonry Level 1 has 6) Cost to cover testing for five training groups:
  - o \$39 per inmate to test all 15 modules
  - o 60 x \$39 = \$2340 plus retest allowance
- Masonry Instruction: It costs approximately \$2500 per class in paid instruction (80 hours of paid instruction with the remaining 25 hours plus 20 hours classroom time are volunteer hours; CORE instruction is provided by the DOC) with three classes per year
  - o 80 hours x \$30/hour = \$2490
  - o 3 training session in 2025 instructor pay: \$7,400

### **Funding Sources**

MIl has already invested more than \$5,000 into NCCER curriculum and training. There was an initial cost of over \$4,000 to start the certification process with NCCER. The yearly maintenance fee for NCCER accreditation is \$600 and will be budgeted by MII annually.

MII will also handle the filing and administrative paperwork for each student. MII staff will also facilitate textbook teaching and proctor testing as needed. This is approximately \$1,000 in staff time.

MII members have already donated over \$2,500 in materials for the training (practice mortar, brick and concrete block from King's Material and TCC Materials) and will donate additional supplies as needed. MII plans invest funds to purchase additional levels as they were not donated in the initial grant application. The value to purchase the levels is approximately \$400.

The Department of Corrections is providing the following support for the masonry training program: NCCER books, teaching of Core Curricula, staffing during masonry training and additional tablets for testing. Staff time is approximately \$2,500/year for teaching CORE.

Going forward, several industry partners have volunteered to donate time to help with the masonry training. Timeline in 2024 and 2025 will not be as rushed, giving mason contractors more opportunity to volunteer and come in to help. This volunteer help is approximately \$2,500/year.

- BAC: 24 hours a year (minimum)
- Seedorff Masonry: 24 hours a year (minimum)
- TCC Materials: 24 hours a year
- Other mason contractors: donation of time as needed

### **Requested Payment Procedure**

MII will handle finances, including the distribution of payment for the instructor as well as payment to NCCER for testing. Instructor for this training will be an independent contractor of the MII. MII asks for a one time payment to be spent down over the course of the next two years.

### **Reporting Schedule**

It will take approximately four months for an inmate to complete the masonry training within the prison system. Over the next two years, approximately sixty will complete Masonry - Level 1 training. Semi-annual updates would be appropriate in regards to reporting. Reporting will include breakdown of instructional hours as well as data on the inmate's training level (test scores/performance profile data, etc).