

 <p>Massachusetts Department of Correction</p> <h1 style="text-align: center;">POLICY</h1>		Effective Date	Responsible Division  Deputy Commissioner, Clinical Services and Reentry
		6/26/2026	
		Annual Review Date	
		6/26/2026	
Policy Name  103 DOC 473 SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUPS		Regulation Reference: M.G.L., c 124, § 1 (c), (e) and (q)	
		DOC Policy Reference: 103 DOC 346, 103 DOC 405, 103 DOC 476; 103 CMR 485	
		ACA/PREA Standards:	
Attachments Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Library Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Applicability: Staff/Incarcerated Individuals/Civil Commitments	
Public Access Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		Location: Department Central Policy File Each Institution's Policy File	
<p><b>PURPOSE:</b> The purpose of 103 DOC 473 is to establish Department of Correction (Department) guidelines governing the establishment and administration of incarcerated and civilly committed individual Self-Improvement groups at all Department of Correction institutions.</p> <p><b>RESPONSIBLE STAFF FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF POLICY:</b> Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Services and Reentry Division Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Reentry Program Services Division</p> <p><b>CANCELLATION:</b> 103 DOC 473 cancels all previous Department policy statements, bulletins, directives, orders, notices, rules, and regulations regarding Self-Improvement Groups which are inconsistent with this policy.</p> <p><b>SEVERABILITY CLAUSE:</b> If any part of 103 DOC 473, is for any reason, held to be in excess of the authority of the Commissioner, such decisions shall not affect any other part of this policy.</p>			

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**ESTABLISHMENT OF A SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP**

Self-Improvement Groups are structured incarcerated individual or civil commitment coordinated groups designed to reduce idleness and enhance reentry by providing incarcerated individuals and civil commitments with a forum to develop interpersonal communication, problem solving and basic life skills. For the purposes of this policy, religious services and activities, recreational and leisure activities, self-help groups and volunteer facilitated programs are not considered Self-Improvement Groups.

- A. Incarcerated individuals and civil commitments may request to establish a Self-Improvement Group by submitting a proposal (Attachment #1) to the institution's Director of Treatment, which will then be reviewed by the Superintendent.
- B. The proposal shall detail the purpose of the group, goals, objectives, organizational structure, space and time requirements, associated costs, rules and benefits to the incarcerated individual or civil commitment population.
- C. The Superintendent or designee may either recommend approving, denying, or modifying the proposal. Denied proposals shall be returned to the incarcerated individual or civil commitment within thirty (30) business days of receipt detailing the rationale for denial.
- D. Approved proposals shall be submitted to the Director of Program Services and Reentry, who shall make a recommendation to the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Reentry within ten (10) business days of receipt.
- E. The Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Reentry shall make the final decision. Written notification of the decision shall be forwarded to the respective Superintendent normally within ten (10) business days of receipt but no longer than twenty (20) business days.
- F. The Director of Program Services and Reentry or designee shall update the Program Description Booklet.
- G. Self-Improvement Group applications shall be maintained on file by the Director of Program Services and Reentry and the Superintendent's designee.
- H. Each institution with a Self-Improvement Group shall seek to provide space, time, and supervision for all such groups on an equal basis. All groups are to meet at a minimum of once per week. Enrollment capacity in the group should be aligned with the capacity of available program space. A waitlist shall be maintained for those who are interested in participating in the group when space does not allow them to join.

**473.02**

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

- A. Self-Improvement Group participants shall not discriminate or mistreat incarcerated individuals and civil commitments on the basis of actual or perceived sex, age, race, religion, national origin, religious views, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. In addition, it is prohibited for staff and other incarcerated individuals and civil commitments to harass and abuse participants based on gender identity, transgender status, or sexual orientation.
- B. Incarcerated individuals or civil commitments who are found guilty of a category one or category two disciplinary offense may be prohibited from participating in or joining a Self-Improvement Group until they have been disciplinary report free for a period of six (6) months from the date that the category one or category two disciplinary report was issued.

**473.03**

**SUPERVISION OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUPS**

- A. The Superintendent shall designate a staff member to oversee Self-Improvement Groups.
- B. The Superintendent's designee shall assign a group member to function as the coordinator. The coordinator shall serve as liaison between the group and the Superintendent's designee. The coordinator shall submit agendas, meeting minutes, requests to disperse funds and process dues, Special Activity Applications, and any other requests.
- C. The Self Improvement Group shall not have a structured hierarchy (i.e., Committee Members, Mentors). All communication and proposals to the Superintendent's designee shall come through the coordinator.
- D. Each Self-Improvement Group shall submit an agenda at a minimum of five (5) business days prior to the meeting for review and approval by the Superintendent's designee.
- E. The Self-Improvement Group shall submit meeting minutes to the Superintendent's designee no later than two (2) business days after the meeting. The minutes shall detail the presenter, agenda items, and discussion points.
- F. Failure to adhere to the agenda or submit meeting minutes within the required time frame may result in the suspension or termination of the Self-Improvement Group.
- G. The Superintendent's designee shall maintain and update a monthly roster for each Self-Improvement Group. The Superintendent's designee shall update

the Inmate Management System (IMS) enrollment screen to reflect the monthly roster.

- H. Incarcerated individuals and civil commitments may enroll in a Self-Improvement Group by submitting a request to the Superintendent's designee.
- I. If approved, based on suitability the Superintendent's designee shall add the incarcerated individual's or civil commitment's name to the next month's roster. The incarcerated individual or civil commitment shall be eligible to attend group meetings once the monthly roster has been published. The incarcerated individual or civil commitment may be placed on a waiting list if enrollment is at full capacity.
- J. If an incarcerated individual or civil commitment misses two (2) consecutive meetings or two (2) meetings in one (1) month, they shall be terminated from the group and their name removed from the roster. If an incarcerated individual or civil commitment is removed from the roster, they are no longer eligible to attend group meetings or participate in group special activities.
- K. An incarcerated individual or civil commitment may write to the Superintendent's designee thirty (30) business days after the termination date requesting to be placed back on the group's roster.

**473.04**

**EXTERNAL GUEST SPEAKERS**

- A. Self-Improvement Groups are encouraged to propose a guest speaker via a Self-Improvement Group Special Activity Application (Attachment #2).
- B. Self-Improvement Groups shall not directly contact potential external guest speakers. Failure to comply may result in the suspension or termination of the Self-Improvement Group.
- C. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prevent an incarcerated individual or civil commitment from filing individual grievances about the conditions of their confinement or from corresponding with public officials, civilians, or others about those conditions.
- D. The Self-Improvement Group coordinator shall ensure the external guest speaker is appropriate in relation to the group's purpose and goals. The coordinator shall submit a Self-Improvement Group Special Activity Application (Attachment #2) to the Superintendent's designee sixty (60) days prior to the event. The Self-Improvement Group Special Activity Application shall include the name of the potential guest speaker and a summary of the topic to be presented.

- E. The Superintendent's designee shall ensure that the topic is appropriate and consistent with the goals and objectives of the group and contact the potential external guest speaker to extend an invitation to attend a regularly scheduled meeting.
- F. All external guest speakers shall be processed pursuant to the requirements of 103 CMR 485, *Volunteers and Volunteer Programs*.

**473.05**

**SPECIAL ACTIVITY EVENTS**

- A. Self-Improvement Groups may submit Special Activity Application (Attachment #2). Each Special Activity Event shall be consistent with the Self-Improvement Group's stated purpose, goals and objectives. Refreshments, if requested, shall be limited to coffee and tea.
- B. Participation shall be limited to active group members on the roster and approved external guest speakers pursuant 103 CMR 485, *Volunteers and Volunteer Programs*.
- C. The Superintendent may recommend to approve, deny, or modify the Self-Improvement Group Special Activity Application. Denied applications shall be returned to the coordinator within ten (10) business days of receipt detailing the rationale for denial.
- D. Approved applications shall be submitted to the Director of Program Services and Reentry who shall make a recommendation to the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Reentry within ten (10) business days of receipt.
- E. The Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Reentry shall make the final decision. Written notification of the decision shall be forwarded to the respective Superintendent normally within ten (10) business days of receipt but no longer than twenty (20) business days.
- F. The Director of Program Services and Reentry and the Superintendent's designee shall maintain Self Improvement Group Special Activity Applications on file.
- G. Groups that gain administrative approval for a Special Activity may be granted additional meeting time for the planning of the event. The Administration's operational inability to meet the additional time needed is a legitimate reason for denial of these requests.

**473.06**

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

- A. The Superintendent's designee shall assess each Self-Improvement Group within six (6) months of its establishment, and each year thereafter, to

determine if it is functioning in accordance with its stated purpose, goals, and objectives.

- B. The assessment shall include a review of agendas, meeting minutes, attendance, Special Activity Applications, proposals, requests to disperse funds, correspondence, direct observation of group meetings, and feedback from assigned staff and volunteers if applicable.
- C. Written notification shall be forwarded to the coordinator identifying the deficiencies if it is determined that the group is not adhering to its stated purpose, goals, and objectives.
- D. The coordinator shall submit a plan of action to the Superintendent's designee addressing the identified deficiencies.
- E. If after thirty (30) business days it has been determined by the Superintendent that the deficiencies have not been corrected, the group may be suspended or discontinued at the discretion of the Superintendent.
- F. Once the Superintendent has determined that a suspension or termination is warranted, the Superintendent's designee shall notify the coordinator and Director of Program Services and Reentry in writing of the decision.
- G. If a group has been suspended or terminated, the coordinator may appeal the suspension or termination to the Director of Program Services and Reentry within ten (10) business days of receipt of written notification.

**473.07**

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP ACCOUNTS**

- A. Upon request, the Superintendent shall request, through the Treasurer's Office, the establishment of a Z Account for all approved groups pursuant to 103 CMR 405, *Fund Accounts*.
- B. The Treasurer shall submit such requests to the Support Services Division for final approval.
- C. Group Z Accounts shall be maintained in accordance with 103 DOC 346, *Internal Controls Procedures*.

**473.08**

**INACTIVE SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUPS**

- A. A Self-Improvement Group shall be deemed inactive when it does not have any members or activities for three (3) consecutive months.
- B. The Superintendent's designee shall notify the Superintendent and the Director of Program Services and Reentry of such status.

- C. The Director of Program Services and Reentry or designee shall update the Program Description Booklet accordingly.
- D. The Superintendent shall notify the Institutional Treasurer in writing and request any balances in the Self-Improvement Group account be transferred to the Inmate Benefit Account.

**473.09**

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP DUES**

- A. Self-Improvement Groups may solicit a monthly voluntary dues payment from participants. Dues shall be limited to ten (10) dollars per month, per member.
- B. Incarcerated individuals or civil commitments paying dues may submit an institutional charge slip to the Superintendent's designee for final approval.
- C. No incarcerated individual or civil commitment who is deemed indigent shall be prevented from participation due to inability to submit voluntary dues.

**473.10**

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP PURCHASES**

- A. The purchase of coffee, tea or office supplies with Group Z-Account funds shall be in accordance with Department of Correction Purchasing Procedures.
- B. All requests to utilize Group Z Account funds shall be approved by the Superintendent's designee.
- C. All requests shall originate from the coordinator. Justification for the request shall be furnished along with how the requested items will be utilized. There shall be a compelling need for the requested items, and they should be directly related to the goals/mission of the group.
- D. The majority of requests shall be funded by the approved Group Z-Account.
- E. Self-Improvement Groups may request to utilize Inmate Benefit Funds for program related materials i.e., DVD's, books. Any request to utilize Inmate Benefit Funds shall be reviewed/approved by the Superintendent pursuant to 103 DOC 476, *Canteen and Vending Machine Operations and Expenditures*.
- F. All program-related materials and supplies shall be secured in an area designated by the Superintendent's designee.
- G. The Superintendent's designee shall ensure supplies or services are delivered to the group and that they are used for their intended purpose. Any abuses of supplies or services shall be immediately reported to the Superintendent and

may result in the suspension or termination of the Self-Improvement Group.

**473.11**

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP DONATIONS**

- A. Self-Improvement Groups may not solicit the community for donations.
- B. Any information regarding a potential donation shall be referred to the Superintendent's designee.
- C. The information shall include a contact person, items to be considered for donation, and justification for donation.
- D. All potential donations are subject to the Superintendent's approval. Donations may not be accepted if it is determined that the institution cannot accommodate the donation, or it is not consistent with the needs of the group.
- E. The Superintendent's designee shall contact the potential donor and coordinate the delivery of items. In most instances, donations shall be limited to related books, DVD's, office supplies, and other program-related material.
- F. All donated items shall become the property of the Department and subject to the use of other groups and/or the incarcerated individual and civil commitment general population.

**473.12**

**EMERGENCIES**

Whenever, in the opinion of the Commissioner or the Superintendent of a state correctional institution, an emergency exists which requires suspension of all or part of this policy, the Superintendent may order such suspension. However, any such suspension lasting beyond forty-eight (48) hours shall be authorized by the Commissioner.

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP APPLICATION FORM**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Space and Meeting Time Requirements: \_\_\_\_\_

Capacity: \_\_\_\_\_



Approval:    Yes    No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approval:    Yes    No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Program Services and Reentry

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approval:    Yes    No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Reentry

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**PROGRAM NARRATIVE**

**Program Description:** Detailed explanation of the purpose of the group.

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**Program Goals and Objectives:** Identify the intended program goals and objectives.

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**Describe the benefits to the incarcerated individual and civil commitment population:**

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**Rehabilitative Benefits:** (Describe the immediate and future rehabilitative benefits for the incarcerated individual and civil commitment.)

Immediate rehabilitative benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

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Future rehabilitative benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

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**SELF-IMPROVEMENT GROUP SPECIAL ACTIVITY APPLICATION FORM**

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Activity Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Activity Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervising Staff: Name & Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Facilitator(s): Name & Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Facilitator(s): Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Target Population: \_\_\_\_\_

# of Participants: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Session: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials/Supplies: \_\_\_\_\_

Funding Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Associated Costs: \_\_\_\_\_

Space Requirements: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Outside Guests Invited: \_\_\_\_\_ Screened for Relevance? Yes  No

Please attach applicable item:

Agenda: Yes  No

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Approval: Yes  No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approval: Yes  No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, Program Services and Reentry

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Special Instructions or Contingencies: \_\_\_\_\_

Approval: Yes  No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Reentry

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SPECIAL ACTIVITY NARRATIVE**

**Special Activity Description:** (Outline of the agenda and/or lesson plan to include a description of how the special activity supports the Department of Correction’s mission, vision and core values. In addition, please attach a copy of the full agenda).

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Describe the structure of the special activity (for example: guest speaker, group discussion, community reparation activity, family re-unification activity).

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Describe what impact the special activity will have on:

- Institutional operations (i.e.: staffing, space requirements, associated costs) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Victims of crime, the community, family members of incarcerated individuals and civil commitments, staff (for example: possible objections to the special activity) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Climate of the institution \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Volunteer availability \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

**Special Activity Goals/Outcomes:** (Identify the intended goals/outcomes).

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**Proposed Invited Guests and Relevance to the Goals/Objectives of Event:**

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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**Self-Improvement Special Activity Evaluation:**

Please have incarcerated individuals and civil commitments complete the evaluation form on the next page to be utilized to measure their performance.

## Activity Follow Up Evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Special Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate the presentation/training session:

The event was well organized       Yes       No

The activities were interactive and enjoyable  Yes       No

Staff were engaging and supportive       Yes       No

The environment was welcoming and comfortable       Yes       No

I would like to see a follow-up from this session       Yes       No

Comments/Suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_

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