



# Unlocking the Benefits of Virtual Skilled Trades Training

## A Guide for Correctional Leaders

How safe and immersive virtual skilled-trades training can enhance facility outcomes and prepare justice-impacted individuals for in-demand careers.





## Bridging the Gap: Transforming Lives and Strengthening Workforce Development Through Virtual Skilled Trades Training

At Orijin, we believe skill development in high growth industries is key to breaking the cycle of incarceration. Studies show that sustainable employment is a critical factor in reducing recidivism, providing justice-impacted individuals with stability, purpose, and a pathway to reintegration. Yet, for too many justice-impacted individuals, the path to a well-paying career is fraught with challenges. Limited access to education and workforce development, compounded by space constraints and staff shortages in correctional facilities, makes skill-building nearly impossible.

At the same time, industries across the country are struggling to find skilled workers in high-demand fields like HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and facilities maintenance.

Here's where you fit in. Correctional leaders hold the key to bridging this gap—unlocking opportunities through virtual skilled trades training. This approach provides a scalable, immersive solution that equips learners with real-world, in-demand skills. Facilities across the country are already seeing the impact—improving safety, reducing recidivism, and delivering long-term savings for communities.

This guide explores how virtual skilled trades training is transforming corrections, offers insights for gaining administrator buy-in, and lists key considerations when setting up your own virtual program.



According to the Council on Criminal Justice, **sustainable employment** can reduce recidivism by up to **61%**.

Source: Council on Criminal Justice





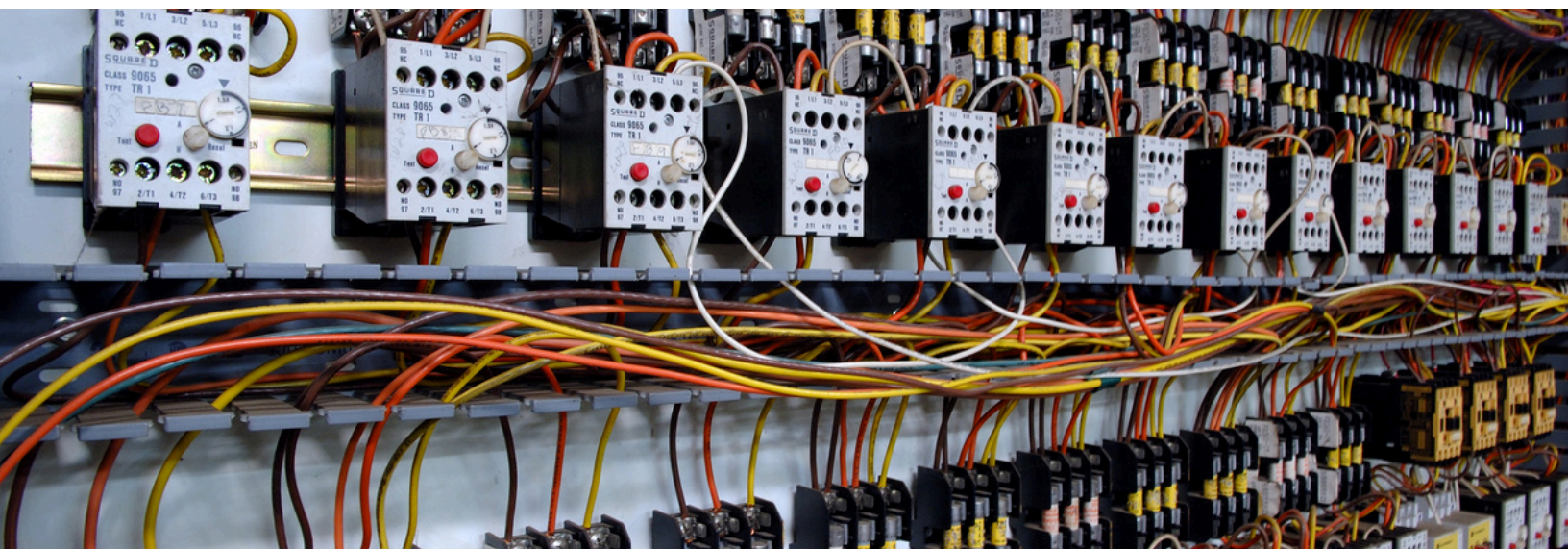
## The Growing U.S. Skills Shortage and Why Correctional Facilities Are a Key Part of the Solution

Our nation is experiencing a shortage of skilled workers in critical trades. Between August 2023 and July 2024, the construction industry had an average of 382,000 job openings each month, marking the third consecutive year of increased demand.<sup>1</sup>

This shortage is further exacerbated by an aging workforce and a decline in younger individuals entering these fields. To underscore the urgency of addressing this gap, it is projected that by 2030, there will be 2.1 million unfilled skilled trades jobs.<sup>2</sup>

With up to 700,000 people being released from state and federal prisons each year, correctional facilities are uniquely positioned to address this gap by providing incarcerated individuals with training in high-demand trades.

By bridging the opportunity gap for justice-impacted individuals and addressing the skills gap in the labor market, virtual vocational training in correctional facilities can transform lives, while helping to solve a pressing national issue.



<sup>1</sup> [Insights2Action](#)

<sup>2</sup> [McKinsey & Company](#)



## Why Virtual Skilled Trades Training is a Perfect Fit for Correctional Facilities

Most correctional facilities—especially jails with shorter-term populations—struggle to offer vocational training due to limited space, staffing shortages, and resource constraints. Traditional trade programs require dedicated classrooms, tools, equipment, and instructors, which many facilities simply can't accommodate.

As a result, countless incarcerated individuals miss out on the opportunity to gain job-ready skills that could set them up for success. Offering skilled trades training virtually removes these barriers, providing a scalable, secure, and cost-effective way to equip learners with real-world, industry-recognized skills that lead to employment.

### Immediate Career Readiness

Learners gain practical, job-ready skills they can apply right away. They're prepared to pursue entry-level employment, qualify for pre-apprenticeship programs, or begin full apprenticeships—creating momentum toward a sustainable career path.

### Accessible & Scalable

Traditional classroom or lab-based programs serve only a fraction of those who need them. Virtual training expands access, allowing more learners to gain skills across a broader array of trades.

### No Need for Extra Space or Staff

Virtual training delivers expert-led instruction on secure tablets, eliminating the need for dedicated classrooms, equipment, or additional staff.

### No Need for Tools and Equipment

Expensive tools and machinery are often impractical in correctional settings. Virtual simulations provide hands-on, trade-specific training without physical tools.

### Safe Learning and Training

Virtual programs eliminate safety risks associated with traditional hands-on training, allowing learners to practice skills in a controlled, secure environment.

### Prepares for Industry Certifications

Virtual training aligns with recognized industry standards, preparing learners for certifications like OSHA 10, EPA 608, and NATE Ready-to-Work.

By embracing virtual workforce development, correctional facilities can break down barriers, expand opportunities, and better prepare learners for sustainable careers.



## Career Pathways with Virtual Training

Virtual skilled trades training provides incarcerated learners with the foundational knowledge and hands-on practice needed to explore careers in high-demand industries.

### HVAC | Commercial HVAC



Career paths include: HVAC Specialist, Maintenance Technician

### Electrical



Career paths include: Electrical Assistant or Apprentice

### Plumbing



Career paths include: Plumber's Apprentice, Maintenance Technician

### Facilities Maintenance



Carer paths include: Maintenance Technician, Building Engineer

### Residential Construction



Career paths include: Carpenters, Building Construction Technology

### Multi-Family Maintenance



Career paths include: Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Technician

### Appliance Repair



Carer paths include: Home Appliance Repairer

### Clean Energy



Carer paths include: Energy Efficiency Technician

### Solar



Carer paths include: Solar Construction Worker or Installer





## Best Practices for Starting a Virtual Skilled Trades Program

Below are best practices and steps you can take to get a virtual skilled trades program off the ground.

### Secure Administrative Buy-In

- Engage leadership early to align the program with jurisdiction goals.
- Highlight the benefits including reduced idleness, improved behavior, and workforce readiness.
- Use data and success stories to demonstrate the program's impact on safety, recidivism reduction, and post-release employment outcomes.

### Ensure Seamless Technology Implementation

- Conduct a site assessment to ensure digital tablets, learning platforms, and the network are properly set up.
- Work with facility IT teams to troubleshoot connectivity and security concerns.
- Address security concerns by controlling access and monitoring usage.

### Select the Right Virtual Learning Partner

- Choose a provider with a proven track record in the correctional space.
- Look for data-driven solutions with measurable outcomes.
- Ensure programming is immersive and engaging to keep learners motivated.
- Prioritize industry-recognized certifications aligned with in-demand jobs.
- Select a provider that offers pathways to pre-apprenticeship for post-release success.



### Establish Clear Pathways & Supports

- Meet learners where they are by offering personalized learning experiences tailored to their interests, skill levels, and career goals.
- Work with your provider to deliver onboarding to ensure learners know how to navigate the program.
- Assign mentors or facility staff to offer guidance, motivation, and accountability throughout the learning journey.

### Monitor Engagement & Outcomes

- Set clear goals to track progress—not only in course completion rates and certifications earned, but also in larger goals like facility safety, recidivism, and behavior improvement.
- Regularly review engagement metrics and gather feedback from staff and learners to refine the program.
- Use data to demonstrate program effectiveness, justify continued funding, and support expansion.

### Build Community & Employer Partnerships

- Engage local workforce boards, businesses, and apprenticeship programs to create job placement opportunities.
- Create pathways from education to apprenticeship and employment to maximize post-release success and long-term stability.



## By the Numbers

**40%**

Percent of employers struggling to find skilled workers in trades like HVAC, electrical, and plumbing.<sup>1</sup>

**9%**

Projected growth in demand for HVAC technicians over the next decade.<sup>2</sup>

**43%**

Reduction in recidivism when incarcerated individuals participate in educational and vocational programs.<sup>3</sup>

**\$60,040**

Average annual salary for electricians.<sup>4</sup>

**\$59,880**

Average annual salary for plumbers.<sup>4</sup>

**\$50,590**

Average annual salary for HVAC technicians.<sup>4</sup>

**28%**

Increase in likelihood of securing stable employment upon release after having received vocational training during incarceration.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Angi's Skilled Trades Report, 2024

<sup>2</sup> [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> [RAND Corp.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [BLS.gov](#)



## **Pre-Apprenticeship: A Bridge to Career Success**

### **Pre-Apprenticeship & Why It Matters**

Pre-apprenticeships are a vital first step toward stable careers in the skilled trades. These programs, designated by the U.S. Department of Labor, provide essential training to qualify for apprenticeships and entry-level jobs, building employer-recognized skills without requiring prior experience.

Employers value pre-apprenticeship experience as it shows both knowledge and commitment to the trade. Completing a pre-apprenticeship helps learners secure sustainable jobs, advance in their careers, and break the cycle of incarceration.

### **Did You Know You Can Offer a Pre-Apprenticeship Program in Your Facility?**

Through virtual pre-apprenticeship pathways, learners receive a state-recognized Pre-Apprenticeship credential, which serves as a critical stepping stone to full apprenticeships and job placement. Additionally, learners are prepared to sit for industry-recognized certification exams that further enhance their employability, including: OSHA 10, EPA 608, and NATE Ready-to-Work.





“Investing in people is the key,” said Sheriff Burkhart. “It’s not about warehousing individuals—it’s about giving them the opportunity to be better. That’s an investment that benefits the entire community.”

- Sheriff Brad Burkhart, Greenfield, Indiana



**Hancock County Jail | Greenfield, Indiana**

## **From Incarceration to Impact: 150 Graduates Save County \$4.4 million**

Under the leadership of Sheriff Brad Burkhart, Hancock County Jail has become a model for transformative correctional practices. Their commitment to providing high-quality educational and vocational programs is playing a pivotal role in rehabilitating and rebuilding lives.

At the heart of this initiative is the integration of Orijin’s managed learning platform, which complements the facility’s in-person programming, enhancing outcomes and providing supplemental learning. They are seeing meaningful outcomes:

- Skilled Trades Certificates Earned: 350+
- Days Out of Jail: 56,101
- Daily Cost to House an Individual: \$79.02
- Overall Savings To-Date: \$4.4 million

**For more guidance on how to set up a  
virtual vocational program, [contact Orijin](#).**

