

Prison Visit FAQs

What should I do when I arrive?

When you arrive at the prison, park anywhere in the parking lot except in the reserved spaces. Please lock your car with the windows rolled up – **unlocked vehicles on TDCJ property will be towed**. Vehicles are also not allowed to have the windows rolled down.

Come in the front door and tell the receptionist that you are here for PEP.

What should I bring with me inside the prison?

Bring

- Car keys (and please roll up your windows all the way; this is required to park in the lot.)
- Driver's license, state ID or passport. (Please bring the same ID you used to RSVP.)

Do NOT Bring

- Cell phone, PDA or pagers (This is a felony in Texas!)
- Firearms or weapons – not even in the parking lot
- Wallet, purse or briefcase – just bring your driver's license.
- No cash, coins, stamps, business cards, tobacco products, or camera
- Medication – if you need to take medication during your visit, please notify us so we can make appropriate arrangements
- Anything else not pre-approved by PEP staff

NOTE: PEP will provide you with pens and notepads inside the unit, if needed.

What should I wear?

We are all business at PEP and that includes our attire. Extreme hair styles/colors are not allowed by TDCJ as is jewelry worn on facial areas (nose, eyebrows or tongue). If you have questions please visit TDCJ's website and review their Handbook for Volunteers. Dress code as well as other matters are addressed there. The dress code is business professional. Please avoid wearing cologne or perfume.

Gentlemen: Wear a suit or a sport coat with slacks. A tie is optional. No open-toed shoes.

Ladies: Refrain from wearing dresses, skirts or cropped pants. TDCJ rules require that ladies dress modestly and conservatively, PEP recommends slacks and a jacket/sweater over a blouse that is not sheer or low cut (in the front or in the back). Both shoulders and the midriff area must be covered at all times. Sheer fabrics or tight fitting clothing such as slacks or pants are not allowed.

Executive Volunteers are allowed into prison at the discretion of the warden and his/her security staff; if a volunteer is not dressed appropriately they may not be allowed into the unit. If you have questions about your clothing please err on the side of moderation. Volunteers should feel free to call our office at (832) 767-0928 with any questions/ concerns about your visit to prison.



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What is my role as a volunteer?

Encourage the participants

- Remember you are in business attire and they are in a prison uniform. The participants are going to be intimidated by your clothing, education and success. Keep this in mind as you offer feedback and interact with them. Hopefully by the end of the night you will see that the only difference between you is some clothing a few choices.
- One-on-one time is an important aspect of each event because you are able to really get to know the participants on an individual level. Use this time to help them practice their interpersonal skills and build their confidence. It never hurts to reassure our participants on a personal level.

For business events, use your knowledge to improve the participants' pitches and business plans

- Depending on the event you attend, you will get to see the participants' business plans at different stages of development. Sometimes you will play the role of an investor as the participants pitch their initial ideas. Other times you'll play the role of a hard to sell customer or an interviewer. Still, there will be times that you will find yourself as a friend and an advisor.
- Use what you know from your education and real world experience to improve what the participants have put together. Remember, we're shooting for quality plans that will be viable in the "free world."
- Don't be afraid to offer constructive criticism if you see changes that need to be made. That is why you are there!

Abide by all prison rules

- As fun as PEP events can be, we have to remember that we are in a prison and it is imperative to abide by all prison rules for everyone's safety.
- This means that all guests need to arrive at the specified time and plan to stay until the event is completed.
- Each guest will be subject to a pat down search from a same-gender prison guard. This is to ensure the safety of everyone involved with PEP.

What is the security level at the Prison?

PEP operates within pre-release minimum/medium security facilities that also house members of the general prison population in addition to PEP participants. Inmates are typically within one to three years of release. In prison terms, this is very little time left, and inmates tend to be on their "best behavior." PEP staff and volunteers have never encountered security problems with inmates, and we ask you to follow our rules to ensure program safety.

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Can you tell me about your class participants?

Most participants will be released within a year of joining PEP – most to the Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston areas. Participants who meet qualifying criteria are selected after completing a 10+ page application package, passing entrance exams, and interviewing with PEP staff members. Each participant accepted into the class has demonstrated his commitment to personal transformation.

Most of our participants are in their twenties and thirties, although they range in ages from 18 to 65. They have served an average of five to eight years in prison on this sentence. Our classes typically consist of approximately 30% African Americans, 30% Hispanics, and 40% Caucasians. Their criminal backgrounds and sentences vary broadly, although we do NOT have any people who have committed sexual offenses in our program.

Where should I stay? What is the nearest airport?

If you need airport and hotel recommendations, please see the RSVP site for the most updated information. Or contact PEP staff for recommendations for the specific prison that you are visiting.

Why does PEP request my driver's license information?

TDCJ requires each guest to submit driver's license information for security clearance purposes. Formerly incarcerated persons are still allowed into the unit, but we need to be aware of these circumstances.

What else should I know about my prison visit?

Contact Information

DO NOT give any inmate your personal contact information, and do not distribute business cards. These are violations of TDCJ rules. It is PEP policy that our volunteers do not communicate via mail with our participants while they are incarcerated. Please do not give or take any contact information.

Behavior

Please be aware that our participants are very impressionable and will look to you as a role model of success. We ask that you be a positive influence. Please refrain from using any curse words or from making inappropriate jokes.

A little nervous?

Most of you have probably never stepped foot in a prison and are not sure what to expect. Although many executives initially have reservations, as soon as they walk through the prison gates and actually "see what an inmate looks like," most of their fears strangely disappear.

Although the event is inside a "real prison," it is not like the movies. You will see tremendous opportunity in these men, and will realize that they are not the caged animals that much of our

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society believes they are. Many of these men landed in prison precisely because they were entrepreneurs in the first place. They are intelligent, creative, passionate and driven individuals.

We also expect that you will find our participants to be extremely courteous and thoughtful. You may be shocked by some of our men – because they might even look a bit like you. We have a few guys in our program who made the bad mistake of having an extra drink after a cocktail party and killed someone in a drunk-driving accident on their way home. The majority of our participants; however, won't look like you. Many grew up in the ghetto, without a chance, without hope, without fathers. They learned violence and drugs at an early age. They have paid dearly for their choices. The only reason why they were hand-selected to participate in PEP, and why they have persisted through this intensive program, is because they are choosing to live a different life and have new values.

Given that every man on this unit is very close to his release, the rate of “negative incidents” on this unit is exceptionally low, even among inmates. They do not want to do anything wrong to mess up their chances of going home. We expect that you will feel surprisingly comfortable at the unit.

Of the executives who have participated in PEP in the past, almost all get “hooked” and can't wait to come back. They have flown in from all over the country to teach business to our participants. This is an opportunity for you to leverage your skills and expertise in a very meaningful and tangible way.

Directions

See the RSVP site for specific directions to the prison that you are visiting.

Whom should I contact if I have questions?

Please call Kristie Wisniewski, Chief of Staff, with any questions regarding travel/logistics. Her phone number and email are at the bottom of this page.

On the day of an event, staff will likely be in the prison, meaning that they will not have access to email or cell phones. If you need to contact us on the day of an event, please call the appropriate facility and ask for the PEP classroom:

Cleveland, TX (Cleveland Unit)
(281) 592-9559

Venus, TX (Sanders Estes Unit):
(972) 366-3334



See you in prison!