

Correctional Facility Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for correctional facility manager roles assess your operational leadership, regulatory knowledge and ability to handle pressure while maintaining safety and humanity in a complex environment.

- **Operational leadership:** Questions about managing custodial teams, rostering, emergency response and day-to-day facility operations.
- **Regulatory and compliance:** Questions on corrections legislation, human rights obligations, internal audits and operating standards.
- **Risk and emergency management:** Scenario questions about critical incidents, use of force, and decision making under pressure.
- **People and performance:** Behavioural questions on staff conduct, performance management and team culture.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Questions about working with courts, police, health services, community agencies and government executives.
- **Budget and resource management:** Questions on facility budgets, procurement, contracts and maintenance.

The process typically begins with a screening interview, followed by a panel interview with senior corrective services executives and sometimes a scenario-based exercise. Reference checks and psychometric testing may also form part of the later stages.

1. Tell me about a time you managed a critical incident within a correctional facility. What was your approach and what was the outcome?

Why they ask

This assesses your ability to stay calm under pressure, follow emergency procedures and lead staff during a high-stakes situation.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and your role, the task you faced, the actions you took step by step, and the result, including what you learned or changed afterwards.

Example answer

"In my previous role as a shift manager at a remand centre, a fight broke out between two detainees in a unit. I was the senior officer on duty. I immediately activated the emergency response protocol, directing staff to secure the area and isolate the individuals involved. I coordinated with health staff to assess injuries and ensured the incident was documented and reviewed. Afterward, I led a debrief with the team and introduced additional conflict resolution training, which reduced similar incidents over the following months."

2. How would you ensure your facility remains compliant with corrections legislation and human rights obligations?

Why they ask

This tests your understanding of the regulatory framework and your practical approach to embedding compliance into daily operations.

How to structure your answer

Use a process structure: outline the key legislation and standards, explain how you would audit and monitor compliance, and describe how you would train and support staff to meet those obligations.

Example answer

"I would start by familiarising myself with the relevant corrections legislation, operating standards and human rights instruments that apply to the facility. I would establish a regular audit schedule covering areas like use of force, prisoner classification and incident reporting. I would also work with unit managers to embed compliance checks into daily routines and provide ongoing training on human rights and lawful practice. If issues arose, I would address them through corrective action plans and report outcomes to the commissioner's office."

3. Describe a time you had to manage a staff member's performance or conduct issue. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

This explores your people leadership, fairness and ability to maintain standards while supporting staff.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: set the scene, explain the issue and your responsibility, detail the steps you took, and share the outcome for the staff member and the team.

Example answer

"In a previous role, a custodial officer repeatedly arrived late for shifts, affecting rostering and team morale. I met with the officer privately to understand the cause and discovered a personal issue. I referred them to the employee assistance program and worked with them to adjust start times temporarily. We agreed on a performance improvement plan with clear expectations. Over the following weeks, their punctuality improved, and they returned to full duties. The process was documented and fair, and it reinforced to the team that we support staff while holding them accountable."

4. How do you balance security requirements with the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders?

Why they ask

This tests your ability to apply a humane and lawful approach while maintaining safety, a core tension in corrections leadership.

How to structure your answer

Use a values-based structure: acknowledge the tension, explain your guiding principles, give an example of how you have balanced both in practice, and describe the outcome.

Example answer

"Security and rehabilitation are not mutually exclusive; a well-run facility creates the conditions for both. My guiding principle is that safety enables positive engagement. In one facility, I supported a program that allowed low-risk detainees to attend vocational training in a secure workshop. We conducted risk assessments, set clear boundaries and monitored behaviour closely. The program reduced idleness and improved behaviour in the unit, while maintaining security. I believe that treating people with dignity and offering meaningful activity ultimately makes the facility safer for everyone."

5. Give an example of how you have managed a facility budget while maintaining service levels.

Why they ask

This assesses your financial acumen and ability to make tough decisions about resources without compromising safety or compliance.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the budget context, the challenge you faced, the actions you took to manage costs, and the result for the facility.

Example answer

"In my last role, I was responsible for a facility budget that had to absorb unexpected maintenance costs. I reviewed all procurement contracts and renegotiated terms with key suppliers, saving money without reducing service frequency. I also introduced a system for tracking overtime and rostering more efficiently. We ended the financial year within budget, and critical maintenance was completed on schedule. The key was prioritising spending on security and essential services while cutting discretionary costs."

6. How would you lead your team through a period of organisational change, such as a new policy or restructure?

Why they ask

This looks at your change management skills, communication and ability to maintain morale and operational stability.

How to structure your answer

Use a change management structure: explain how you would communicate the change, address concerns, involve staff and monitor the impact.

Example answer

"I would start by understanding the rationale for the change and how it affects different teams. I would then communicate openly and honestly with staff, explaining what is changing, why and what it means for them. I would invite feedback and address concerns through regular meetings and updates. During implementation, I would provide training and support, and recognise early adopters. I would monitor morale and performance, adjusting my approach as needed. In a previous restructure, this approach kept the facility running smoothly and helped staff feel heard."