



Field & Capacity Building Resource
2023 EDITION

NRWC TRAINING GUIDE
FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYER
ENGAGEMENT

About NRWC

The National Reentry Workforce Collaborative (NRWC) is a national network of organizations, practitioners, advocates, and industry experts in reentry programming and workforce development spanning across 74 cities in 32 states. The NRWC works to improve policies and practices to better equip nonprofit practitioners, reentry workforce systems and employers, to support and provide access to employment and economic mobility for people who are impacted by the justice system.

About Fair Chance Employment

Over the years many companies have created policies that excluded people with a criminal record from accessing job opportunities within their corporation. However, in the current economy where the demand for workers exceeds the supply, many companies are exploring fair chance hiring opportunities. Fair chance hiring (also known as second chance hiring) is an approach where companies change policies and make accommodations to hire individuals with a criminal record. Companies that succeed in fair chance hiring have established good systems of support to help individuals with criminal record navigate some of the collateral consequences. Many of these companies have done this through partnerships with community-based organizations.

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I. Introduction

This *Fair Chance Employer Engagement Training Guide* is designed to train community-based job developers, program and organizational leaders in building long-term Fair Chance Hiring (FCH) relationships with employers. This document was created by the National Reentry Workforce Collaborative in partnership with reentry workforce practitioners possessing a collective 150 years of experience building FCH employer relationships. The content was also informed by data collected from surveys of (a) businesses that have varying levels of experience employing people who have been impacted by the justice system, and (b) frontline Job Developer staff of NRWC's community-based partner organizations.

This training resource is designed for use in two ways. It can be used to host a one-day training or as an orientation guide for new and/or seasoned job developers and practitioners playing a similar role. In the one-day training approach, we recommend a training design that covers the content in four modules.

One-day Training Approach:

Modules	Sections	Objectives
One: Discovery	Theory of FCH and Employer Research & Preparation	Participants will understand the basis for Fair Chance Hiring and the groundwork needed to find, target, and recruit employers.
Two: Activation	Engagement & Presentation and Placement & Retention	Participants will understand how to engage and activate employer relationships to open job opportunities for program participants.
Three: Expansion	Cultivating Relationship and Growth & Expansion	Participants will explore different approaches to develop long-term employer relationships and strategies to leverage existing relationships to build a network of fair chance employers.
Four: Action	Implementation	Participants will explore the tools and resources that will be used to aid and guide the process of employer engagement.

Orientation Approach:

When using this resource as an orientation for new and/or seasoned practitioners, we recommend providing the users the content before the orientation. This will give the users the chance to review the material in advance. During the orientation the facilitator may lead discussion by asking users to read sections of the guide and use the questions at the end of each session to facilitate discussion.

II. Key Issues & Insights for Fair Chance Employer Engagement

In engaging a wide swath of expert practitioners working in reentry initiatives locally and nationally, a number of *key issues, themes, and perspectives* were repeatedly vocalized by workgroup members as important for developing meaningful Fair Chance employer engagement. Before moving into the more linear training “flow” of Sections III - VIII, the NRWC wanted to *lift up* these insights and encourage readers to consider their importance in their employer engagement training and practice.

- ▶ **The importance of countering employer risk perceptions:** Employers will often express fears of ‘negligent hiring’ lawsuits and/or the perception of poor retention outcomes relative to FCH hires. Research shows FCH employees actually perform as well or better than their peers, are more likely to retain jobs, and more likely to advance within a company¹. Furthermore, the risk of a ‘negligent hiring’ lawsuit is exceedingly low, unlike the potential for EEOC enforcement against blanket hiring policies that prevent members of protected classes from accessing opportunity.²
- ▶ **Commit to humanizing Fair Chance applicants (and their workplaces)** with some or all of the following:
 - ▶ Storytelling about current and past Fair Chance participants with employer partners, highlighting their success and resilience.
 - ▶ Gently reminding collaborators that we are all unpredictable humans that have likely committed some crime in the past (“everyone make mistakes, but only some of us get caught”).
 - ▶ Encourage employers to humanize workplaces by being responsive to the unique needs of their Fair Chance employees, including providing ongoing coaching and support following job placement.

1 McKinsey & Company, July 2022. *Bridging the Advancement Gap: What Frontline Employees Want – and What Employers Think They Want*.

2 In the United States, only 300 negligent hiring cases are filed each year, and less than 1% of employers subject to these suits have been found liable for negligent hiring. 60,000 lawsuits are filed annually by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regarding discrimination toward classes protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. See <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/enforcement-guidance-consideration-arrest-and-conviction-records-employment-decisions> more additional information.

- ▶ **Expect reciprocity in employer partnerships:** As with any relationship, be sure there are healthy power dynamics at play in your work with employers. This means ensuring employers are:
 - a) highly invested in and appreciative of their partnership with your organization,
 - b) actively seeking out opportunities to contribute resources to the work and needs of your organization and the persons you serve,
 - c) striving to create inclusive/supportive environments for Fair Chance employees, and
 - d) offering Fair Chance employees opportunities for ongoing professional development, promotion, and advancement.

ALWAYS REMEMBER:

Job Developers/Employer Reps are key allies and much-needed references in leveling the playing field for Fair Chance applicants. The trust you build with employers is critical to countering the stigma of a criminal record!

III. Research & Preparation

Utilizing LMI and other tools to identify fair chance friendly companies and connect with decision-makers

The first step to successful employer engagement is to research your local labor market conditions, determine which industries might be appropriate for the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) of the persons you serve, and determine which local employers have recurring needs to fill high-quality³ job opportunities.

Leveraging Labor Market Information (LMI) to Source Employment Opportunities

The US Department of Labor defines LMI as “Data about employment by location and occupation, labor supply and demand, earnings, unemployment, and demographics of the labor force⁴”

In working to advise and connect Fair Chance applicants to local employment and training opportunities, understanding the major industries in your area that possess a high demand for employees (as evidenced by current vacancies or projected job/ industry growth) will help you to (a) speak competently with local employers in those fields, and (b) guide Fair Chance participants to opportunities that offer a higher job quality, i.e. better wages, working conditions, opportunities for advancement, and greater job security.

In addition to national data provided by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov) and CareerOneStop resources⁵, each state’s local workforce development agency (search your state + Department of Labor + LMI, or see [here](#)⁶) will typically publish local data and provide online LMI tools that are useful in researching local trends and in-demand occupations for your area.

- ▶ **Ban the Box:** A key aspect of Fair Chance LMI is Ban the Box legislation (or the lack thereof) in your area⁷. Be sure you are prepared to advise your employer partners and participants on what employers can and cannot ask relative to criminal history in application processes.

3 This guide’s use of “quality jobs” or “jobs of high quality” refers to employment opportunities that offer competitive pay and benefits, good working conditions, and opportunities for advancement.

4 Retrieved from <https://www.careeronestop.org/Veterans/ExploreCivilianCareers/CareerOptions/labor-market-information.aspx>

5 <https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Industry/industry.aspx>

6 <<https://www.bls.gov/bls/ofolist.htm>>

7 See <http://www.nelp.org/publication/ban-the-box-fair-chance-hiring-state-and-local-guide/> for more information

Cross-walking Fair Chance Participant Profiles to LMI

Not all in-demand jobs are going to provide great opportunities for Fair Chance clients. In addition to seeking out opportunities with high job quality, the following items should be considered when determining which industries and employers to prioritize in your employer engagement strategies:

- ▶ **Collateral Consequences:** Specific industries may be more or less Fair Chance-friendly. Consider any statutory barriers that might exist for licensed roles and facilities (i.e. ability to pass DHS background check to work with vulnerable populations), and whether a person's offense may directly apply to the type of role they are considering (i.e. persons with theft convictions applying to cash-handling roles). Note, however, that hiring conditions and policies can be highly dynamic, change frequently, and companies/ industries might surprise you. This is particularly true with the growth in Fair Chance Hiring advocacy and support in recent years, which has been aided by pressing labor shortages nationally.
- ▶ **Geographic Location + Transportation Options:** Is the work location accessible by public transit? Do transit options run at different times of day and/or on weekends if needed? How long would the daily commute be, and is it sustainable for your participant and/or their family?
- ▶ **Scheduling Considerations:** Is your participant able to work 2nd/3rd shift or evenings/ weekends? And, if applicable:
 - ▶ Are childcare options available outside of regular business hours?
 - ▶ Is the participant in a halfway house that imposes conditions on shift times and/or environments in which they can work (i.e. no overnights, no alcohol presence, etc.)?
 - ▶ Does the participant have conditions of release that might conflict with potential work environments/ duties (i.e. no access to social media, etc.)?
 - ▶ Does the participant need to work around a school or training schedule?
- ▶ **Education, Experience, or Testing Requirements:** Questions to ask include:
 - ▶ Does your participant meet the required qualifications?
 - ▶ Does the company administer any testing for their application procedures? If so:
 - ▶ Can they share the test with you so your organization can pre-assess participants and help them study/ prepare in advance of applying?

- If a specific reading grade level is required: does your organization use TABE or CASAS testing to gauge participants' literacy levels and potential Adult Education needs?

Company Research

Company websites, press releases, and news articles provide a wealth of information regarding a company's mission and values. In researching online information about a company, check for the following:

- Do the company's values have any focus on advancing social or community needs?
- If the company has a Community Relations team, what causes do they support/ care about?

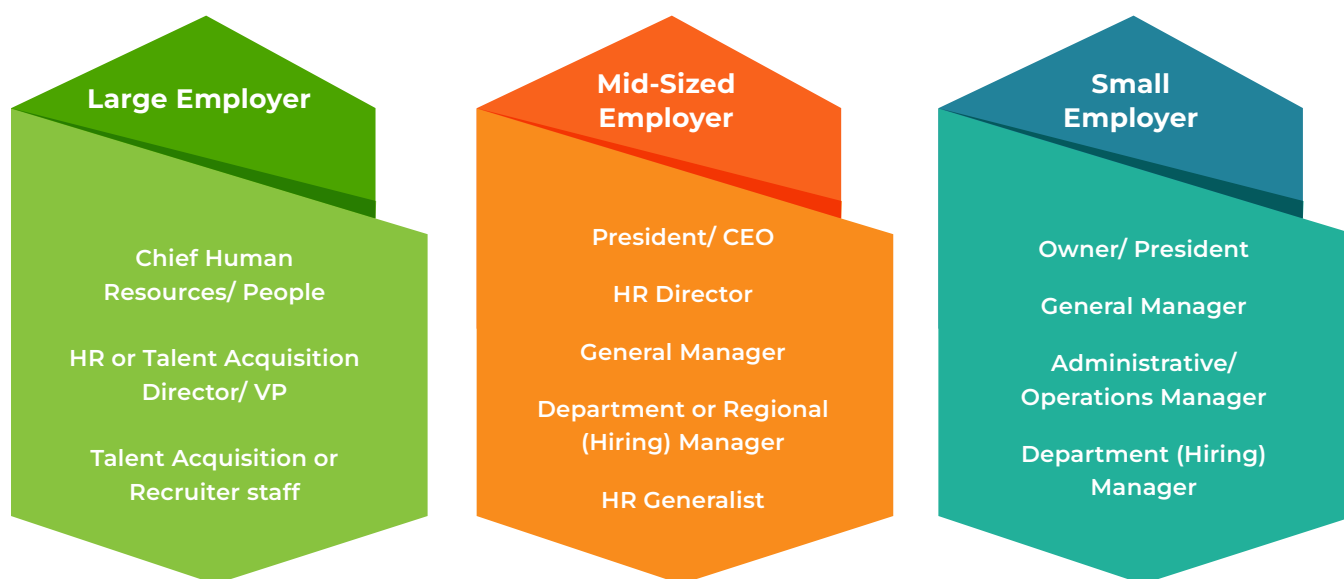
The purpose of this exercise is two-fold: when referencing the above information in your company engagements, you (a) exhibit that you are knowledgeable and have done your research, and (b) can remind company representatives of their guiding values, aspirational goals, and how a partnership with your organization can ultimately help them to 'live' their values.

Aligning Mission-Based Work: Most hospitals in the US are nonprofit organizations whose tax-exempt status requires a charitable, community-based mission. Although licensed positions within hospitals may be subject to statutory requirements barring certain criminal records, hospitals are large employers with a range of administration, facilities management, and food service positions that should have more flexibility in hiring decisions.

In outreaching to hospital personnel/ hiring managers, it may help to refer to the *economic stability* focus of your work as improving your community's social determinants of health, a framework that is likely also a component of any hospital's community-based mission. It may also help to reference that one of the highest-ranked hospital systems in the nation – Johns Hopkins – has actively promoted its success as a Fair Chance employer for more than a decade.

Sourcing Introductions: Before cold-calling/ emailing a company, consider whether you have networked connections that might facilitate a 'warmer' introduction to a decision-maker within that company. Do you know any current or past employees there? Is your organization part of a chamber of commerce or industry/ trade association that this company is also active with? Is their HR Director on the board of an organization you know well? If you are a LinkedIn user, do a 'companies' search to find their page, then click on 'people' to show their LinkedIn user employees. For any current employees that show up as a 1st or 2nd degree connection, ask your mutual connection if they would be comfortable facilitating an introduction.

Targeting decision-makers: It is important to engage persons with some decision-making authority or influence over a company's hiring functions. In your company research and initial engagement, determine which role at the company you will target to initiate a relationship. The names of decision-making roles can vary greatly within companies, but the size of the company can often inform common titles to look for in determining your target person(s). The table below illustrates common titles involved in hiring management based on a company's relative size.



Important!: Be sure to document all of your company research, engagements, new hires, etc. in a central data platform that is accessible to others in your organization.

Section III Discussion Questions

Question 1: What is your local source(s) for LMI and how have you used it in the past?

Question 2: Based on your experience, what are some differences you have noticed between engaging with large, mid-sized, and small businesses?

Question 3: What local industries are Fair Chance-friendly in your area? Have you ever had an employer demonstrate more openness to a Fair Chance candidate than you were anticipating?

Employer Profile Exercise: Research a local company that your organization is interested in approaching and complete the employer profile tool that was provided.

IV. Engagement & Presentation

Making the business case for and humanizing fair chance hiring; taking the time to

Initial Contact

Once you determine an initial point person to connect with, you will need to determine a strategy to get their attention and motivate them to want to learn more. When approaching a new relationship as an entirely ‘unknown’ entity, you will likely need to initiate multiple touchpoints (i.e. “I wanted to call to follow up to the email I sent last week,” etc.). Things to keep in mind when introducing yourself:

- ▶ **Be familiar:** be collegial in your greeting and reference any mutual connections that may exist
- ▶ **Be concise:** in summarizing your inquiry, keep it short but provide enough context to pique the employers’ interest (“we are a Fair Chance organization that helps employers create community-based hiring pipelines that support their recruitment strategies”)
- ▶ **Use neutral or asset-based language:** Avoid deficit-based terminology focused on participant barriers/ labels, using neutral language instead (“we provide free consult on becoming a Fair Chance employer” or “we connect jobseeker/Fair Chance talent to quality employers,” etc.).
- ▶ **Establish credibility:** Do you have established partnerships in the same industry as the target employer? Has your organization recently received any awards or recognition for its work? Is your work part of a broader initiative? (“This project was awarded state workforce agency funding to provide support to employers seeking to connect with untapped local talent.”)
- ▶ **Request a meeting to discuss a potential partnership:** Suggest a few potential meeting times and/or request the employer do the same. Before you request a meeting, be sure to understand the business cycle of the employer so that you can suggest times when they will be available to give you their full attention. Express gratitude for their time and willingness to consider a collaboration.

Sidenote: Employers may automatically assume that you are either (a) attempting to sell them temporary staffing services, or (b) representing services to other demographic communities that also have a need for employment interventions. Stay positive and be transparent about the focus of your organization’s work and the persons you serve.

Making the Business Case

Although your organization's work with employers and participants will be unique to the needs of your community, consider incorporating the following elements to strengthen your Fair Chance Hiring pitch:

- ▶ **Overview of your organization and its work with employers:** You are doing impressive work with great partners! Give a brief overview of your organization's history, its work with participants/employers, and how this meeting fits into that broader scope of work.
- ▶ **Services you offer to employers:** In describing the services you can offer to employers, focus on using Human Resources-focused language and terminology, i.e.:
 - ▶ Candidate pre-screening and referral
 - ▶ Customized training programs and/or career pathways mapping.
 - ▶ **Consultation on inclusive hiring practices**
 - ▶ Hiring policy review/ best practices (i.e. 'Getting Talent Back to Work'⁸).
 - ▶ Interpretation of criminal histories & their risk
 - ▶ Technical assistance in accessing hiring incentives, i.e. WOTC credits and federal bonding programs.
 - ▶ **Employee retention coaching and support.**
- ▶ **Dispel Myths/Concerns:** Counter employers' risk perceptions regarding Fair Chance Hiring with education and real data.
- ▶ **Why Fair Chance Hiring?** Incorporate statistics that outline the magnitude in which America's workforce is impacted by the justice system and references to major companies that do Fair Chance Hiring.

ALWAYS CUSTOMIZE YOUR PITCH!

Be sure to point out any areas in which you see strong alignment between the Employer you are meeting with and your organization's work, i.e.:

Their company's mission, values/ core tenets, etc.

Highlight how the services you provide - or participants you serve - might be particularly well-suited to their talent needs (i.e. track record of serving similar employers, participant interest in that employer/industry, any contextualized training you might provide, etc.)

8 See <https://www.shrm.org/about-shrm/news-about-shrm/pages/shrm-foundation-introduces-getting-talent-back-to-work-certificate.aspx>

- ▶ **Understanding the Employer's Needs:** This is the most important aspect of your pitch. Your approach should always prioritize - and dedicate most of your meeting time – to actively listening to the employer's specific talent acquisition needs. Be sure to ask clarifying follow-up questions to ensure (and exhibit) that you have a clear understanding. This approach is often used in consultative sales, where the primary focus is on the “customer” versus the features of services being presented.
- ▶ **Storytelling:** Humanize your work and the participants you serve! Consider past participant success stories, other employer partnerships that have worked well, and stories exhibiting the strengths/motivation of persons you are actively seeking to place.
- ▶ **Expectations & Next Steps:** Describe how you could address the specific needs of that employer, how a partnership might work and any specific expectations you have of employer partners, and what the next steps would be to customize a partnership to address their needs. Be sure it is very clear to the employer who their **point of contact** is at your organization.

The National Reentry Workforce Collaborative offers several resources to partners to assist them in crafting their own unique business case. These include the following:

- ▶ Template 'pitch deck' presentation
- ▶ Common Objections and Responses
- ▶ Business Case for Fair Chance Hiring Fact Sheet

Section IV Discussion Questions

Question 1: What are some things you have done, or can do to establish credibility with employers?

Question 2: What steps can you take to understand the unique/specific needs of the employer?

Question 3: What does it mean to take a “consultative sales approach” to engaging with employers? Is this a new concept for you? If no, describe how you have taken this approach in the past and how it worked for you.

Question 4: What are some common objections against fair chance hiring you have heard from employers?

V. Placement & Retention

Train and prepare job candidates with prerequisite skills, provide supports, and match the best candidate first.

In developing a Fair Chance hiring collaboration, it will be critical that participants referred by your organization are work ready and equipped with the supports they need to succeed on the job.

Participant Readiness

Before referring job-seeking candidates to interview with a Fair Chance employer, participants should be prepared for their (a) interactions with employer partners, and (b) potential new job start. If your organization is not currently providing a Work Readiness training series for participants, you will need to determine how can feasibly address participant readiness needs with the resources available to you. This could include provision of 1:1 coaching in advance of employer referrals, partnering with an external organization or Adult Basic Education provider to facilitate Work Readiness/ Digital Literacy training, or other strategies.

In focus groups and surveys, NRWC partners recommend the following training topics to adequately prepare participants to engage with employer partners: Interview Preparation/ Developing Personal Narratives, Workplace Norms, Conflict Resolution, Communication Skills, and Digital Literacy training.

Supportive Services Provision

Before and after placement into employment, it will similarly be important that Fair Chance participants have access to any needed supportive services to remove barriers to successful job placement and/or retention. NRWC partners and workgroup members recommended the following: transportation assistance (bus/transit cards, gas cards, emergency repair), interview and work clothing purchase, work tools purchase, housing assistance, childcare referral, and referral to basic needs (hygiene, food shelf, etc.), tattoo removal, and legal services.

At the time of job placement, your organization (and/or its partners) should be prepared to continue the provision of career coaching and support to Fair Chance participants to ensure they (a) have the resources needed to be successful on-the-job, and (b) continue to work towards long-term career advancement and/or education goals. If your organization and/or its partners provide financial coaching services, these can similarly help Fair Chance participant employees recalibrate their household budget aligned to a new income and savings plan, navigate changes to (and/or apply for) public benefits and income supports, and work on any credit repair needs in pursuit of asset-/ wealth-building goals.

The Importance of *First Referrals*

The first candidate referrals your organization makes to a new employer relationship have the potential to ‘make or break’ that relationship for years to come. This is your organization’s chance to make a good first impression regarding your candidates’ level of preparation/ work readiness, and your ability to match candidate skill sets to the Employer’s qualification requirements. In addition to ensuring candidates are interested in the role and possess the needed qualifications, your First Referrals should be persons that you can count on to be reliable/ punctual and have good communication skills for the interview setting.

Identifying/ selecting someone to be your organization’s ‘First Referral’ is an honor – let them know you think of them as a leader and appreciate the work they have put in, and *help them understand the role they can play in positively impacting a pipeline of future opportunities for other Fair Chance candidates.*

Retention in Employment

In developing/ maintaining employer relationships, establish a good rapport with partners and let them know to contact you (or a designated person at your organization) if any concerns arise with persons supported by your team. When employers do contact you, consider the following:

- a) Be responsive to their concerns, replying within 24-48 hours (or sooner) whenever possible
- b) Level-set when needed and help the employer to understand the situation from a human.
- c) Maintain good boundaries and ensure roles/ responsibilities between the Employer and your organization are clear. For example, your organization may be able to provide job coaching and/or retention counseling interventions with participants,

Leveraging Industry Norm – Turn Over

Goodwill Industries of Kentucky leverages high turnover rate in the restaurant industry by working with a network of employers in their RAMP program to provide a wide range of pathways for clients. Clients are provided training, credentialling, one-on-one career coaching, and barrier removal assistance. This bundle of professional development services, couples with the network of employers provides the client and employers peace of mind. Clients can advance in their career, with the initial employer partner or with other RAMP up partners; and employers have access to a talent pipeline of job seekers that are enrolled in ongoing professional development. Additionally, the employers that we engage have also adapted hiring/employer practices that foster an environment for clients to upskill/un-lift.

but the Employer is always responsible for any disciplinary action or needs for employee termination.

- d) Develop an action plan that supports both the employer and your participant's needs/ interests.

Your role as a Job Developer/ Employer Engager should not end once your participant begins an entry-level role with an employer partner. In continuing to support the long-term goals of both the employer and your participants, career pathways mapping can be an effective exercise to support longer-term employee retention. In supporting the employer with their planning, help them to understand their industry's norms (i.e. typical wages, benefits, career tracks, turnover rates, etc.) to inform how *they* might create streamlined opportunities for internal advancement and career pathways. This could include determining processes and benchmarks for wage increases, promotions, training/ professional development, additional benefits, or other employee supports to promote longer-term employee retention.

Section V Discussion Questions

Question 1: What type of soft-skills development does your work readiness training provide?

Question 2: A First Hire can make or break a relationship. Do you agree? If yes, why?

Question 3: Based on your experience, what are the top three supportive services needed and how does your program provide these services?

First Hire Exercise: Read the assigned case study and describe how you would go about preparing the participant to take on the role, equip the employers to successfully onboard the new hire, and support the participant to help her retain her job.

VI. Cultivate Relationships

Form true collaboration on fair chance hiring that lead to ongoing placement and retention of candidates.

In developing relationships with employer partners, a consultative approach focused on listening to and meeting the needs of both the Employer *and* your Fair Chance participants should be prioritized. Building trust and mutuality may require ongoing education and direct efforts to hold each other accountable to the roles and goals of your project. In addition to this give-and-take reciprocity, an ‘ideal’ Employer partnership will similarly stress the importance of continuous learning and improvement, providing human-centered workplaces that fully integrate Fair Chance employees and respond to their needs.

As with any partnership, establishing trust and standards for ongoing communication is always important. The employer relations table below illustrates what an ideal partnership, developed over time, might look like.

Function	Community-Based Organization (CBO)	Fair Chance Employer
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CBO prescreens applicant referrals to open positions in support of company’s recruitment needs ▶ (If needed) CBO drafts MOU/ letter of commitment outlining partnership roles and responsibilities, including regular check-ins and communication standards between Employer/ CBO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Employer views CBO partner as an integral extension of their HR function. ▶ Agrees to give CBO referrals ‘First Look’ on open positions ▶ Agrees to and signs MOU commitment (if needed), including regular check-ins/ meetings with CBO.

Function	Community-Based Organization (CBO)	Fair Chance Employer
Employment Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CBO provides supportive services (transportation assistance, work clothing allowance, etc.) to ensure participant is ready & able to get to work. ▶ CBO provides technical assistance/consulting on available incentives (e.g. WOTC, bonding). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Employer commits to inclusive and supportive work environment and thorough onboarding practices to set the stage for employee success/retention.
Employment Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CBO provides ongoing coaching and support to Fair Chance employees to support their career retention and/or advancement. ▶ CBO partners with Employer to inform policy, map pathways, and co-develop training and internal pathway opportunities to promote internal advancement/ promotion. ▶ Invites employers to share and participate in celebrations of participant success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Employer commits to regular communication and leans on CBO to triage any human/ social needs that may arise for Fair Chance employees. ▶ Employer invests resources in paid employee training/ professional development in support of internal career pathway opportunities/ promotion. ▶ Employer advises CBO on training needs as a member of its Business Advisory Council (or similar). ▶ Employer participates in participant recognition/ celebration events.

Function	Community-Based Organization (CBO)	Fair Chance Employer
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CBO communicates opportunities for employer to learn more about their organization and “plug in” to its mission (newsletter, volunteer and board recruitment, etc.) ▶ CBO finds ways to highlight successful partnership with Employer in its communications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Employer seeks out ways to provide additional support and give back to the CBO’s mission, including joining Business Advisory Council or board of directors, attending/ contributing to fundraisers, and organizing volunteer events.

Section VI Discussion Questions

Question 1: What steps have you taken in the past to strengthen relationship with employers?

Question 2: Do you currently have any employer relationships that you think could be strengthened? If yes, how what steps can you take to bring the relationships to the next level?

Long-term Employer Relationship Exercise: Envision a long-term relationship with an employer that you are currently working with or would like to work with. Use the table provided to describe how the relationship would work for each function.

VII. Growth & Expansion

Build a network of businesses that use your services and provide insight and support to grow your program.

Once your organization has been successful in amassing a number of Fair Chance employer partnerships, you may decide to ‘specialize’ your work/ service with specific employers and/ or industries that have proven to be Fair Chance-friendly and offer good opportunities to participants. Specializing your work to a specific industry has the potential to further your reach through trade associations, increase your credibility and expertise in being able to respond to niche employer training and talent acquisition needs, and become a go-to ‘industry player’ for filling job vacancies or helping companies develop customized training.

Employers recognize the inherent value proposition in partnering with organizations committed to training candidates for positions (and credentials) in their industry. Community-based organizations can leverage and further this buy-in by implementing some or all of the following strategies:

- **Business Advisory Councils:** Often industry-specific, inviting employer partners to join your business advisory council can provide them with an opportunity to network and learn from their peers while working on an initiative that is bigger than the bottom line. It similarly provides an opportunity for your organization to stay informed about latest industry trends/needs, ask industry experts to inform your organization’s (Work Readiness or credentialed) training curriculum, and co-develop new training or internship models. Business advisory councils also offer a unique platform in which to further showcase the work of your team (and participants) while garnering additional employer commitments to contribute to the mission of your program/ organization (i.e. speaking engagements, mock interviews, etc.).

Share Successes with Employers

Your organization and the employer share complementary goals. Therefore, it is important to share successes with employers so they can “taste the success” of your program and its participants. In sharing stories of participants that have graduated or met key programmatic milestones, the employer can begin to understand the impact of the program on the lives of individuals served *and* its potential for talent pipeline development. Likewise, sharing grant award announcements and case studies on other businesses that have successfully hired participants can not only strengthen the credibility of your program, but also inspire a competitive “fear of missing out” among your employer partners.

- ▶ **Reverse Hiring Fairs:** Unlike the standard Job Fair where participants are referred to join a sea of faces all vying for the attention of the event's participating employers, a *reverse hiring fair* asks employers within a specific industry/ niche field to come to *your* organization and meet your qualified, vetted participants who been invited to participate (i.e., recent graduates of a credentialed training program contextualized to that role or industry, etc.).
- ▶ **Industry/ Trade Association Membership:** By joining an industry trade association in a field in which you train and/or place candidates, you will be introduced to new potential employer partners, be given opportunities to present your work to the association's membership, and open doors to potential training and/or funding collaborations with the association and/or its membership.

Within the context of a particular industry, the above strategies have the potential to create a self-reinforcing workforce development 'ecosystem': your organization becomes the known go-to workforce intermediary among local employers seeking training or placement collaboration, and community members increasingly become aware of the potential to jumpstart careers in a specific area through your training and placement programming. And, in furthering your organization's reach and credibility with employers, you can build a reputation within your city, region, or state that has potential to create new coalitions, career pathways, and/or funding opportunities that unlock *more* opportunities for justice-impacted persons.

Section VII Discussion Questions

Question 1: Are you currently or are you interested in implementing any of these strategies to grow your network of employers? Please discuss.

Question 2: If you do not have an active business advisory council, what steps can you take to develop one?

VIII. Acknowledgments

The National Reentry Workforce Collaborative would like to thank the many individuals and organizations that generously shared their time, talent, and experience – both professional and *lived* - as members of NRWC's inaugural Fair Chance Employer Engagement Workgroup.

Organization	Workgroup Member
Safer Foundation	Harry Alston
Center for Employment Opportunities	Christopher Watler
Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (CFCHI)	Harris Rollinger
	Terra Heinzl-Nelson
	Kristen DeWitt
	Jason Whyte
Transformative Workforce Academy (Saint Louis University)	Meredith Rataj
	Lisa Cohn
Goodwill of Kentucky	Dennis Ritchie
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