

Reentry Toolkit: A Resource for ISRI Members

Introduction

The purpose of the Reentry Toolkit is to provide a resource for ISRI members who are considering hiring previously incarcerated individuals for employment. These resources are for the company and employees to help them reenter the workforce and society. Some of the information in this toolkit may be applied to any individual entering or reentering the workplace as well. There are great benefits to hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, for example, it can improve the workforce, provide diversity of skills and knowledge, and provide positive opportunities for these individuals. **These opportunities allow formerly incarcerated individuals to do labor for your company while building up the community.** These benefits are why we have created the **Reentry Toolkit** as a resource for ISRI Members.

Benefits

Hiring formerly incarcerated individuals comes with many benefits for the employer and potential employees. Some of these include:

- Financial Stability
- Respect
- Potential Tax Incentives and grants
- A Diverse Workforce
- Giving back to the community

For additional information on these benefits you can visit these resources.

- [5 Reasons Why Your Business Should Hire Former Inmates](#)
- [Incarceration to Employment](#)
- [Second Chance Hiring: The Benefits of Employing Returning Citizens](#)

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

There are several challenges that many formerly incarcerated individuals face when reentering back into the workforce. As an ISRI member you can aid with turning these challenges into opportunities for these individuals. When reentering into the workforce some important challenges for individuals are:

- [Interviews](#)
- [Education Status & Training](#)

- [The Transition](#)
- [Finding Housing](#)
- [Mentorship and Support](#)
- [Daily Necessities & Financial Awareness](#)

Tools for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals Reentering the Workforce

Interviews

The interview process is the starting point between an employer and potential employees' relationship. This step is extremely important for formerly incarcerated individuals. It is very difficult for these individuals to make it past the interview process, or even get to this point. This toolkit provides tips for the interviewer to holistically assess a formerly incarcerated person. By being able to do this, an employer can gain important knowledge about an individual in a short period of time.

Interview Tips that help the employer conduct an interview with people reentering the workforce

1. Keep an open mind as, the applicant may be nervous that they will be judged based on their history
2. Do not ask detailed questions about incarceration history early in the interview
 - a. The Fair Chance Act (Ban the box)
 - i. To get additional information on how to implement The Fair Chance Act you can visit these resources:
 - ii. [Fair Chance Act \(Ban the Box\)](#)
 - iii. [How Fair Chance Hiring Benefits Businesses and Candidates](#)
 - iv. [A Guide to Fair Chance Hiring for Employers](#)
3. Ask about experience, but do not condone lack of experience, if your company can help with job training let that be known to provide comfort for these individuals. The goal is to **“lower barriers, not standards”**.
4. Make the job responsibilities clear, as this might be their first job in a formal workplace.
5. Be aware of the challenges that these individuals face and if they actively want to change these challenges, be clear that your company can help with the transition.

The Fair Chance Act or “Ban the Box” can be implemented when assessing potential employees. This concept says that an employer will assess a candidate's qualifications/skills, offer the position, then they can inquire about incarceration history. This method can eliminate initial stigma and bias. This allows for the interviewer to judge if someone is right for a position solely on skills.

Note: This process can vary due to an individual's form of corrections. There are 4 main forms of corrections: intermediate sanctions, prison, jail, probation, parole. For example, if an individual was placed on community supervision (i.e. probation) or on parole their officer might contact the organization directly to inform of status. This can interfere with the concept of 'ban the box'. Intermediate sanctions include ankle monitoring, community service, treatment, etc... which could potentially interfere with their work position.

Education Status & Training

Each employee is different, meaning they have different education and experiences, and this may especially be true for formerly incarcerated individuals. **The goal is to effectively assess a candidate's experiences and skills in order to provide necessary training.** Many of these individuals have experience in skills labor that can be an asset to your company. Formerly incarcerated individuals tend to be fast learners due to constant adaptation which can be an asset as they learn company operations. Once a candidate is hired, you can provide professional training and continue to monitor their performance to identify frustration and challenges they might experience. This will help increase productivity in the workplace.

Additional Resources:

- If you are interested in the benefits of employee training and how to effectively train them you can visit this resource: [8 Employee Training Tactics](#)
- [Workforce Development Solutions](#) from the U.S. The Department of Labor discusses how to find diverse candidates and techniques for training and education.

The Transition

Many formerly incarcerated individuals have established expectations. These established expectations became a norm or lifestyle for them that tends to mirror their lives while in the incarceration system. Once hired the workplace environment will be unknown to many individuals. As the employer, you can create a welcoming environment to help the individual transition comfortably in their new environment. Let them know that they have more independence and are free to ask questions, if needed, without repercussions. A comfortable employee is a productive employee, and in turn will do good quality work for the company.

Another way to help formerly incarcerated employees is to guide them through a process that helps them locate reentry programs. Reentry programs assist formerly incarcerated individuals specifically in re-entering into society and ease the challenges that come with it. Each program might have different purposes and missions as well. The resource below provides a list of reentry programs by state.

Visit: [ReEntry Programs by State](#)

Finding Housing

As an employer, the safety of your employees is important, inside and outside of the workplace. Therefore safe housing is very important. Formerly incarcerated individuals have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing for several reasons, but a big one is lack of financial resources and/or literacy. Many individuals are not aware of the financial aspect that comes with housing and the different types of housing.

Visit: [Guide to Finding Housing](#) to find housing options, financial resources, and several other reentry tips.

If an employee wants more state or city specific housing information they can go online and do a search for “Housing resources for formerly incarcerated individuals in [city or state].”

Mentorship and Support

Many individuals may benefit from a mentor to help them reestablish themselves into society. This can be in the workplace or by helping them access outside resources. This toolkit includes resources where an individual can seek an outside mentor, as well as tips for an internal employee willing to serve as a mentor. When being a mentor for formerly incarcerated individuals it is important to focus on upskilling in many areas. Upskilling is teaching or adding onto the skills that they already have.

- **Visit:** [A criminal background shouldn't be a life sentence: How to mentor and upskill employees so they thrive at your business](#) to obtain information about how to be a mentor to your employees.

Some individuals may want to seek out support groups which can also help reduce recidivism. There are several outlets that could potentially help an individual seeking these groups.

Additional Resources:

- Search “support groups in [city or state]”.
- Specific support (i.e. loss of a family member, or addiction, etc...): “ support groups in [city or state] for [insert reason]”.
- **Visit:** [NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Health](#) to help with support regarding mental health

Daily Necessities & Financial Awareness

Many of your formerly incarcerated employees might need assistance in locating consistent transportation, daily necessities like clothing for work, food stamps, online access, as well as,

financial awareness and literacy. Financial literacy and awareness is a huge barrier for many individuals, especially those who have been formerly incarcerated. This barrier is an important aspect that can reduce recidivism. If a formerly incarcerated person gains the skill and knowledge of budgeting and managing finances, they increase their chances of maintaining a stable lifestyle, which will help them grow in the community. As an employer, the first step was hiring them, next you can assist them by providing support to help them manage their finances in a smart manner. Here is a [link](#) that provides a short guide on financial education. Also, included in this link are reentry tips, housing and transportation resources, etc... This link is primarily for the employees once hired, but can be a great resource for ISRI members so that they can be aware, as well.

Finding necessities near you:

- Public Transportation:
 - Search “Public Transportation in [insert city]” and use the resources on how to operate or utilize that transportation
- Professional Clothing:
 - Use [Goodwill](#) to locate one near you and obtain affordable clothing
 - Search “Free professional clothing in [insert city]”.
- Food Stamps
 - [USAgov](#) is a great resource for your employees that provides assistance to obtain food assistance.

