EMPLOYER GUIDE FOR HIRING JUSTICE-INVOLVED TENNESSEANS



SECOND CHANCES WORK



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING JUSTICE-INVOLVED TENNESSEANS

IN TENNESSEE, THE ROAD TO REENTRY IS ONLY ATTAINABLE IF JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS ARE GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE, AND THAT BEGINS WITH MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT. THOUSANDS OF TENNESSEANS HAVE FULFILLED THEIR OBLIGATIONS TO THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND ARE READY, WILLING, AND ABLE TO WORK AS LOYAL EMPLOYEES. BY EMBRACING SECOND CHANCE HIRING, BUSINESS LEADERS AND HIRING MANAGERS CAN STRENGTHEN BUSINESS OPERATIONS, FUEL ECONOMIC GROWTH, AND ENHANCE PUBLIC SAFETY ACROSS THE VOLUNTEER STATE.

UNLOCK TALENT & END RECIDIVISM

ONE IN THREE AMERICANS HAS A CRIMINAL RECORD, AND DESPITE RECORD-LOW UNEMPLOYMENT, JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS STRUGGLE TO FIND JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

This issue is particularly pronounced in Tennessee, where the unemployment rate for justice-involved individuals stands at an alarming 27 percent, while the statewide unemployment rate sits at a historically low 3.4 percent. Providing job opportunities to justice-involved individuals is not only a smart business decision for employers seeking talent, but it is also a vital economic factor that can break the cycle of recidivism.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Employment is a critical factor in reducing recidivism rates. However, outdated hiring practices and the stigma of a criminal record create unnecessary barriers for justice-involved job seekers. As business leaders and hiring managers, it's time to shift our perspective and recognize the potential and value that justice-involved individuals bring to business operations.

15K+
INCARCERATED TENNESSEANS ARE RELEASED ANNUALLY

46%
OF RELEASED TENNESSEANS RETURN TO PRISON WITHIN THREE YEARS

27%
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED TENNESSEANS

THRIVING INDIVIDUALS, THRIVING BUSINESSES

There is pride in a paycheck, and just like many employed Tennesseans, justice-involved individuals have a strong desire to work and contribute to society. When justice-involved individuals are given a chance to work, they prove their loyalty, dedication, and productivity. They become valuable assets to businesses and contribute to their success. By offering employment opportunities, you not only transform lives, but you also foster a more diverse and skilled workforce.



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OUR JUSTICE-INVOLVED TEAM MEMBERS NOT ONLY VALUE COLLECTING A PAYCHECK, THEY ALSO TAKE GREAT PRIDE IN BEING PART OF OUR TEAM AND CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY. AS A RESULT THEY ARE EXTREMELY LOYAL AND PRODUCTIVE, AND THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED DEEPLY TO OUR COMPANY'S OPERATIONS AND CULTURE.

J. PAUL JACKSON
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER | THOR BOATS, LLC

BENEFITS OF SECOND CHANCE HIRING

Tennessee is widely recognized as one of the most business-friendly states in the nation and that reputation must extend to providing employment opportunities to those who have fulfilled their obligations to the judicial system. Companies in a wide range of industries, including highly-skilled and highly-regulated sectors like manufacturing, hospitality, back-office operations and construction, have bucked this trend and established successful programs to give justice-involved job seekers a chance at meaningful employment. Companies prioritizing second chance hiring are reaping great benefits for their business operations. Here are some key reasons why companies are taking this necessary step:



AVAILABLE & MOTIVATED TALENT POOL

LOW TURNOVER & HIGH PERFORMANCE

TAX INCENTIVES AND BONDING FOR EMPLOYERS



UNLOCK A VAST AND MOTIVATED TALENT POOL

Tennessee employers have a unique opportunity to unlock a largely untapped talent pool by hiring justice-involved individuals. With more than 300,000 job openings currently available across the state, employers in every industry are struggling to find qualified candidates to fill these roles. However, justice-involved individuals represent a qualified pool of candidates who can bring unique skills and experiences to the workplace. In fact, over 8,900 justice-involved individuals have completed a profile on jobs4tn.gov and are waiting to be hired. With the help of the Tennessee Office of Reentry, employers can unlock this talent pool.

LOWER TURNOVER & HIGHER PERFORMANCE

Justice-involved employees are known for their loyalty, strong work ethic, and low turnover rates. They bring fresh perspectives and unique skills to the office, enhancing business operations without negatively impacting current employees. By hiring justice-involved individuals, employers gain dedicated team members who are invested in their work and committed to long-term success.



Studies have consistently shown that justice-involved individuals perform on par or even better than their non-justice-involved peers. They bring a sense of gratitude, loyalty, and work ethic to their roles. By hiring justice-involved individuals, you not only make a positive impact on their lives, but you also benefit from a more engaged and committed workforce. Lower turnover rates and higher performance translate to increased profitability for your business.

SUPPORT AND INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS

FEDERAL TAX CREDIT

The **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)** is a federal tax credit that provides financial incentives to businesses that hire individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system. The credit can be as much as $2,400 per qualified hire, and it can significantly reduce the cost of hiring, training, and retaining justice-involved individuals. The WOTC is available to all businesses, regardless of size, and there is no limit to the number of qualified hires a business can make.

FEDERAL BONDING PROGRAM

The **Federal Bonding Program** is a program established by the U.S. Department of Labor to provide fidelity bonds for hard-to-place job seekers who are considered to be at risk. The program provides coverage for the first six months of employment at no cost to the job applicant or the employer. The bonds can be applied to any job with any employer, in any state, and cover any employee dishonesty committed on or away from the workplace. The program is designed to give employers peace of mind when hiring individuals who may have a criminal record or other risk factors.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING GRANT

The state of **Tennessee's On-the-Job Training (OJT)** grants offer tremendous value to both employers and individuals seeking employment. These grants provide employers with financial incentives to hire and train individuals, enabling them to gain the necessary skills and experience directly in the workplace. By reducing the financial burden of training new employees, the OJT grants help businesses save on recruitment and training costs while mitigating the risks associated with hiring individuals who may lack traditional qualifications but possess the motivation to succeed. Simultaneously, these grants offer individuals the opportunity to acquire practical skills, increase their employability, and secure stable, long-term employment. The value of Tennessee's OJT grants lies in their ability to foster mutually beneficial partnerships between employers and individuals, driving economic growth, reducing unemployment, and promoting a skilled and thriving workforce.



REAP THE BENEFITS & JOIN EMPLOYERS EMPOWERING SECOND CHANCES

Companies across The Volunteer State are finding success with justice-involved employees and you can do the same while making a difference. By hiring these individuals, employers are playing a transformational role in the lives of men and women who are reentering our communities by providing a path to redemption and opportunity.

American Paper · CVS · KUB · THOR DROP THE HAMMER · Kroger

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN JUSTICE AND JOBS



The State of Tennessee is committed and invested in bridging the gap between jobs and jail, and the Tennessee Office of Reentry (OOR) is setting a national precedent as the first and only state reentry team to operate within the Department of Labor instead of the Department of Correction. By emphasizing the importance of employment and workforce development in reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful reentry practices, the Office of Reentry is demonstrating a unique and innovative approach to evidence-based criminal justice reform.

Through collaboration with state and local government agencies, community organizations, and employers, the Office of Reentry facilitates strategies to overcome barriers to employment and increase awareness of the value of justice-involved individuals across all 95 counties. Since 2021, the OOR's approach has led to significant gains, by investing over $1 million in grants for local workforce development boards, hosting regional resource fairs and expungement clinics, and providing driver licenses and state IDs as ways to remove barriers to employment. These efforts have resulted in the enrollment of thousands of justice-involved Tennesseans via **Jobs4TN.gov** who are ready, willing, and able to work.

A REENTRY TEAM WITH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

To truly understand one's challenges beyond the walls of incarceration, you must understand their journey behind the walls. One-third of the Tennessee Office of Reentry staff is comprised of justice-involved individuals who have personally experienced the hurdles of reentry. This firsthand experience allows our team to provide realistic and unmatched perspectives and practices to employers interested in implementing second chance hiring practices.

At the Tennessee Office of Reentry, we recognize the untapped potential and the immense value justice-involved individuals bring to the workforce. Our team is committed to guiding and supporting a workforce that offers genuine opportunities for personal and professional growth. With a team who has walked the path themselves, we understand the unique challenges faced by justice-involved individuals and the strategies that lead to their success.

WORKFORCE AND HIRING SOLUTIONS

By understanding the common barriers that prevent employers from hiring justice-involved individuals, such as a lack of vital documents, expungement needs, and ineffective hiring policies, the OOR can serve to bridge the gap to employment. We can also use our vast network to connect businesses with other employers that have had success with hiring justice-involved individuals.

This is done via partnerships with our network of employers and employer-related organizations across the nation, such as Jobs for the Future (JFF), Second Chance Business Coalition (SCBC), National Reentry Workforce Collaborative (NRWC), and the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation.

THE TENNESSEE REENTRY OFFICE IS HERE TO HELP

Employers are vital to our mission, and we encourage businesses who have not yet gotten involved to become a part of this meaningful work. By working together and leveraging resources, we can help break down barriers and create a more diverse, skilled, and thriving workforce.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS

By giving justice-involved Tennesseans a second chance at employment, you can tap into a diverse and motivated workforce while also contributing to reducing recidivism rates in your state. But where do you start? Fortunately, there are numerous resources available to Tennessee employers interested in second chance hiring. From training and education programs to tax incentives and legal guidance, these resources can help you navigate the process and make the most of this opportunity.

ENGAGE MORE WITH SECOND CHANCE HIRING

SECOND CHANCE BUSINESS COALITION

The SCBC is a cross-sector coalition of large private-sector firms committed to expanding second chance hiring practices within their companies.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SECOND CHANCE EMPLOYMENT

This short two-page resource describes how companies across the U.S. are benefitting from second chance hiring and programs.

ONRAMPS GUIDE

This guide provides various starting points and pathways to build second chance employment into your hiring strategy.

GET MORE IN-DEPTH TRAINING

FAIR CHANCE CORPORATE COHORT

This Second Chance Hiring Program from JFF (Jobs for the Future) provides training to, and produces resources for, employers on how to adopt and implement fair chance hiring. Employers interested in participating or looking for more information should reach out to justice@jff.org.

AMERICAN JOB CENTER

American Job Centers offer services for a wide range of circumstances to help meet your employment needs.

Business Services: Provides assistance to employers
Reentry Advisors: Located in our comprehensive American Job Centers, reentry advisors are specially trained for assisting those who are going through reentry.
Apprenticeship Programs: This workforce development initiative allows employers to train job seekers to help meet their skilled talent needs and the demands of Tennessee's thriving economy.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SECOND CHANCE HIRING

GETTING TALENT BACK TO WORK

This initiative was created by the SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management Foundation) to lead the way in reducing barriers and building bridges to employment for justice-involved Individuals. In this hub, HR professionals and employers can find all the resources, tools, and case studies needed to attract, hire, and retain justice-involved individuals.

ASSESSMENT

- 10 question self-assessment with a downloadable report that can help direct you with useful tools and resources.

CERTIFICATE

- Free certificate that hiring managers, front-line supervisors, and other HR professionals can learn from to attract, hire, and retain justice-involved individuals.

TOOLKIT

- Along with a resources page, this toolkit is split into 5 steps to help employers' efforts to recruit, welcome, and develop justice-involved individuals.
- Workplace Readiness, Talent Acquisition, Onboarding, Talent Development, Talent Mobility

PLEDGE

- Once you have learned more about becoming a second chance business, consider taking the pledge and joining those who have pledged to give opportunities to justice-involved individuals.

The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development is committed to principles of equal opportunity, equal access, and affirmative action.
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Authorization No. 377605; This public document was promulgated for electronic use only.

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