



INCLUSIVE HIRING

TOOLKIT FOR
EMPLOYERS | 2.0

Strategies and
considerations
for employers to
build truly
inclusive
workplaces for
women with a
history of
involvement in
the criminal
justice system



**VERMONT
WORKS
FOR WOMEN**

EQUITY MATTERS HERE.

THE CASE FOR INCLUSIVE HIRING

Individuals with a history of involvement with the criminal justice system represent a large, untapped potential workforce that can fill a critical need for labor across Vermont, while providing employers with motivated, dedicated, loyal employees. We know “fair-chance” hiring is good for business; opening the workforce to justice-involved individuals widens the talent pool, decreases turnover (saving on average \$4000 per employee), supports diversity and inclusion goals, and has the global benefits of improving community safety, and stabilizing families and communities. By excluding formerly incarcerated individuals from the workforce, \$78-88 billion is lost from the gross national product. Furthermore, inclusive organizations are 8x more likely to achieve better business outcomes, 6x more likely to be innovative and agile, and 2x more likely to meet or exceed financial targets.

Vermont’s women’s prison, Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF), has housed an average of 101 individuals per year since 2020. A recent employment and training survey at the facility, which garnered 78 responses, indicated that 73.1% of those currently residing there are interested in job training classes, 91% of respondents are proficient in reading, and 69.2% are proficient in math. Furthermore, 96.1% wish to work part or full time upon reentering the community. Vermont Works for Women has been providing contracted employment readiness services within the women's prison for decades. Our programs offer personal and professional development, including soft skills such as conflict resolution, time management, effective communication, stress management, goal setting, and more, while offering hands-on training and work opportunities to build skills and experience. When women leave the facility, they face numerous challenges and barriers to reintegration. However, with continuity of wraparound support, access to services and opportunities, and employers who are fully inclusive and prepared, they stand ready and eager to meet labor needs in our state.

The workforce is changing as employers and workers alike continue to recognize the need to build a culture that embraces inclusion and belonging, as well as the need for flexibility and workplaces that meet the needs of individuals. Vermont faces a critical labor shortage to meet demand in the climate, infrastructure, manufacturing, outdoor recreation, and other growing industries. We have an opportunity – and an obligation – to harness the potential of all workers. Implementing policies that are good for all workers, but especially for those from historically marginalized groups, takes continuous evaluation, learning, and support.

This toolkit outlines basic strategies, considerations, and tools for employers to build truly inclusive workplaces for women with a history of involvement in the criminal justice system.

With a focus on removing barriers, offering flexibility and access to resources, and understanding individual needs, the toolkit is a jumping off point to build supportive policies and cultures that result in loyal, long-term employees.

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CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYERS

HIRING JUSTICE-INVOLVED WOMEN

JUST THE FACTS

The prompts below can be used to reflect on your hiring practices, affirm existing practices and identify potential areas for improvement:

Organizational Readiness

- ☐ Do we have policies that support fair hiring for justice-involved individuals?
- ☐ Have we trained hiring managers to assess candidates based on skills and experience rather than past convictions?
- ☐ Do we provide mentorship, training, or peer support for new employees?
- ☐ Have we reviewed job descriptions to ensure they use inclusive, non-biased language?

Hiring & Recruitment Practices

- ☐ Do we delay background checks until after an offer is made?
- ☐ Do we ensure that interviews focus on skills and competencies rather than past mistakes?
- ☐ Have we partnered with organizations that support second chance hiring initiatives?

Workplace Culture & Retention

- ☐ Do we offer professional development for employees with justice involvement?
- ☐ Have we fostered an environment where all employees feel safe and included?
- ☐ Do we track and evaluate the success of our inclusive hiring efforts?

Personal & Organizational Biases

- ☐ What concerns do I have about hiring someone with a criminal record?
- ☐ How do my past experiences shape my views on justice-involved individuals?
- ☐ How does my organization's leadership perceive second-chance hiring?

Current Hiring Policies & Practices

- ☐ Does our application process create unnecessary barriers for justice-involved women?
- ☐ Have we evaluated whether background checks are used fairly and appropriately?
- ☐ Do we provide opportunities for professional growth and long-term career success?

Workplace Culture & Support

- ☐ Does my team understand the value of inclusive hiring?
- ☐ What steps can we take to better support justice-involved employees?
- ☐ How do we measure success in our inclusion efforts?

FACT:

Employees with past convictions are no more likely to be fired and are more likely to have longer tenure than employees without convictions.

FACT:

A study of 1.3 million military enlistees found that enlistees with past convictions had superior performance to those with no convictions.

FACT:

Over a three-year period, employees with criminal backgrounds at Dave's Killer Bread had slightly fewer policy, attendance, or behavior violations compared to those without such backgrounds.

FACT:

Three top reasons top companies give for hiring justice involved individuals are that they want to hire the best candidate for the job, make the community a better place, and give a second chance to individuals who are justice involved.

FACT:

70% of Americans want the companies they support to be actively involved in conversations about social justice.

*Data Sources Listed on Page 25



STATISTICS

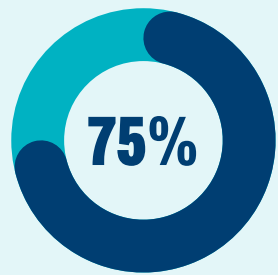
THAT WILL SURPRISE YOU

QUOTES

FROM FORMERLY AND CURRENTLY INCARCERATED WOMEN IN VERMONT



% OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS STILL UNEMPLOYED 1 YEAR LATER



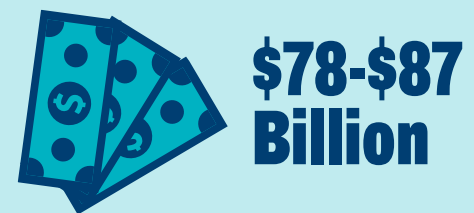
SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PREDICTOR OF RECIDIVISM:



OF AMERICANS WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD



BY EXCLUDING FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS FROM THE WORKFORCE, HOW MUCH MONEY IS LOST FROM GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT?



% OF PEOPLE IN STATE PRISONS THAT WILL REENTER THE COMMUNITY AT SOME POINT



WHAT IS THE TURNOVER COST SAVINGS PER EMPLOYEE OF INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES?



What should an employer understand about formerly incarcerated workers?

"Not to judge people so quickly based off their background. Everybody deserves a chance. People can change based off whatever beliefs people may have."

Autumn, formerly incarcerated

"Formerly incarcerated workers may be very committed employees. Having been given a second chance to be in the community post-release, they can be highly motivated to succeed and contribute."

Anonymous, currently incarcerated

"That some of them have held jobs while being incarcerated. They have skills and also have had a chance to get certain certificates for some jobs."

Anonymous, currently incarcerated

What kind of supports may a formerly incarcerated person need for job success?

- Support with anxiety and/or mental health
- Flexibility to access appointments and meetings (i.e., required probation meetings, medical, mental health appointments)
- Higher level of communication to make sure needs can be met without creating interferences
- Sponsors/mentors to provide guidance and advice, and take an active role in supporting career advancement
- A job that offers opportunity for higher promotions with increases in pay for job mobility

Performance: 81% of business leaders and 85% of HR professionals believe workers with criminal records perform their jobs about the same or better than workers without criminal records.

Work Quality: 4 out of 5 HR professionals believe the quality of workers with criminal records is about the same or better than workers without – up from 67% who said the same in 2018.

Hiring Costs: 81% of HR professionals felt the cost-per-hire of workers with criminal records was about the same or less than workers without criminal records.

Reliability: 73% of business leaders and 75% of HR professionals said workers with criminal records were just as or more dependable than workers without criminal records.

*Data Sources Listed on Page 25

IMPACTS OF INCARCERATION



Conditions Within the Prison:

Individuals exiting incarceration have become accustomed to a very rigid system starkly different than what it is like living in the community. They have very little autonomy, and there is a dynamic of power and oppression that persists within the facility. Their schedules, movement within the facility, and contact with family are controlled by the Department of Corrections. Residents are encouraged to seek assistance from officers when conflicts arise and are not encouraged to manage and resolve conflict on their own. There is a disconnect from technology and family; although everyone is issued a tablet, there are costs for utilizing anything such as communicating with family, streaming music, or playing games. On the other hand, the realities of scarcity in the facility breed creative problem-solving – for example, using unusual and unique materials to create art. All of these conditions require significant adjustment upon returning to the community.



Substance Use Disorder:

According to the VT Department of Corrections, roughly 66% of currently (as of February 2024) incarcerated women in Vermont are receiving medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). A majority of women will be navigating recovery from substance use disorder upon reentry to the community. The risk of an opioid overdose is 40x higher in the two weeks post-release compared with that faced by the general population.



Medical Health:

The Association of American Medical Colleges reported in a 2023 study that formerly incarcerated individuals are 1.5 times more likely to report a history of diabetes, asthma, or high blood pressure. With individuals likely to have no health insurance or connection to care upon reentry, the risk of dying within two weeks of release from prison is nearly thirteen times higher than that faced by other individuals even after adjusting for age, race, and sex. Additionally, impacted individuals are contending with a lack of skills necessary to navigate the health care system and little faith that the system will work for them.



Trauma/ Mental Health:

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, formerly incarcerated individuals are up to five times as likely to meet the threshold for serious psychological distress, often struggle to find meaning and purpose, and feel a disconnection from family, loss of autonomy, boredom, isolation, and unpredictability of surroundings due to a separation from social networks and loved ones. For incarcerated women, separation from children often causes guilt, distress, depression, anxiety, and fear of losing mother-child attachment. Many, in fact, suffer from “Post-Incarceration Syndrome,” a syndrome similar to PTSD, meaning that even after serving their official sentences, many people continue to suffer the mental effects. Further compounding the trauma and mental health impacts at Vermont’s women’s prison are the inadequate conditions at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility. According to the VT DOC, the facility has outdated and degraded physical infrastructure and was never designed for sentenced population or long-term habitation, and there are chronic issues with cleanliness, habitability, and lack of programming space.



Lack of Housing/Community Supports:

According to the VT Department of Corrections, individuals with lived experience, as well as advocates, point to a lack of transitional and permanent housing as major impediments to successful community reintegration and reentry. Waitlists exist for beds in SUD recovery centers, as well as transitional housing. Even if granted a bed, many individuals struggle to find sustainable employment earning enough to afford an apartment when the temporary situation comes to an end, or the inventory of available housing is so limited they cannot find anything.

Additionally, DOC states that there is a lack of community supports due to “reduced Vermont community capacity due to funding and staffing constraints, and lack of statewide services.” Vermont community service providers see these issues regularly when women they support reenter the community from CRCF. Chronic issues include being released without an ID, which leads to further complications as a valid ID is necessary for employment, housing, driving, setting up a bank account, medical appointments, and more. Moreover, many do not have access to transportation which presents a barrier to accessing appointments and treatment, among other things. DOC notes that women have fewer familial supports than male counterparts while in custody. A majority of incarcerated women in Vermont are mothers, and therefore upon reentry they are often working toward reunification with their children, which adds emotional stress and additional appointments and supervised visits with DCF.

UNDERSTANDING IMPLICIT BIAS, BARRIERS, AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

GETTING STARTED

BEST PRACTICES FOR HIRING AND RETENTION



Becoming a fully inclusive workplace culture begins with building an awareness of implicit bias throughout the organization and learning strategies to mitigate the impacts of such bias. Implicit bias is the attitudes or stereotypes about groups of people, characteristics, or traits (gender, age, race, etc.) that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner. A good starting point for understanding one's own implicit bias is to take the Harvard Implicit Association test (IAT) online (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>). The mission of the IAT is to educate the public about bias. It measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may be especially interesting if it shows that you have an implicit attitude that you did not know about. Please see the resources section at the end of this document for additional information and resources on implicit bias.

Justice-involved individuals have historically faced many biases in our communities that result in extreme barriers to building social capital, accessing employment, and participating fully in the economy. Understanding lived experience is important for building an inclusive culture that supports everyone's success in the workplace. Incarceration can have significant effects on individuals, however with the right opportunities and wraparound supports, these can be mitigated. Starting from a place of understanding will help with communication and setting expectations and will help to address issues before they become serious.

Reflection Questions for Employers Who Have Completed the Harvard Implicit Association Test

- What surprised me about my results, and what aligns (or doesn't) with how I consciously view myself and others?
- How might these implicit biases influence my decisions in hiring, promotion, team dynamics, or feedback?
- What systems or practices in our workplace might unintentionally reinforce these biases?
- What is one small, concrete step I can take to interrupt bias in my daily leadership or management practices?

When your company or organization is ready to start the work of building a truly inclusive workplace for justice-involved individuals, there are some important overall considerations:

- You must have “buy in” from all levels
- This work requires a change of perspective
- Address implicit biases from the start
- Be prepared to reinvest applicant screening funds into building inclusion
- “Fair chance” hiring may not be appropriate for all positions

Examining recruitment strategies, hiring processes, company culture, and retention and advancement opportunities is necessary to thoroughly review and assess your business' readiness, and to set goals for becoming an inclusive workplace for justice-involved individuals. Some best practices and policies are outlined below.

Hiring practices

“Open hiring” is a recruiting method that presents the opportunity of employment to anyone that can meet basic expectations. It discontinues hiring practices focused on screening out potential “risky” candidates. Open hiring removes background checks and interviews for entry-level positions and instead accepts applications on a rolling basis. Applicants are kept on a list and selected based on who is next in the queue. This process focuses on whether candidates are on-time, respectful, and ready to work, and provides on-the-job training for the skills needed for the job.

If you must interview for all positions, follow best practices to eliminate bias in the hiring process such as conducting structured, skill-based interviews that focus on strength-based questions. Include your commitment to inclusive hiring on your applications and explain it during the interview. It's important to train all HR and hiring managers on implicit bias to reduce its impact on the hiring process.

The Second Chance Business Coalition’s Onramps guide offers the following best practices for job postings, applications, and hiring : (see page 24).

- We use inclusive application language that is accessible to diverse audiences
- Our job descriptions clearly state relevant requirements
- Our job descriptions focus on qualifying skills and competencies
- Our job descriptions do not require candidates to disclose past convictions (we "Ban the Box")
- If we conduct background checks, we notify candidates on our applications (in a manner consistent with applicable law)
- We state on our job posting that we are a second chance employer

Background checks

Background checks can understandably be a barrier for justice-involved applicants. Evaluating your background check policies should include conversations on whether background checks are really required for each position. If they are necessary for certain roles, make sure to use a reliable, accredited agency and make the background check the last step in the hiring process. Limiting the lookback period and encouraging proactive candidate discussions about any past convictions can help reduce barriers and create opportunity. Convictions more than 3-7 years back are less likely to influence present job performance. If a conviction surfaces during a background check process, you may consider the following:

- Does the conviction pose a job-related risk?
- How serious is the prior offense?
- How serious is the potential harm?
- Has the applicant been referred by an established reentry community partner/organization?

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Guidance

It’s important to be aware that there are specific guidelines outlined by the EEOC related to an employer's use of an individual's criminal history in making employment decisions. Specifically, EEOC says that these decisions may, in some instances, violate the prohibition against employment discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended. It further states the following :

“The fact of an arrest does not establish that criminal conduct has occurred, and an exclusion based on an arrest, in itself, is not job related and consistent with business necessity. However, an employer may make an employment decision based on the conduct underlying an arrest if the conduct makes the individual unfit for the position in question. In contrast, a conviction record will usually serve as sufficient evidence that a person engaged in particular conduct. In certain circumstances, however, there may be reasons for an employer not to rely on the conviction record alone when making an employment decision. A violation may occur when an employer treats criminal history information differently for different applicants or employees, based on their race or national origin (disparate treatment liability).”



“At Rhino, we offer a crash course (2-day training/orientation program), resource coordinator (20hrs/week), Pharmacy Benefit Manager, PT services by Injury & Health Management Solutions, and recovery coach (every Thursday morning). The whole beauty about open hiring is that it gives people hope. This model works very well for Rhino because we offer entry-level, front-line positions where workers are trained on the job. It’s about today and tomorrow and not the past. We do not require background checks, interviews, or experience. We have three expectations from day one: be on time, respectful and ready to learn. We had a 26% decrease in turnover during our inclusive hiring pilot, we lowered our recruiting costs, and we increased our recruiting pipeline and loyalty.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5zPYXPF3CM>

“Values-led hiring is about eliminating barriers for people who want to get back into the workforce. At Ben & Jerry’s, we ended the practice of criminal record inquiries as part of the initial application process...We did it for two reasons. First, we did it because it became clear to us that the practice reinforced systemic racial and economic inequities. Secondly, we realized that requiring disclosure of a criminal record in the first phase of the application process stands in the way of our aspiration to build a diverse, inclusive and high-performing team.”

<https://www.benjerry.com/values>





“The concept is simple; Open Hiring means no interviews, no background checks, no resumes. Individuals put their name on a list, and when the next opening comes up, they get a job. Greyston Bakery is 40+ years of proof that Open Hiring works. Our workforce successfully produces millions of first-rate brownie products enjoyed worldwide thanks to our longtime partnership with Ben & Jerry’s.”

<https://www.greyston.org/job-seekers/>

At Greyston, Open Hiring has:

- Reduced time-to-hire by 80%
- Reduced hiring costs up to 93%
- Increased positive perception of work culture and trust in employer
- Generated positive economic impact directly to the local community

Orientation & Onboarding (Training), cont.

Supervisor and manager training is imperative to inclusive hiring. Supervisors need to understand the lived experience of individuals coming from an incarcerated setting and how it may impact their behavior and performance in the workplace. Things are not always what they seem; for example, a number of external and complicated factors could be underlying issues at work such as:

- Being under supervision
- Probation/parole meetings at convenience of PO
- Restrictions on being able to accept overtime hours
- Restrictions on working at additional work sites
- Knowing a PO can stop by place of employment at any time
- Critical medical appointments
- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) appointments
- Counseling/therapy requirements
- Reunification with children
- Transportation
- Housing
- Debt/Credit issues
- Recovery from addiction

Proper training and resources and establishing policies and procedures upfront as to how you will address workplace issues will help mitigate problems and concerns that arise. Questions to consider in advance are:

- What can be considered a reasonable accommodation?
- Where do you have to draw the line? Is there a backup/coverage plan?
- How do you decide if it’s not working and it’s time to separate?
- What other supports and resources can you bring in?



Orientation & Onboarding (Training)

Research shows that offering a well-structured orientation and onboarding program that includes mentorship and ongoing training serves to set justice-involved employees up for success and promotes greater retention. One study found that new employees who were provided a structured orientation were 69% more likely to stay at the company for up to three years (<https://www.gettingtalentbacktowork.org/learn-more/>).

Mentorship programs provide newer employees, including those with criminal records, a place where they are able to ask questions and gain comfort in a new company. It’s important to be conscious of the fact that justice-involved individuals are coming from an environment where a lot of individuality and decision-making has been stripped away and may require ongoing support and training to help build these skills as they make this transition. Pairing them with a seasoned employee for guidance can make a big impact. If all employees are trained around inclusive hiring, they will be better prepared and motivated to take on a mentorship role, and this will continue to build an inclusive culture and make all employees feel like they belong.

Manager and supervisor training on legal and compliance matters is also essential. For more information, see the Compliance and Onboarding sections of the Employer checklist on p. 17, as well as the resources under “Legal and Policy Issues” on page 25 of this toolkit.

GETTING STARTED

BEST PRACTICES FOR HIRING AND RETENTION

Retention & Advancement

Some of the top barriers to advancement include focusing on credentials instead of skills, and unclear prospects – advancement opportunities not clearly outlined and announced to all employees. Frontline employees (defined as hourly workers, primarily individual contributors, making \$22 per hour or less and employed in the customer service, financial and professional services, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, retail, shipping, and logistics and transportation industries) who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system typically demonstrate high motivation, despite historical underinvestment in their career advancement. For example, according to a 2022 McKinsey & Company study, these workers are more likely to dedicate nonwork hours to upskilling (14 percentage points higher for respondents with involvement in the criminal justice system) and to apply to advancement opportunities (as much as nine percentage points higher). Employers that hire for skills, not credentials, can open advancement opportunities for diverse employees, tap into new and highly motivated talent pools, and build a more inclusive workforce. McKinsey found that the top motivators for frontline workers in the workplace are job growth or promotion, learning opportunities, an aligned skill set, and a supportive manager.

The Second Chance Business Coalition’s Onramps guide (see link on page 24) offers these key retention best practices for supporting employees with a history of justice involvement*:

- We have reviewed our benefits package with a lens of inclusivity
- We offer transportation options and subsidies for employees
- We provide flexible and transparent scheduling opportunities
- We support candidates and employees with expungement or record sealing
- We provide benefits that help employees build toward goals such as home ownership and further education
- We offer milestone incentives to reward retention and ongoing training
- We facilitate ongoing professional development and credentialing opportunities for employees
- We are able to provide letters and references to support probation and parole hearings, record sealing, pardons and other justice-related issues

*BONUS, these best practices also support retention and advancement of women and other underrepresented groups!

GLOSSARY

OF TERMS

Using the proper terms and inclusive language in the workplace is one key strategy to building inclusion and belonging. Also, focusing on people-centered language such as “women who are justice involved” can go a long way to signaling a safe, inclusive environment.

Ban the Box:

An initiative, turned into law in 37 states, which removes the ability to ask about any type of conviction history on an initial job application.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging (often abbreviated as DEI or DEIB):

The abbreviation for efforts undertaken in a workplace or organization to build environments and cultures that support all individuals regardless of background or identity.

Diversity is the range of human differences.

Equity is evenly distributed tools and assistance for fairness in outcomes.

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment.

Belonging is feeling valued, heard, and accepted.

Implicit Bias:

The attitudes or stereotypes about groups of people, characteristics, or traits (gender, age, race, etc.) that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

Inclusive Hiring:

The business practice of not only a willingness to hire people with criminal backgrounds, but also a commitment to support them and provide flexibility as appropriate for these employees to thrive and provide excellent work production.

Intersectionality:

A lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. For example, race inequality is often talked about as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. However, what’s missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.

Recidivism:

The tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend.

Reentry:

The process in which an individual is released from prison, ideally with basic needs and essential appointments like doctors, mental health providers, etc., in place.

Second Chance Act:

Federal act that supports (including grants) states, local, and tribal governments and nonprofits in their work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from state and federal prison. Authorizes federal grants for vital programs and systems reform aimed at improving the reentry process.

EMPLOYER CHECKLIST

FOR GETTING STARTED

VIEW ALL TOOLS, RESOURCES,
AND ONLINE VERSION AT
VTWORKSFORWOMEN.ORG/INCLUSIVE-HIRING-TOOLKIT/



Where is your company already with inclusive hiring policies and practices? About what approaches would you like to learn more? Use the checklist on these pages with its resources and tools as a starting point to evaluate where you are now and what may be a good place to start making changes or improvements toward inclusive policies and practices that support justice-involved individuals. There are easy steps that are a good entry point into this work! Adapted from: <https://www.envoy.us/assessment>

Category	Questions for Considerations	Already There? Or Want to Learn More?	Tools & Resources for Employers Hiring Women Who Are Justice Involved
Job Descriptions	Are job descriptions designed to include skills and experiences relevant to justice-involved individuals?		Tips and Examples for Writing Inclusive Job Descriptions
	Are they inclusive, clearly outline required skills, qualifications, and avoiding unnecessary exclusions (e.g., background checks unrelated to the role, using phrases like “clean background required” in job postings unless legally mandated.)?		Online Tools to Support the Inclusive Hiring Process
	Are job descriptions written in inclusive and supportive language?		Recs for Writing Inclusive Job Postings
Recruitment Channels	Are outreach efforts targeted to organizations that support justice-involved women (e.g., reentry programs, nonprofits)?		Making Job Postings Accessible in Chittenden County, Vermont Making Job Postings Accessible Across Vermont’s Five Regions
	Are job postings shared with community organizations and networks supporting justice-involved individuals?		
	Are job postings accessible to individuals with limited internet access or technology skills?		
Application Process	Is the application process designed to avoid bias against justice-involved candidates?		Framework for Intersectionality in the Workplace
	*Conduct criminal background checks only when necessary and relevant to the job.		“Ban the Box” Application Process vs Traditional Questions for Justice-Involved Women in Vermont

Category	Questions for Considerations	Already There? Or Want to Learn More?	Tools & Resources for Employers Hiring Women Who Are Justice Involved
Application Process	*Eliminate questions about criminal history from initial job applications (Ban-the-Box). *Delay background checks until after a conditional job offer is made. *Review each candidate’s convictions only in the context of specific job requirements.		Are candidates provided opportunities to explain gaps in employment or past convictions?
	Are candidates provided opportunities to explain gaps in employment or past convictions?		Examples of Ways to Have Candidates Explain Gaps in Employment
Interview Process	Are interviewers trained on trauma-informed interviewing techniques?		Guidelines for Trauma-Responsive Interviewing w/Justice-Involved Women
	Are accommodations made for candidates who may need flexible interview schedules due to parole or other obligations?		Accommodating Justice-Involved Women During the Interview Process
	Are interviews conducted in a nonjudgmental and inclusive manner?		Inclusive Hiring Interview Question Bank Second Chance Interviewing
Selection Criteria	Are selection criteria inclusive of transferable skills (e.g., resilience, problem-solving) gained during incarceration or life experiences?		Selection Criteria Checklist
	Is the decision-making process free of bias against justice-involved candidates?		Bias-Free vs Biased Decision-Making Processes
	Are hiring decisions focused on potential and future contributions rather than past mistakes?		

EMPLOYER CHECKLIST

FOR GETTING STARTED



CONCLUSION

Category	Questions for Considerations	Already There? Or Want to Learn More?	Tools & Resources for Employers Hiring Women Who Are Justice Involved
Compliance	Are hiring practices compliant with Vermont Ban the Box laws/regulations and other laws supporting justice-involved individuals?		*Vermont Becomes the 8th State to Ban the Box in Private Hiring *U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Laws
	Are there clear policies to address complaints related to bias against justice-involved individuals?		Examples of Employment Policies to Prevent and Address Bias
Onboarding	Is the onboarding process trauma-informed and designed to support justice-involved hires?		Sample Onboard Process for Justice-Involved Women
	Are new hires connected to internal or external mentorship programs?		
	Are resources provided to address challenges justice-involved women may face (e.g., childcare, transportation)?		Resources That Can Be Provided to Help Justice-Involved Women w/ Challenges They May Face
Continuous Improvement	Is there a system in place for regularly reviewing and improving hiring practices for justice-involved women?		Reviewing and Improving Hiring Practices
	Are hiring metrics (e.g., retention rates, candidate satisfaction) monitored to ensure equitable outcomes?		Sample Quarterly Pulse Survey for Employees

Vermont is faced with a chronic labor shortage, combined with low unemployment, which is burdening our employers and having an impact across industries. Employers can harness an untapped, eager workforce by building an inclusive workplace and implementing supportive policies that remove barriers for justice-involved individuals to access meaningful work and economic stability. This takes intentional work and dedicated resources from employers; however, the return on investment has been proven. Employers who are leaders in this work make a commitment beyond just updating policies and procedures; they make real cultural change, build intentional relationships, offer wraparound supports, and celebrate and advocate. Some additional ways you can support, advocate, and celebrate these initiatives are:

- Talk with local legislators and lawmakers about your experience and successes
- Show up – at panels, events, workforce coalitions, etc. to share your stories
- Write letters for employees with records for expungement, probation, court, etc.
- Celebrate the personal successes of justice-involved individuals in your workforce

You don’t have to do it alone! Though it can seem daunting, there are resources, research, and assistance available to support you and success stories from businesses that are leaders in these initiatives. Many community organizations in Vermont stand at the ready to support your workplace, and to directly support justice-involved individuals on the job. This toolkit serves as an overview of steps toward building an inclusive workplace for justice-involved employees and a starting point for discovering more information and resources. We encourage you to take this knowledge back to your team and discuss the opportunities, further explore national models, and reach out to local organizations for support and guidance on your journey to inclusive and fair chance hiring. This is a movement, and each new step is progress that builds momentum!

Margaret Overman
Senior Manager for Career
Empowerment and Inclusion

Judy Carr
Reentry Workforce
Specialist

Alison Lamagna
Former Director of Impact

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

FOR HIRING JUSTICE-INVOLVED WOMEN

Phase 1: Preparation and Planning - Timeline: Months 0-3

Objective: Lay the groundwork for inclusive hiring practices.

Secure Leadership Buy-In

- Present a business case to leadership emphasizing benefits and alignment with organizational values.
- Assign a diversity and inclusion (D&I) champion to oversee implementation.

Define Goals and Metrics

- Set measurable objectives (e.g., hire 10% of new employees from justice-involved backgrounds).
- Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) like retention rates and performance metrics.

Review Current Policies

- Audit existing hiring policies and identify barriers for justice-involved candidates.
- Develop or update policies, such as “ban the box” and tailored background check policies.

Establish Partnerships

- Identify and collaborate with local reentry programs, nonprofits, and workforce development organizations.
- Formalize partnerships through MOUs or agreements.

Phase 2: Internal Training and Awareness - Timeline: Months 4-6

Objective: Prepare staff for inclusive hiring practices.

Conduct Training

- Train HR staff and hiring managers on unconscious bias and fair chance hiring.
- Use real-life examples and case studies to build empathy and understanding.

Develop Communication Materials

- Create internal guides and FAQs for staff on the importance of inclusive hiring.
- Highlight success stories from justice-involved employees in similar roles or industries.

Update Job Descriptions and Postings

- Use inclusive language tools like Textio or Gender Decoder.
- Focus on skills and competencies rather than rigid requirements.
- Post roles on diverse platforms and through reentry organizations.

Phase 3: Redesign Hiring Practices - Timeline: Months 7-9

Objective: Create a hiring process that reduces bias and fosters inclusion.

Implement Blind Recruitment

- Remove identifiable information from resumes during initial screenings.
- Use skills-based assessments to evaluate candidates.

Conduct Structured Interviews

- Develop standardized interview questions focused on competencies and potential.
- Train interviewers to evaluate responses objectively.

Adjust Background Checks

- Delay background checks until after a conditional offer is made.
- Focus on job-related relevance of any findings, offering candidates the opportunity to explain.

Phase 4: Onboarding and Support - Timeline: Months 10-12

Objective: Ensure justice-involved hires are set up for success.

Structured Onboarding

- Assign mentors or “buddies” to help new hires integrate into the workplace.
- Provide clear guidance on job expectations and workplace policies.

Offer Wraparound Services

- Provide access to resources like counseling, transportation stipends, and flexible schedules.
- Ensure open communication channels for addressing challenges.

Establish Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

- Create ERGs or peer support networks to foster community and retention.

Phase 5: Monitoring and Continuous Improvement - Timeline: Ongoing

Objective: Measure success, refine practices, and sustain momentum.

Track Metrics

- Monitor hiring rates, retention, performance, and employee satisfaction.
- Compare outcomes to initial KPIs and adjust goals as needed.

Gather Feedback

- Conduct surveys and focus groups with justice-involved employees and their managers.
- Use feedback to identify areas for improvement.

Celebrate Successes

- Share success stories internally and externally to build awareness and support.
- Recognize leaders and teams who contribute to achieving goals.

Refine Policies and Practices

- Regularly review policies for relevance and effectiveness.
- Stay informed about changes in laws, incentives, and best practices related to hiring justice-involved individuals.

APPENDIX

SOURCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Local Vermont Community Organizations That Can Support This Work:

Organization	Website	Resources/Programs
Vermont Works for Women	www.vtworksforwomen.org	Employment support for justice-involved women; training and resources for inclusive hiring
Working Fields	https://workingfields.com/	Inclusive staffing agency
Working Bridges	https://unitedwaynwvt.org/community-impact/our-programs/working-bridges/	On-site resource coordinators for workplaces; employer training
Recovery-Friendly Workplaces	https://recoveryvermont.org/becoming-a-recovery-friendly-workplace-implementation-in-4-steps/	Employer resources and training
VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence	https://www.vtnetwork.org/	Support for survivors; network of local providers across Vermont
Mercy Connections	https://mercyconnections.org/	Vermont women's mentoring program; support for individuals who are justice-involved, in transition from prison, treatment court, addiction, and/or mental health crises
Lund	https://lundvt.org/	Residential and outpatient SUD treatment for parents; supporting children of incarcerated parents
VT Community Justice Centers	https://www.vcjn.org/	Restorative responses to conflict and crime; network of centers throughout Vermont

VT Probation and Parole Offices	https://doc.vermont.gov/probation-and-parole-offices	Support for individuals under supervision; 12 community-based facilities at locations across the state
Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform	https://www.vcjr.org/	Resources, Drop in Reentry & Recovery Center

Second Chance Hiring Toolkits

Organization	Website
Second Chance Business Coalition	https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/get-started
California Employers' Fair Chance Hiring Toolkit	https://www.rootandrebond.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/California-Employers-Fair-Chance-Hiring-Toolkit.pdf
Getting Talent Back to Work – All Resources	https://www.gettingtalentbacktowork.org/all-resources/
Center for Employment Opportunities: A Fair-Chance Hiring Guide and Toolkit 2023	https://ceoworks.org/assets/downloads/publications/CEO-A-Fair-Chance-Hiring-Guide-Toolkit-2023.pdf
Second Chance Hiring Toolkit for Local Communities	https://themanufacturinginstitute.org/workers/second-chance/toolkit-for-local-communities/#access-the-toolkit

APPENDIX

SOURCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



LEGAL/POLICY RESOURCES

Work Opportunity Tax Credit	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wotc	Legal and tax credit information
US Equal Opportunity Employment Commission	https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/small-business/criminal-records	Info on legal requirements, etc.
National Employment Law Project	https://www.nelp.org/insights-research/ban-the-box-fair-chance-hiring-state-and-local-guide/	The Fair Chance / Ban the Box Toolkit, helpful overview of policy

DATA SOURCES

- Center for Employment Opportunities, A Fair Chance: Hiring Guide and Toolkit: <https://ceoworks.org/assets/downloads/publications/CEO-A-Fair-Chance-Hiring-Guide-Toolkit-2023.pdf>
- Prison Policy Initiative: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/directlyimpacted2022.html>
- Bureau of Justice Statistics: <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/reentry.pdf>
<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/eprfp10.pdf>
- American Civil Liberties Union: <https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/re-entry#:~:text=Formerly%20incarcerated%20people%20need%20gainful,most%20important%20predictor%20of%20recidivism.>
- Scholars at Harvard: https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/pager/files/pager_ajs.pdf
- Prison Policy Initiative: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/economics_of_incarceration/#:~:text=The%20Business%20Case%20for%20Criminal,job%20seekers%20from%20the%20workforce.%E2%80%9D
- Second Chance Business Coalition <https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/why-it-matters>
- Deloitte Review, The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution 7) Second Chance Business Coalition <https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/why-it-matters>

Vermont Works for Women is working to create an equitable Vermont where people of all identities and backgrounds have equal access to opportunities and to thrive economically, where they make confident, deliberate choices about life and work that reflect an expansive grasp of what’s possible.

From career exploration programs for middle and high school girls and gender-expansive youth, to job training and career coaching for women, to gender equity consultation for businesses and schools, VWW is committed to improving educational and economic outcomes for Vermont youth and women.

VWW has always held strong values around the transformative power of work and the potential within every individual to take positive risks, face challenges, and pursue their interests as they develop a greater notion of what is possible. These values are the foundation of our work supporting currently incarcerated women, and women with a history of justice involvement.



THANK YOU!

Vermont Works for Women would like to thank the current and formerly incarcerated women who graciously shared their experiences and perspectives for this toolkit, as well as Kathy Astemborski, DOC Women’s Services Division Director and the Vermont Department of Corrections. We are grateful for the good work of companies and organizations throughout Vermont and beyond who are putting in place policies and practices to support hiring women who are justice involved.

INCLUSIVE HIRING

TOOLKIT FOR
EMPLOYERS | 2.0



**VERMONT
WORKS
FOR WOMEN**

EQUITY MATTERS HERE.

Vermont Works for Women promotes economic justice by advancing gender equity and supporting women and youth at every stage of their career journeys.

www.vtworksforwomen.org



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