

Second Chance Hiring

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Many communities across the country are working to build collaborative second chance employment initiatives, and four types of organizations are leading the charge. These are local community partners, workforce boards, state associations and chambers of commerce. Despite their differences, these organizations share two key characteristics that make them ideally suited to mobilize employers around second chance hiring. First, they serve as trusted, central convening bodies within local employer networks. Second, as a result of this position, they have unique insight into the needs and challenges local employers face.

Workforce boards, industry associations and chambers of commerce exist in every community in the United States. Workforce boards were established and funded by the 1998 Workforce Investment Act, which created a national workforce preparation system to meet the needs of job seekers and employers. In 2014, the Workforce Investment Act was reauthorized and updated as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. With funding supported through WIOA, each state has its own workforce board, with an additional 593 local boards serving as the administrative vehicle to channel federal funding into local workforce ecosystems across the country. By working directly with both employers and job seekers, workforce boards have unique insight into high-potential recruitment strategies and opportunities to reach untapped talent pools, such as justice-impacted job seekers. They are also familiar with the community partners in their area, who work with justice-impacted job seekers.

Similarly, industry associations and chambers of commerce exist in each U.S. state. Associations and chambers are dedicated to bringing companies together for shared interests and, importantly, to solve common challenges. For manufacturers, talent acquisition has been a primary area of focus for business associations for more than a decade.

In 2022, the Manufacturing Institute—the workforce development and education affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers—partnered with the Georgia Association of Manufacturers to pilot the first multicompany second chance employment initiative through a state association. Since the pilot, which convened nine Atlanta manufacturers and guided them through a peer-learning cohort, several place-based second chance initiatives have gained momentum around the country and have had measurable success. While each initiative has looked different, they have shared a common model: a convening body recruits local employers with shared talent challenges and works with community partners and other second chance employment experts to educate employers and equip them with tools for implementation.



Partnership is crucial—the convening body not only works closely with second chance experts to put on the training, but also mobilizes and integrates its local ecosystem of reentry and workforce-readiness partners to both help inform employers about the resources in their community and to form referral partnerships with them afterward. To put it simply, these employer conveners use their platforms to serve as “hubs” for employers to learn how to implement second chance strategies at their own companies and to introduce them to community partners in their area. The GAM has now scaled their work across the state and has published a guide for Georgia manufacturers on implementing second chance hiring practices. Similar models have launched in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky, across different industries and at different scales. Community partners have played an integral role in each of these initiatives.

Since last year, the Ohio Manufacturers’ Association has been working with the MI and Envoy as part of the Economic Development Administration’s Good Jobs Challenge to convene employers across the state on strategies to [adopt Fair Chance practices](#). Ohio manufacturers from Cleveland to Cincinnati are convening remotely to participate in [Envoy’s](#)

Fair Chance Implementation Series to learn how to hire and retain justice-impacted talent while building long-term referral partnerships with high quality reentry organizations. The series will equip employers to understand how to identify community partners and establish a long-term referral relationship, and employers will work with a map developed by Envoy that outlines more than 200 reentry and work-readiness organizations across the state to identify which to partner with for their own initiatives.

The [Kentucky Comeback Initiative](#) is another example of a successful second chance initiative with a statewide reach. Beginning in 2020, the Kentucky Chamber, along with the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, has convened employers and workforce experts across Kentucky to address common talent needs through its Fair Chance Academy programming. Brandi Hon, program manager for the Kentucky Chamber Foundation, describes this partnership as “absolutely critical” to the initiative. “Both of these entities are a very trusted source when you’re looking at businesses’ workforce models. Workforce boards are an integral part of making this all work.” Kentucky Comeback helps companies adopt second chance practices with an





emphasis on building community partnerships and establishing a recovery-friendly workplace to provide “transformational employment successfully.” Since May 2022, it has delivered four business cohorts with more than 100 business leaders receiving certifications. Resources also include a comprehensive guide of service providers across the state and online locators to find recovery centers and reentry divisions with the Department of Corrections nearby.

In Philadelphia, another workforce board is taking the lead to bring second chance practices to employers. Philadelphia Works is convening employers it knows will benefit from second chance employment and is partnering with Envoy to host its Fair Chance Implementation Series for local employers this year. A core component of the series will be spotlighting Philadelphia-based reentry and work-readiness organizations and equipping employers to initiate and establish their own referral partnerships with select organizations. To recruit employers to participate, the workforce board has worked closely with the

Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, which similarly shares relationships and insights into the local Philadelphia business community. By collaborating, Philadelphia’s workforce board and chamber have been able to expand their reach as local employer conveners to bring even more Philadelphia employers together to adopt and sustain second chance practices.

Just west of Philadelphia, South Central Pennsylvania Works is driving a regional ecosystem-based second chance initiative. As the workforce development board for the region, SCPa Works invests nearly \$14 million each year into employment programs and operates six PA CareerLink sites that serve tens of thousands of residents annually. During the MI’s recent [How Workforce Boards Can Help Communities Start a Second Chance Hiring Program](#) webinar, SCPa Works CEO Jesse McCree said that SCPa Works has invested in second chance hiring for more than a decade, and he shared how they have funded their recent work, “We view ourselves as connectors and conveners in our community, but philanthropic funders are also an important part of this ecosystem.” McCree explained that they have found success targeting funders that value increasing economic mobility and see second chance employment as an important driver to achieving that. “We’ve had a tremendous outpouring of support from philanthropies that agree this is critical work.” Similar to Philadelphia Works, SCPa Works is also taking a coordinated approach this year to target local business needs by hosting an Implementation Series with Envoy for local construction companies.

While these city, regional and state-wide initiatives across Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky differ in various ways, they follow a common model of mobilizing a local second

chance ecosystem through a coordinated effort to engage employers with shared talent needs and bringing in content experts to equip them to address those needs with second chance employment. All these models place an emphasis on partnering with local service providers to proactively recruit and retain justice-impacted talent.

If you are a local industry association, chamber, workforce board or other convening or hub organization interested in helping employers

in your area solve shared talent needs through second chance employment, there are several great models to learn from around the country. You can also access the MI's step-by-step [guide](#) on how to deploy a similar initiative in your area, and check out the [tools and resources](#) you can use to disseminate information to employers. And, as always, contact the MI if you would like guidance on where to start!

