



Enhancing Second Chance Employment Opportunities in Wyoming



Career Compass Program Funded by the Pathway Home Grant

Purpose

To outline the importance of second-chance employment initiatives, highlight the successes of the Career Compass Program, and demonstrate the critical role of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in supporting justice-involved individuals.

Career Compass Program Success

Career Compass Program: A Second Chance

The Career Compass Program, funded by the Pathway Home Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, focuses on helping justice-involved individuals reintegrate into the workforce.



Program Successes

Participants Served: Over 600 referrals for the program. Over 260 enrolled, with approx. 164 in follow-up services.

Employment Placements: Participants have found jobs in high-demand fields like transportation and manufacturing. For example, one participant, after obtaining a CDL, is now making between \$1,000 and \$5,000 per week.



Gillette Success Story

A participant was released in Feb 2024 and quickly secured a job at Legacy Retirement Home. With assistance from WIOA, she received the necessary work clothing and has since been promoted to supervisor. She has saved enough money for reliable transportation and secured housing, with continued support from her Transitional Case Manager.



High Unemployment Rates:

Nationally, 34% of non-working men aged 25-54 have criminal records, leading to significant barriers in securing employment².



Economic Impact:

It is estimated that the U.S. economy loses between \$78 and \$87 billion annually due to the unemployment or underemployment of individuals with criminal records¹.



Barriers:

- ✓ Legal Barriers
- ✓ Stigma and Discrimination
- ✓ Lack of Soft Skills or Work History
- ✓ Housing and Transportation Issues
- ✓ Education and Skill Gaps
- ✓ Financial Barriers
- ✓ Mental Health and Substance Use
- ✓ Lack of Family and Social Support

Key Challenges

- **Staff Turnover:** The program has faced challenges with staff turnover, particularly in critical positions such as the Reentry Program Manager. This has slowed progress at times, especially with system migrations and administrative transitions³.
- **Complexity and Time Investment:** Building a sustainable second-chance employment program like Career Compass is not something that can happen overnight. It requires consistent effort, collaboration, and coordination between multiple agencies, including the Department of Corrections, Workforce Services, local employers, and community³.
- **Collaborative Support:** The success of the program depends on the continued support from transitional case managers, local businesses, WIOA-funded programs, and community organizations willing to help participants access necessary services, such as housing or job training.

WIOA's Role in Supporting Reentry Initiatives

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plays a critical role in providing funding and services to support justice-involved individuals:

- **Priority Population:** Individuals with criminal records are a WIOA priority, ensuring they receive essential job training and employment services¹.
- **One-Stop Centers:** WIOA-funded One-Stop Centers provide job search resources, resume writing workshops, and access to on-the-job training, crucial for justice-involved individuals transitioning into the workforce¹.
- **Industry Collaboration:** Partnerships between WIOA-funded programs and local employers facilitate second chance hiring, encouraging employers to consider individuals with criminal records for roles in sectors like transportation, construction, and manufacturing¹.

The Path Forward: Strengthening Wyoming's Workforce

Key Recommendations:

- **Expand Second-Chance Employment:** Encourage businesses to participate in second-chance hiring by promoting available tax credits and incentives, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and federal bonding programs³.
- **Promote Training in High-Demand Fields:** Continue investment in skills training for sectors like construction, transportation, and manufacturing, which are projected to see significant job growth in Wyoming³.
- **Strengthen Collaboration:** Expand partnerships between reentry programs and local businesses to ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers ready to reintegrate into the workforce^{1:3}.

Summary

- The Career Compass Program is a comprehensive initiative that depends on ongoing collaboration and support to ensure the success of justice-involved individuals. By utilizing WIOA and other funding sources, and promoting second-chance hiring, Wyoming can reduce recidivism, address workforce needs, and generate long-term economic growth. However, building this program is a gradual process that will require sustained commitment from stakeholders in both the public and private sectors.

References

1. Bucknor, C., & Barber, A. (2016). The price we pay: Economic costs of barriers to employment for former prisoners and people convicted of felonies. Center for Economic and Policy Research. <https://cepr.net/documents/publications/ex-offenders-2016-06.pdf>
2. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. (2017). What corrections and reentry agencies need to know. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://doleta.gov/wioa/Overview.cfm>
3. Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. (2024). Wyoming Labor Force Trends: August 2024. <https://doe.state.wy.us/LMI/>