

# Promised Pathways

Integrating Justice-Impacted Individuals into Public Service





# Promised Pathways

Envisions local governments repairing generational harm in justice-impacted communities through Fair Chance hiring, family support, and systemic reform.

Over the last year, we:

1

**Researched the current landscape** of institutions, systems, policies and practices related to this work, compiling the summary of our findings in a Landscape Analysis.

2

**Surveyed local governments** to understand awareness of these programs, barriers to participation and/or challenges with implementing.

3

**Conducted interviews with organizations** that participate in this work and lived experience professionals to inform our recommendations.

# The Grand Challenges



# Connect Individuals to Meaningful Work

## The Challenge

Opportunities for meaningful work are harder and harder to come by, and local governments struggle to stand out as an employer of choice in the modern workforce

## Promised Pathways

Delivers by **connecting individuals impacted by the criminal justice system to stable, meaningful employment** while promoting local governments as quality employers



# Foster Social Equity

## The Challenge

Local governments must address inequities in systems and institutions to reduce harm, but faces many structural and political barriers to doing so

## Promised Pathways

Delivers by **directly addressing systemic harms** caused by the criminal justice system and **seeking pathways to rehabilitation** where status quo fails to do so



# Landscape Review



# Key Terms

<b>Justice-Impacted Individuals</b>	Folks who have been incarcerated or involved with the US justice system.
<b>Lived-Experience Professionals</b>	Employees who are hired, in part, for their experience as a member of a marginalized group.
<b>Fair Chance Hiring Policies</b>	<p>A set of policies that prohibit/limit when an employer can inquire about conviction history, often until after a conditional offer has been made.</p> <p>This umbrella term includes initiatives like Ban-the-Box and complaint/appeal procedures for employers accused of violating the policies.</p>

Our research shows that “lived-experience professionals” is often used to describe individuals who have experience with mental health, substance abuse or housing-instability.

We see an opportunity to bring **justice-impacted** individuals into this narrative, as ***lived-experience is intersectional.***

# Core Concepts

## RISKS

Actual vs Perceived risks in hiring Justice-Impacted Individuals.

Legal liability  
Concerns from other employees  
Re-offending/Behavior  
Community Trust/Response  
Unreliable/Unskilled/Uneffective  
Cost to hire Justice-Impacted Individuals



- Among Fair Chance hiring, less severe offenses such as substance-related felonies and misdemeanors are the most prevalent types of criminal records.
- The quality of hiring and cost-per-hire for Fair Chance candidates is comparable to or better than that of other employees.
- Recent data indicates that Fair Chance hiring can enhance employee productivity, engagement, and yield long-term public service benefits.

## BARRIERS

Difficulty in hiring Justice-Impacted Individuals

Local policies  
State policies  
Federal policies  
Trade/Profession requirements



- Insufficient identification preventing individuals from accessing public benefits, services, and employment opportunities necessary for stabilizing their lives.
- Delayed job placement within local government settings.
- Workplace & regulatory policies hinder individuals with criminal records from job opportunities and required licenses or certifications.

## BIAS

Stigmatizing perceptions hindering Fair Chance hiring

Institutional  
Systemic  
Interpersonal



- Individuals desire to be accorded human dignity and treated with respect.
- Language is vital in program naming, job seeker presentation, and inclusive job descriptions.
- A citation, an arrest, a conviction, or a criminal record can all present barriers to gaining employment.



# Employment After Justice Involvement

Justice-impacted individuals struggle to obtain the gainful employment critical to successful re-entry.

- Each year, more than 600K individuals are released from state and federal prison, while another 9M cycle through local jail systems.
- Individuals who leverage vocational training while in the corrections system are 28% more likely to obtain employment following release.

**87%**

*respondent communities have never considered Fair Chance hiring policies*

Source: Promised Pathways survey initiative

**81%**

*of HR professionals and business leaders said fair chance employees perform comparably or better than their counterparts*

Source: 2021 Getting Talent Back to Work Report



# Talent Acquisition Environment

Local Governments struggle to be seen as competitive and attractive employers.

- In 2022, job opening rates were the highest they've been in 20 years.
- Many of the hardest-to-fill positions are skilled labor such as asset maintenance and utility work.

47%

*respondent communities that always or very frequently struggle to fill vacant positions*

53%

*respondent communities that occasionally struggle to fill vacant positions*

Source: Promised Pathways survey initiative



# Our Pillars



## Justice-Impacted Individuals

Justice-Impacted Individuals and the support networks necessary to create successful pathways for re-entry.



## Institutions & Systems

Local Governments, States, Prison Systems and Federal Agencies that play a part in the complex justice environment.



## Policies & Programs

The non-profit network and policy landscape that enables or hinders successful Fair Chance hiring.



# Individuals

## Justice-Impacted Individuals and Families

The population of Justice-Impacted Individuals in the U.S. is vast - 1 in 3 Americans have a criminal record, and roughly 1 in 28 children currently have a parent behind bars. Upon release, the employment landscape is often bleak - a 2018 study shows that unemployment rates are 5x higher for previously incarcerated individuals.

## Living on the Margins

Individuals with lived experience are often without critical documents, working through significant trauma and rebuilding their lives leveraging the social safety net, which often requires proof of employment shortly after release. Local government does not meet the urgency for these candidates - in 2022 average days-to-fill for vacant positions was 130 days.

## Skills & Boundaries

Successful Fair Chance programs invest in development opportunities for Justice-Impacted Individuals, focusing on technical skill development while supporting life skill growth. Supervisors need coaching skills rooted in trauma-informed methodology to support this work.



## Adams County Community Safety and Well-Being

*"I didn't know what self-care was before. In doing [this work] there is a lot of compassion fatigue, you bring that along especially as someone with lived experience. You don't have boundaries.*

*Being given boundary training, first aid and mental health first aid training... Those are ways that they have supported me and given me tools in my toolbelt as well as grown me as a person and my loyalty is there now because of it."*

Heather McClure  
Lived-Experience Professional

# Institutions & Systems

## Criminal Justice System

Parole Officers play a critical role in the success of reentry for justice-impacted individuals; their advocacy is powerful in navigating employment

- Prisons that invest in pre-release workforce development programs reduce recidivism; the Minnesota EMPLOY program generated a ROI of \$6.45 for a total of \$2.8 million in costs avoided annually

## Nonprofit Agencies

Mission-aligned agencies and service-aligned agencies provide services that meet the six basic life needs of Justice-Impacted Individuals, including access to acute needs like health care, housing, childcare, job readiness training and employment process navigation.

## Government and Non-Government Resource Providers

National Employment Labor Project, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Department of Justice and Department of Labor provide resources and capital to support implementation of Fair Chance in public and private sectors



## Project: Elevate

- A collaboration between the City and County of Denver and The Empowerment Program, Inc.
- Supports women through the reentry process via a 6-8 month program with a focus on the whole person.
- Major barriers to employment include the accessibility of application processes and uncertainty of what will disqualify candidacy.

***“We talk about rehabilitation, but we are not willing to give them credit for rehabilitating”***

*Stephanie Robertson  
Director of Operations*

# Policies & Programs

## Fair Chance Hiring Policies

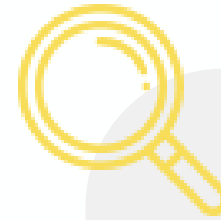
Since the federal Fair Chance Act of 2019, more than 150 cities/counties and 37 states have “Ban the Box” policies; this is an important step in removing barriers for Justice-Impacted Individuals to obtain gainful employment.

## Inaccessible Application Processes

Employment applications are riddled with legalized and inaccessible language, leaving individuals uncertain about the intent of questions and the level of detail required in responses.

## Creative Solutions to Systemic Obstacles

Programs designed to provide low-to-no-barrier work experience circumvent the major barriers to traditional employment, including exclusionary background check processes, traditional two-week payment cycles and zero-tolerance policies.



## Denver Day Works

- A supported work program designed to provide a low-to no-barrier work experience.
- Originally designed with unhoused populations in mind, but has implications for Justice-Impacted Individuals too.
- Partnering with a third-party to reduce barriers in traditional HR policies related to hiring and payment such as waived background checks and daily cash payment.
- Participants get breakfast/lunch, a fare pass and access to an employment specialist or peer navigator each day.

# Biden-Harris Reentry 2030

Reentry 2030 is a national initiative that aims to dramatically improve reentry success for people exiting prison and those under supervision.



- ★ Investing in **Job Training & Intensive Reentry** in Federal Prisons
- Expanding **Federal Job Opportunities & Loan Programs**
- Promoting **Best Practices for Hiring** Across the Federal Government
- Supporting **Veterans**
- Expanding **Access to Healthcare and Housing**
- Developing and Amplifying **Educational Opportunities**
- ★ **Supporting Job Seekers** and **Establishing Best Practices for Employers**

# Proposed Action





# CONTEXTUALIZE The Environment

## State Policy

The changes we propose are most impactful at the state level, as our analysis and interview show that state support for Fair Chance programs better equips local jurisdictions in supporting Justice-Impacted Individuals in their transition to becoming Lived-Experience Professionals.

### Begin by evaluating your state policy environment:

- Does your state affirmatively support Fair Chance programs?
- Do state policies hinder the implementation of Fair Chance programs?
- Are state policies silent on this issue?

By leveraging your agency's influence, advocating for the adoption of Fair Chance legislation in your state will enhance resources and success factors for individuals impacted by the justice system.

## Local Policies

Though states are often best equipped to codify Fair Chance programs, local policies and programs can be incredibly effective in the absence of statewide political support. Understand your agency's policy landscape:

- What is permissible under existing HR policy for hiring?
- Is there flexibility in payment and benefit terms?

## Critical Partnerships

Elected Officials

City Attorney's Office

Human Resources  
Professionals



# COMMIT

## To the Conditions for Success

### Critical Partnerships

DEI Officers

Human Resource  
Professionals

City Attorney's Office

Civil Service Commissions

### Lived Experience Statements

Go beyond compliance with Ban the Box and EEOC requirements and craft a statement demonstrating your organization's commitment to employing individuals with lived-experience. Be explicit about valuing lived-experience as a critical component of building a diverse and equitable workforce.

### Understand Legal Barriers

It is vital to possess a comprehensive understanding of the specific legal barriers within your local government sector (e.g., Libraries, Public Enforcement, Public Works, Parks, etc.), including the offenses that result in complete disqualification, as well as the availability of waivers to establish a low-to-no barrier for applicants.

### Foster a Culture of Inclusion

Recognize that Justice-Impacted Individuals have unique needs that must be met to ensure successful transition is possible. To do this, employers must invest in creating an organizational culture that values lived-experience. This includes training supervisors and colleagues in trauma-informed methodologies and setting realistic expectations about known hard/soft skill barriers. Incorporate these efforts into a narrative-driven marketing campaign to appeal to Justice-Impacted Individuals, which brings visibility to your commitment and encourages their participation in the local government workforce.

# CHANGE

## Processes & Practices

### Critical Partnerships

Communications  
Professionals

Human Resource  
Professionals

City Attorney's Office

Civil Service Commissions

### Demystify & Humanize Recruitment

There are significant barriers embedded in existing public service recruitment processes, from extensive timelines and technology-required applications to opaque language and unclear expectations.

- **Background Checks:**
  - › Remove background checks for roles without unsupervised access to sensitive populations or handling sensitive information
  - › Clearly state the types of offenses that will make a candidate ineligible
  - › Conduct individualized assessment, considering the age of the offense, relevance to the job and evidence of rehabilitation
- **Language:**
  - › Provide accessible language/clear guidelines for documentation and disclosure requirements
  - › Remove deficit-based language such as ex-felon/ex-offender
- **Time to Hire:**
  - › Create programs that connect individuals to supervised work with little administrative processing
  - › Consider the necessity of excessive testing/screening that can add time to the process

# CENTER

# Employee Experience

## On-the-Job Support

Once you've hired a Justice-Impacted Individual, you must continue to provide targeted and specific support to promote their well-being and transition at work. This includes reimagining traditional benefits to meet the unique needs of this group, including:

- Pay advances
- Cash payment
- PTO banks
- Wellness Hours

## On-the-Job Training

Beyond support in the form of benefits, successful Fair Chance programs focus on development opportunities for Justice-Impacted Individuals. To ensure that the transition into your agency's culture is smooth, consider training opportunities and upskilling in professional and technical skills, such as:

- Time Management
- Healthy Boundaries and Conflict Management
- Mental Health First Aid
- Peer support training
- Microsoft Office, Email Platform, and other Technology-based trainings

## Critical Partnerships

Government Finance Professionals

Human Resource Professionals

City Attorney's Office

DEI Officers

# CO-CREATE

## Community-Based Models

### Critical Partnerships

Government Finance  
Professionals

Economic Development  
Officers

Chambers of Commerce

Elected Officials

### Convene Mission-Aligned Partners

Nonprofit and community partners can support Justice Impacted Individuals in their rehabilitation, obtaining critical documents, navigating application processes and overcoming internalized barriers.

- **Ways to leverage partnerships:**
  - › Soft-skill training
  - › Wraparound resources and rehabilitation certifications
  - › Recruitment pipelines and application navigation

### Incentivize Hiring Lived-Experience Professionals

Local government is an influential player in the local economy and can leverage their position to encourage businesses to give Justice-Impacted Individuals a fair chance at employment. Effective methods include: modest wage subsidies, preference in contracting and tax credits.

### Advocate for Change

Elected officials play a crucial role in advocating for Fair Chance hiring reforms. While ultimate hiring decisions lie with internal staff, elected officials have influence to prioritize pathways for justice-impacted individuals' successful reintegration. They address the overemphasis on risk in our institutions and promote effective communication and leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusion.



**Thank you!**