



Fair-Chance Hiring: Addressing the Talent Shortage

*An Initiative of the Corporate Coalition of Chicago, Cara Plus
and the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance*

THE CHALLENGE

Today, nearly one in three U.S. adults faces a significant barrier to family-supportive employment because of a criminal record. The damage done to individuals, to society, and to our economy by excluding this large group of people has received increasing attention in recent years, and a growing number of firms is showing that hiring those with criminal records is both challenging and doable. Now, as labor shortages have arisen across the economy, the need and opportunity to re-engage those individuals has taken on new urgency. Given demographic trends, business leaders are recognizing that they cannot meet their needs for talent now or in the future unless they tackle this challenge.

THE RESPONSE

The Corporate Coalition of Chicago, Cara Plus and the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance have launched a business-led effort to reduce barriers to hiring individuals with criminal justice involvement. The heart of this initiative is peer-to-peer learning, action, and exchange among companies who are committed to changing their talent acquisition and support processes to include those individuals. The goals of the Fair Chance initiative are to demonstrate and promote local models of successful fair-chance hiring with a focus on the internal changes employers must make; to build a cross-industry group of local champions for fair chance hiring to scale the effort; and ultimately to increase the number of people with criminal records gaining productive, family-supportive employment.

The program uses the knowledge and experience of companies already working on these issues and the expertise of local organizations who serve individuals with criminal records; recognized experts in the field; and national organizations, including the Second Chance Business Coalition.

WHAT PARTICIPATING COMPANIES GAIN

The Fair Chance initiative creates a trusting environment in which participants can comfortably share experiences and challenges, learn from experts about potential solutions, and receive support from others working on reducing barriers and expanding opportunities. With program content developed to meet the specific needs of participating companies, cohort members gain an understanding of internal roadblocks and how to overcome them. They also have opportunities to share perspectives on organizational partnerships and public sector programs that will support their goals.

As cohort members reduce internal barriers and change their approaches to identifying, assessing, onboarding, and promoting talent, they widen their talent pool and increase the number of successful hires. And through this effort, they will contribute to building more stable communities and a more vibrant, safe, and prosperous region.

The first cohort of eight companies represented a diverse mix of industries, company sizes, level of regulation, and progress in their fair chance hiring journey. Some companies are Chicago-focused, while others operate nationally or globally. All are committed to creating a more inclusive workforce in the Chicagoland region. This diversity enriches the conversation between cohort members and enhances the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences. We are currently recruiting for our second cohort, which will kick off in January 2024!

TOPICS COVERED IN THE PROGRAMMING

Based on the common challenges that companies working on fair chance hiring tend to face, in addition to specific challenges identified by cohort members, programming covers the following themes:

- Reframing common concerns about regulatory barriers: *Questions to ask, exemption processes*
- Recruiting and building a talent pool: *How to identify and attract the right individuals, how to select and partner with workforce-focused nonprofits*
- Shaping inclusive background check practices: *How to “screen in” and when to use background checks and individualized assessments*
- Offering wrap-around supports and engaging partners: *Creating a support system for your talent; how to provide these supports internally or through external partners*
- Getting buy-in: *Navigating staff and customer concerns, internal vs. public communications*
- Developing an inclusive culture: *Making internal change, promoting a supportive environment*
- Compiling and reporting data: *What data and metrics are tracked, how do firms report progress*
- Setting up talent for success: *Crafting a path for advancement and long-term career potential*
- Launching a pilot: *How to design a pilot, how to resource and scale it*

HOW TO JOIN FUTURE FAIR CHANCE COHORTS

To increase the likelihood of success, we recommend that firms participating:

- Secure executive-level commitment
- Commit to consistent internal leadership and participation in the full cohort meetings and periodic check-ins with cohort facilitators, during the nine month cohort experience
- Empower those participating in the cohort (ideally the CHRO or equivalent) to engage leaders from across the company (e.g., legal, corporate communications, finance, government affairs, etc.) as needed, to change policies and processes
- Be willing to work collaboratively with fellow cohort members to identify solutions
- Bring an action orientation to the work, identifying and pursuing practice changes during the cohort

The cohort meets monthly for nine months and has access to expert support throughout the experience. To build a trusting environment, participating staff must attend program sessions consistently and agree to engage actively in sharing their challenges, ideas, and solutions.

There is no requirement to share data or company-specific information publicly.

There is no cost for participation for Corporate Coalition members.

For more information about the program or membership in the Coalition, please contact:

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“The next-generation leader will have to dig deeper into untapped talent pools. This will require experimentation, flexibility, and creativity not always associated with staffing functions. Fortunately, aspiring leaders can learn today from pioneers, who have already developed models of success.” -- Jeffrey Korzenik, author of *Untapped Talent: How Second Chance Hiring Works for Your Business and the Community*, Chief Economist at a major commercial bank, and expert advisor to the Fair Chance Hiring initiative