

## Case Study: Unique Starting Points for Ecosystem Development

Phase 1 of the Recovery-to-Work Ecosystem Builders Guide focuses on how to develop an ecosystem approach to helping people in recovery achieve lasting employment. In doing this work, every region has a unique landscape of people, organizations, and projects to connect and coordinate. The Appalachian Regional Commission's Substance Use Disorder Recovery to Work Ecosystem diagram, shown below, captures the full scope of organizations that make up a regional ecosystem that connects people in recovery to successful employment.



The challenge for regions is *how* to build these ecosystems that involve cross-organization, relationship-based work. It's complicated and complex on the ground, and these organizations often work in silos. How can an ecosystem builder mobilize what are often disconnected organizations and projects toward a shared vision of success for connecting people in recovery to careers? Each regional recovery to work ecosystem will look different, and every region may have a different starting point. This case study presents three different starting points for successful regional ecosystem development.

## **Leveraging an Existing Network to Support a New Stream of Recovery-Focused Work: Highland Rivers Behavioral Health, Northwest Georgia**

When Alexandria Sanford, Grants and Strategic Partnership Manager at Highland Rivers Behavioral Health, began developing a recovery to work ecosystem with an INSPIRE planning grant, she was able to connect with key stakeholders quickly and effectively through the [Georgia Family Connection Partnership](#). Georgia Family Connection is a statewide network that brings local partners together in each county to connect to resources, coordinate efforts, and craft solutions, ultimately working towards better outcomes for children, families, and communities. Rather than duplicating the network that already exists in each county through Georgia Family Connection, Alex was able to tap into an existing network and use the existing network and meetings in each county to get input and support from the sheriff's office, drug court, and industry leads. As the region transitioned from planning to implementation, these initial connections were strengthened through the outreach efforts of two community liaisons. The community liaisons conduct more targeted outreach into communities, tailor the recovery-to-work approach to each county's unique opportunities, bridge the gap between employers and people in recovery.

Through partnerships seeded from Georgia Family Connection and strengthened by community liaisons, Highland Rivers is working towards supporting employers in recovery to work opportunities and serving individuals in recovery eager to find meaningful employment. They are expanding the [SOAR program initiative](#) to better connect individuals to employment. As the work continues, the region is creating a cross-county advisory board that will meet regularly to guide recovery to work ecosystem development.

Alex's advice to regions that are starting to build a recovery-to-work ecosystem: "Find the forums that already exist."

- **Resources to help with this approach in the Recovery to Work Ecosystem Builders Guide:** Find templates to design an agenda for where your region is in the ecosystem development process in Phase 2 of Ecosystem Builders Guide.

## **Creating an Ecosystem Based on What an Individual in Recovery Needs: South Central and Cumberlands Workforce Development Boards, Kentucky**

As Director of Reentry Programming for the South Central and Cumberlands Workforce Boards in Kentucky, Aaron Poynter started developing a recovery to work ecosystem when he realized there was an untapped pipeline of people who needed jobs coming out of the justice system. He started partnering with the district attorney's office to identify people who needed jobs, but quickly realized that each person needed some amount of support before they were ready for a job, whether it was help getting a driver's license, additional job training, or some other need. Aaron points out that it's important to deploy resources in the proper order: "If an individual doesn't have a hierarchy of needs met, they won't be a good employee."

Responding to those needs, the workforce board began to develop additional partnerships based on which organizations have expertise in meeting the needs of people in recovery. In recruiting partners, it was important to take time to educate partners and connect the ecosystem work with each organization's unique mission and metrics, connecting the purpose of the ecosystem "employed individuals" to the purpose of each partner.

The workforce board became a hub for the community and the partners, moving from an informal, one-off approach to partnerships to formal partnerships with memoranda of understanding. Some organizations became core partners - “heavy hitters that can handle a lot” - but there was a common understanding that “you have to have all these relationships, you have to get other people involved, and there’s not one organization that does it all.” The workforce board became a navigator, connecting the right organizations and experts when and where they’re most needed.

- **Resources to help with this approach in the Recovery to Work Ecosystem Builders Guide:** Use the [“RTW Roles and Relationship Examples and Questions” tool](#) in Phase 2 of the Ecosystem Builders Guide to learn how other regions have formalized partnerships.

### **Grounding Ecosystem Development in Industry Input: Flying HIGH, Inc, Youngstown, Ohio**

Jeff Magada, Executive Director of Flying HIGH, Inc in Youngstown, Ohio, shares that he started ecosystem work with “the end result in mind”. Flying HIGH set the vision for their recovery to work ecosystem by first connecting with employers in the region and asking: “What are you looking for in a good job candidate? What are the most important things that make people competitive for your open positions?”

To answer these questions, Flying HIGH hosted a roundtable of employers to get their input on these questions. They also met with regional chambers of commerce and the local workforce system to identify where the in-demand jobs were in the region.

Flying HIGH provides accelerated and accredited training programs for welding and machining, training for nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses and registered nurses as well as chemical dependency counselor assistants. Partnerships with other schools, including Eastern Gateway Community College, Choffin Career & Technical Center and the Hannah E. Mullins School of Practical Nursing in Salem, provide more advanced training to students ready to move forward in their careers. Flying HIGH collaborates with local manufacturing and healthcare employers to offer on-the-job training. Working with the nonprofit’s GROW Urban Farm provides students with additional professional skills.

- **Resources to help with this approach in the Recovery to Work Ecosystem Builders Guide:** Find examples and [templates for business roundtables](#) in Phase 3 of the Ecosystem Builders Guide.

### **Key Takeaways and Lessons Learned**

- Look for forums and networks that already exist before starting from scratch.
- Make a connection between the goal of the overall ecosystem and the purpose and metrics of each partner organization you want to recruit.
- No one organization can do it all – enlist experts to do what they do best.
- Ground your partnerships in the needs of people in recovery and the workforce needs of companies in your region.