



Employer Engagement Profile: *Economic Development Intermediaries*

Produced by DDAA in Partnership with the ARC



Understanding Economic Development Intermediaries

Economic Development Intermediaries (intermediaries) can be nonprofits, state or local economic development organizations, or industry associations which have established connections in your regional business community. These organizations will have deep ties with the private sector and can act as ambassadors or intermediaries for recovery-focused efforts in a region.

Here are a few examples of intermediary partners to consider when expanding outreach to businesses in your region:

- Chambers of Commerce: Chambers of Commerce are typically “local organization[s] that gather business leaders working in the community... to advance the goals and interests of [businesses] operating in the area”.¹
- Workforce Development Boards: Workforce development boards identify the needs of their region’s local job market, oversee one stop career centers, and work with businesses to align workforce development initiatives in their region to meet the needs of their regional economy.
- Human Resources Organizations: National and local organizations like the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) regularly work with businesses to help them manage human resources policies. These organizations are well-connected in the business community.
- Local Development Districts (LDDs): Sometimes called Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) or Council of Governments (COGs), these organizations are community-based economic development groups which regularly interface with local businesses.² You can find a map of Appalachian LDDs [here](#).

The above intermediaries are often deeply involved in business communities and can be partners in both identifying recovery-friendly businesses that are hiring and in sharing resources about hiring people in recovery with businesses in the region.

¹ <https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/what-is-chamber-of-commerce>

² <https://www.arc.gov/local-development-districts/>

Economic Development Intermediaries in the Recovery-to-Work Ecosystem

What are the Benefits of Working with Intermediaries?

Developing close relationships with intermediaries can help you better understand the labor needs of businesses in your region and help develop pipelines for individuals with substance use disorder (SUD) from recovery into employment. Examples of successful Economic Development Intermediaries in recovery efforts include:

- ▶ [Employer Resource Network](#) (Ross County Community Action, Ohio): In partnership with the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission and Jackson-Vinton Community Action, Ross County Community Action adopted the Employer Resource Network model in their region. The Network is one of many in the nation which connects employees and employers through training, employee coaching, and referrals to community resources. The ERN also provides training and access to resources for employees who struggle with SUD and/or cannot access transportation or childcare. Moreover, ERN advocates its services to businesses as a means of employee retention—promoting the significant ROI of maintaining and training employees with SUD, rather than letting them go.
- ▶ [Re-entry and Transformational Employment Division](#) (Cumberlands & South Central workforce boards, KY): This division, co-operated by two Kentucky Workforce Boards, is dedicated to assisting individuals re-entering the workforce after incarceration, drug misuse, or other life events leading to unemployment. The division operates both as a recovery assistant—offering resources for housing, training, and basic needs—and a connector for local businesses looking for employees. Employers can fill out [this “quick needs” form](#) and will be put in contact with several potential employees pulled from the division’s talent pool.
- ▶ [Kentucky Comeback](#) (Kentucky Chamber of Commerce): The Kentucky Chamber is very active in recovery-to-work and offers a suite of programs under the “Kentucky Comeback” project. Perhaps the most germane program is their Fair Chance academy, which trains businesses in recovery friendly practices so they can provide “transformational employment” to people with SUD.

What do I Need to Know to Partner with Intermediaries

Intermediaries can leverage relationships to funnel individuals in recovery into employment via employer relationships. In many cases, these relationships are mediated by translating the benefits of recovery and prevention into economic development.

A recovery organization might develop partnerships with intermediaries by emphasizing their role in furthering economic growth in their region. This could be achieved through roundtables with key stakeholders to discuss impediments to economic growth and the needs that stakeholders see in their community of businesses.

Here are a handful of common strategies organizations use to develop these ties:

- ▶ Tie recovery work to economic development
- ▶ Create a database of employers to use for systematic outreach
- ▶ Offer trainings on stigma reduction and recovery-friendly workplaces
- ▶ Host roundtables or focus groups with local Chambers of Commerce or Economic Development Organizations and discuss their challenges
- ▶ Discuss community needs with relevant stakeholders, to better understand how recovery work may benefit them
- ▶ Network with other recovery programs to employee repositories to be advertised to employers

Working with Chambers of Commerce

As mentioned above, local chambers of commerce are major partners in connecting with businesses. Local chambers of commerce are important actors in local economic development, providing advocacy for business interests at the city or county level. Chambers also provide resources to their members to access capital, network with other businesses in their industry, and identify potential employees.

By partnering with the chambers in your region, you can gain access to community business meetings to promote your ecosystem work, become a resource to businesses seeking workers, and offer additional services like recovery-friendly workplace training.

Here is a list of resources to identify your local chambers and learn more about the services they offer:

- ▶ Use [this map](#) to identify accredited chambers near you.
- ▶ Here is a [brief guide](#) to working with a local chamber.
- ▶ Read [this article](#) and [this article](#) to see how local chambers can benefit a nonprofit organization.
- ▶ Use [this example letter](#) to chambers of commerce in Connecticut as a starting point for reaching out to chambers in your region.

How do I make the Case for My Work?

Recovery-focused organizations and initiatives can promote their work by emphasizing that workplace wellness—in this case, recovery from substance abuse and the maintenance of recovery friendly workplaces—is just as important to economic development as workforce training, site development, or other common practices.

Moreover, people in recovery are an untapped pool of high-quality talent for employees. People in recovery miss fewer days of work and take fewer days off than average employees.³ By promoting the benefits of hiring individuals with SUD, your organization can make a stronger case for coupling recovery with economic development, especially in a tight labor market.

Perhaps the most important component of promoting your work and building relationships both with intermediaries and with the businesses they will connect you with, is to nurture a mutual sense of partnership and trust. Here are a few strategies other organizations have used to bolster their relationships:

- ▶ [Leatherstocking Education on Alcoholism/Association Foundation, NY](#) (LEAF) began their outreach by asking Intermediaries about their needs and proposing assistance to meet them. The process took months, but the resulting relationships bolstered LEAF's reach across the region.
- ▶ [Caring Workplaces, KY](#) offered workplace training to businesses who were willing to partner with them to help reduce stigma and continue to promote their process. This process created a feedback loop whereby businesses began to solicit Intermediaries for new workers specifically from Caring Workplaces.
- ▶ [Ross County Community Action, OH](#) convened local chambers, the workforce development board, and local HR chapter to present their work and to see if they were receptive to their approach. This led to long-term connections which Ross County Community Action continues to leverage for their work.

³ <https://www.norc.org/research/library/new-analysis--employers-stand-to-save-an-average-of--8-500-for-s.html>

Case Study

History of the Leatherstocking Education on Alcoholism/Addictions Foundation (LEAF)

One example of an organization which has developed partnerships with Economic Development Intermediaries is The LEAF Council on Alcoholism and Addiction- a nonprofit organization in Oneonta, New York. LEAF works to prevent addiction, educate the public, and encourage appropriate care for those affected by SUD.⁴

LEAF has been operating in New York for over forty years, promoting best practices in SUD care and training community and business leaders in stigma reduction and recovery friendly workplace practices. As an integrated part of the Oneonta community, LEAF has a proven track record in building partnerships with Economic Development Intermediaries.

LEAF's Intermediary Engagement Strategies

LEAF covers four counties in central upstate New York and is in its second year of an ARC INSPIRE grant. Their ARC project includes training for regional businesses in stigma reduction and recovery friendly workplace practices.

LEAF built a network of Economic Development Intermediaries and businesses through consistent communication and collaboration. Instead of approaching these businesses with an advertisement for their services, LEAF begins relationships with interviews asking about community needs and common regional challenges. LEAF also leads focus groups and administers surveys asking key stakeholders about current capacity, stressors in businesses and in the business community generally. Some of the questions used in these interviews include:

- ▶ What do you think is causing employers and the business community stress right now?
- ▶ How are these challenges impacting their businesses, services, or performance?
- ▶ What work-related issues have been taking up more of your time than you would otherwise prefer?
- ▶ How do mental health and substance misuse concerns play a role in anything we have discussed?

⁴<https://leafinc.org/about/>

LEAF's focus groups found that businesses were unable to find workers to meet demand. Further, the survey revealed that managers supervisors and CEOs in the region spent an average of 40% of their time dealing with employee stress, burnout, mental health concerns, and drug misuse. Moreover, unhealthy workplaces cost small businesses in the region an average of \$25,134 per year.

These findings helped make the case for LEAF's programming and brought more businesses into their ecosystem. Through these connections, LEAF has built a broad network, including the Southern Tier 8 LDD, multiple local workforce boards, and the local chamber of commerce- and has established consistent partnership with over 200 businesses in the region.

LEAF also works directly with a labor lawyer who specializes in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and helps to educate rural businesses about accommodations they can make for people in recovery.

⁴<https://leafinc.org/about/>

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Create buy-in by offering Intermediaries a role to play in both the programming you provide and in the solutions that you offer to the business community.
- ▶ Make the case for your work by demonstrating the need through research and/or surveys as exemplified in the case study. Further, make it clear that economic development and recovery-to-work are part of one process—the wellbeing of a region’s people contributes directly to the region’s growth and competitiveness.
- ▶ Develop trusting relationships over a long period of time. By nurturing cooperation with Intermediaries, recovery-to-work ecosystems can create feedback loops with businesses seeking new employees.
- ▶ Cultivate a wide range of partnerships with Intermediaries which focus on a variety of business topics including small business assistance, business convening and advocacy, and business-facing workforce programming.

Sources

- ▶ <https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/what-is-chamber-of-commerce>
- ▶ <https://www.arc.gov/local-development-districts/>
- ▶ <https://www.norc.org/research/library/new-analysis--employers-stand-to-save-an-average-of--8-500-for-s.html>
- ▶ <https://leafinc.org/about/>