



Employer Engagement Profile: *Entrepreneurship*

Produced by DDAA in Partnership with the ARC



Entrepreneurship as an Approach to Providing Jobs for People in Recovery

There are many ways for regions to connect people with substance use disorder (SUD) to employment in healthy workplaces, including working through mission-driven staffing agencies or economic development intermediaries which then place clients in Recovery-Friendly Workplaces or social enterprises. These approaches focus on connecting people with existing companies and jobs. Some regions are taking a different approach and working with people in recovery to create new companies and new jobs through a focus on entrepreneurship.

By starting a business of their own, a person in recovery can leverage skills learned through training or mentorship to generate their own source of income and bring people with similar circumstances together.

But entrepreneurship cannot be a standalone solution. Before someone in recovery can consider this option, they should have established support, skills training, and enough time to solidify their sobriety.

Entrepreneurship Incubators

In many cases, people with SUD who start their own enterprise begin in a social enterprise or similar organization offering employment and training. These same organizations offer courses in business management or partner with local educational institutions that can offer training.

For example, Seed Sower, a supervised housing provider, uses the following criteria to screen candidates for entrepreneurship:

- ▶ Two years or more in recovery;
- ▶ Pass a wellness screening process;
- ▶ Management skills developed through employment or training;
- ▶ Completion of a GED or further education; and,
- ▶ Financial literacy.

These requirements are specifically trained at Seed Sower as part of their recovery programming. Many organizations which support entrepreneurs in recovery offer training and support for people in recovery to obtain skills and a basic level of self-sustainability. Candidates must reach a level of expertise and self-sustainability before setting out on their own business venture.

The Path to Entrepreneurship

Because recovery requires support, most entrepreneurs in recovery will come directly out of recovery-to-work organizations like social enterprises or recovery friendly workplaces. Not all social enterprises or RFWs offer entrepreneurship services, but for those that do, there is a path which many would-be entrepreneurs will follow:

1. Entrance into detox from active addiction, either at a medical institution or as part of a recovery housing organization partnered with medical personnel.
2. If necessary, placed into social/supervised housing with services for life stabilization and social reentry.
3. If necessary, job or skills training- either as part of a course or on-site training through a social enterprise/RFW.
4. Job placement training-site, internally, or through a partner employment service (ex. mission-driven staffing agency).
5. Two to three years of job experience including managerial experience.
6. Training in personnel and business management either in-house or through a partner organization.
7. Entrepreneurship begins with continued support from recovery programs and/or partner organizations.

After taking these steps, entrepreneurs in recovery go on to create businesses in many fields- hiring others with SUD with a diverse range of skills. Some types of businesses started by people with SUD include:

- Housing social enterprises
- Mission-driven staffing agencies
- Recovery-focused nonprofits
- Landscaping businesses
- Cafes and other food service businesses
- Sober living retailers

While this is a general outline for recovery to entrepreneurship, there is no *one* path. Rather than thinking of this as a linear process, ecosystem champions will most benefit new entrepreneurs by ensuring that their local ecosystems include the above services and that those services are meaningfully connected to offer a continuum of support.

Who do I Partner with to Create a Continuum of Support?

If you want to create an environment supportive of entrepreneurs in recovery, there are a few things you might consider. First, it is helpful to find any gaps in wraparound services in your region. You can use this [ecosystem self-assessment tool](#) from the DDAA [Ecosystem Builder's Guide](#) to get started. You might also consider consulting ARC's [Recovery to Work Diagram](#) or this guide on [Finding the Right Partners](#) to identify collaborators in all areas of your ecosystem to help support entrepreneurs.

Second, you can reach out to potentially helpful organizations you've identified above. These organizations might include:

- ▶ Mental Health Services
- ▶ Counseling or Therapy Providers
- ▶ Housing Nonprofits
- ▶ Food Pantries
- ▶ Education Nonprofits
- ▶ Mission-Driven Staffing Agencies
- ▶ Social Enterprises
- ▶ Local Chambers of Commerce
- ▶ Nonprofits
- ▶ Local Development Districts (LDDs)

Case Study

Recovery & Entrepreneurship Elevating Lives (REEL)

In partnership with the Fletcher Group, the Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED) created the Recovery and Entrepreneurship Elevating Lives (REEL) program to help people in recovery start their own businesses.

Employment is an important step for someone in recovery, and some people may want to step outside of an established enterprise and begin their own business. REEL fills this need, and after a successful pilot in Kentucky, the program has moved to offering services across the county.

REEL is a 7-week program consisting of four classes covering all aspects of business development. Typically, the program is offered through recovery centers partnered with SKED and The Fletcher Group. Offered classes include:

- ▶ Planning for Business Success, which covers team building and goal setting
- ▶ Market Planning, including market and competitor analysis and advertising
- ▶ Cash Flow Planning, which discusses business finance and taxes
- ▶ Operations Planning, covering the basics of records management, insurance and employee relations

These courses are complimented by a resource called Be Boss Online, which offers marketing training videos on social media, advertisement, and search engine optimization.

If a participant in this course decides they don't want to start a business after all, REEL also provides industry-recognized certifications so people can seek out employment opportunities.

Since the REEL program began, 82 residents across five recovery centers have participated in the training and 57 have graduated. When people in programs like REEL start a business, that business is more likely to be recovery friendly—and many entrepreneurs go on to start their own social enterprises. This helps to increase the overall awareness of SUD and the availability of people in recovery to find meaningful and supportive employment.

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Recovery to work ecosystem champions who want to help aspiring entrepreneurs in recovery can support their skills training and ensure they have enough time to solidify their sobriety.
- ▶ Entrepreneurship programs can be hosted in-house at a recovery center or other organization, like Seed Sower, or can be contracted to a qualified third-party program, like REEL.
- ▶ Many recovery centers screen clients before allowing them to begin entrepreneurship training—this ensures that clients are stable and ready for this step. This is key, as the process of starting and managing a business can be stressful.
- ▶ Entrepreneurs in recovery can help to grow the recovery to work ecosystem by starting an RFW or social enterprise. Many businesses owners who have experienced SUD themselves will be more understanding and supportive of employees who struggle or have struggled with substance use.