



Employer Engagement Profile: *Mission-Driven Staffing Agencies*

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What are Mission-Driven Staffing Agencies?

Staffing agencies are intermediaries between employers and potential employees, offering matching services that connect people with relevant skills to jobs available in a region. Working with staffing agencies is a common human resources strategy that companies use, and some companies hire primarily through staffing agencies. If a region wants to improve employer engagement, it is worth considering the role of staffing agencies in the region and whether there are mission-driven staffing agencies open to partnering. While traditional staffing agencies may be helpful when coordinating opportunities for people in recovery, they are often not oriented toward the specific needs of people with substance use disorder (SUD). To address these needs, it is often more helpful to partner with staffing agencies with a social mission.

The difference between a standard staffing agency and a mission-driven staffing agency is analogous to that of a business versus a [social enterprise](#), in that it still operates primarily as an employment organization, but pays special attention to other social goals, like helping people with SUD. These agencies are focused on the social *and* employment outcomes of their clients, and they offer services in conjunction with job placement to increase the chances of success. Some of these agencies also focus specifically on recovery. Examples of these include:

- ▶ [Working Fields](#), VT: Working Fields is a mission-driven staffing agency which operates across the state of Vermont. Their programming helps people in recovery find jobs and assigns them a recovery coach to support them in their recovery and improve their chances of success in their career. Working Fields is also a Benefit Corporation, meaning they reinvest the majority of their profits into their mission.
- ▶ [OPARASA](#), Atlanta, GA: OPARASA is a [social enterprise](#) staffing agency which both partners with and purchases small businesses to create opportunities for workers in recovery. OPARASA seeks to fill both the nationwide gap in business purchases and in employment opportunities for people in long-term recovery.
- ▶ [Alternative Staffing Alliance](#), Northampton, MA: Alternative Staffing Alliance is a community-based workforce development program operated by staffing agencies around the nation. These agencies follow a social enterprise model where profits from staffing activities are used to offset worker support costs. The key component of Alternative Staffing agencies is that they provide support for workers both before and *after* they are placed in a job. These supports include skills training, emergency loans, work clothing, and financial advice.

Why Mission-Driven Staffing Agencies are Important

Mission-driven staffing agencies are a key resource for those in recovery to find job placement and be equipped with the support they need to succeed in a job role. Recovery is not universally understood or accepted, and negative biases can limit the opportunities for people with substance use disorder (SUD). Staffing agencies with a social objective can provide an opportunity for a person with SUD to reenter the job market, gain skills, and eventually start a career that will help sustain their recovery.

Here are a few ways that mission-driven staffing agencies support job seekers and businesses:

- ▶ Streamlining hiring processes: Sourcing, screening, and onboarding can become simplified through staffing agencies and recovery-friendly work placement practices.
- ▶ Flexibility: Staffing agencies can connect job seekers to a variety of employment opportunities that meet their skills and abilities.
- ▶ Reduce hiring risks: Bringing in new talent can be expensive for employers but staffing agencies can reduce the risks associated with hiring by placing employees in workplaces as needed.
- ▶ Access to talent and job networks: The staffing agency model creates an environment where talent pools and employers can unite to build a network that sustains itself and meets the needs of employees and employers.

Partnering with Mission-Driven Staffing Agencies

As mentioned above, mission-driven staffing agencies offer complementary services to increase the chance that a person will find and maintain employment. To that end, these organizations need partners to supply potential workers, housing services, recovery counseling, medical care, and workplaces which are friendly to people with SUD for placement.

Ideally, a staffing agency will have a variety of employers that employees can work for to gain skills and support business needs. A person in recovery often has complex needs that go beyond the scope of what a traditional staffing agency can provide. To create an environment that supports people in recovery, a mission-driven staffing agency may partner with the following recovery-oriented or mission-driven organizations:

- ▶ Social service nonprofit agencies
- ▶ Local Probation and Parole boards
- ▶ Homeless shelters
- ▶ Local Chambers of Commerce
- ▶ Technical colleges
- ▶ Behavioral health centers

As a leader in your local recovery-to-work ecosystem, you may want to consider reaching out to staffing agencies to complement their services or to help develop a workforce pipeline to other organizations you are partnered with. This is where your knowledge of your region is key—to connect these groups, you will need to know to what extent employers in your community are already hiring from staffing agencies or are willing to hire from staffing agencies.

What if There are no Mission-Driven Staffing Agencies in My Community?

While it is true that mission-driven staffing agencies are often a better fit for a recovery-to-work ecosystem, it can still be valuable to partner with standard staffing agencies. Even if a staffing agency does not offer SUD-specific services, they can be a powerful driver of employment for people with SUD. Further, by building connections between staffing agencies and other organizations like behavioral health and corrections facilities, you can help spread awareness about substance abuse in your community and bring staffing agencies into the recovery-to-work community. In the end, the simple fact that staffing agencies offer a pool of candidates for hire makes them a useful asset, regardless of their social objectives.

¹⁰ <https://www.arccenters.com/about-us/overview/>

¹¹ <https://www.arccenters.com/treatment-options/the-treatment-process/phased-treatment-approach/>

¹² <https://www.arccenters.com/about-us/overview/>

Case Study

First Step Staffing

The work of First Step Staffing is an example of how staffing agencies can provide job seekers with SUD the tools they need to succeed in a workplace, at scale. Founded by Greg Block in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007, First Step Staffing meets the needs of job seekers by providing employment opportunities and retention services to empower employees and ensure job success for clients.

First Step Staffing is a nonprofit organization with a mission to meet the needs of city leaders in Atlanta while empowering people in recovery to find jobs. Their business model has helped them open locations in 6 states with more than 25,000 employees.

The Unique Value Proposition of First Step Staffing

First Step Staffing boasts a holistic approach to recovery-friendly staffing. They begin the process with an evaluation of work history and living conditions and connect people in need with transportation, housing, and health services through partner organizations. Typically, clients are placed in a job within 48-72 hours and offered full support through retention services including clothing and transportation to the work site.

Major services through First Step include:

- ▶ Support for the various needs of people in recovery by providing services like transportation, childcare, and housing through partners;
- ▶ Career services like counseling, coaching, and skills training;
- ▶ Full and part-time employment with wages above the minimum wage; and,
- ▶ Advocacy for the importance of supportive services for people in recovery to ensure employers understand their unique needs.

¹³ <https://www.arccenters.com/crisis-to-career/second-chance-automotive/>

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Staffing agencies can match roles within companies that are hiring based on the skills of a job seeker and the requirements of a job.
- ▶ Organizations can minimize risks through staffing agency partners as the agencies hire, onboard, train, and provide insurance for job candidates to enter a job placement and succeed.
- ▶ Job seekers within mission-driven staffing agencies are provided additional support to address underlying needs.
- ▶ Mission-driven staffing agencies work with businesses to provide employment opportunities to people in recovery to help reduce the stigma associated with recovery.
- ▶ Temporary assignments can lead to long term employment opportunities for job seekers and their employers.