



Employer Engagement Profile: *Recovery Friendly Workplaces*

Produced by DDAA in Partnership with the ARC



Review of Recovery Friendly Workplace Designations

What is a Recovery Friendly Workplace?

Recovery friendly workplaces support employees with substance use disorder by creating a healthy work environment and by promoting greater understanding of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and behavioral health.^{1,2} Obtaining a Recovery Friendly Workplace designation is one way that businesses can support people in recovery.

How do RFWs Help the Community?

RFW designations can help people in recovery find and maintain employment while encouraging broader de-stigmatization in their community. When organizations partner together to become educated on recovery and adopt policies that reduce stigmas and barriers for people with SUD, there are many benefits to the region:

- ▶ Employers are better equipped to address substance use issues in their businesses.
- ▶ Businesses with employees who struggle with SUD benefit from health interventions and assistance to reduce absenteeism, and workplace drug use.
- ▶ Employees with or recovering from SUD get the assistance they need to find meaningful work and support themselves.
- ▶ People in recovery are good employees, missing fewer days and taking less vacation than the average worker.
- ▶ Communities may see a broad reduction in stigma against people with SUD.

Companies may need support from other organizations in the recovery to work ecosystem to learn about and adopt a RFW designation. These recovery-focused organizations can act as leaders in their communities to help break the stigmas associated with people in recovery and provide important information to companies that want to become recovery-friendly workplaces.

How Can I Start an RFW Initiative?

Recovery Friendly Workplace initiatives can differ significantly depending on the region. The implementation of an initiative may differ based on the size and momentum that a state or region has. It is possible to build an effective statewide effort if an organization has broad reach to businesses, starts local to connect with supporters of the efforts, and unites with other agencies that are doing similar work to strengthen the individual efforts of agencies.

¹ <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/index.cfm?id=2621>

² <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/initiative>

Recovery Friendly Workplace initiatives provide education, training, and resources for employers to help them support employees with SUD. For example, the Gino Macchio Foundation’s “Put Recovery to Work” program in New York offers an annual all-encompassing training program to employers to reduce workplace stigma and support employees who may struggle with substance abuse. The program has over 100 business contacts in their region and offers placement services to people in recovery who are seeking employment.³

Before the “Put Recovery to Work” program could start its work, it had to establish itself as a known RFW program and obtain funding. Some funding came from local towns that saw the benefit of the program. The Gino Macchio Foundation also gathered money through private donations from local businesses and interested members of the community. The Foundation also conducted a large networking campaign advertising their free course to businesses throughout the region. Eventually, the local Smithtown Town Board allocated \$70,000 in ARPA funds to support The Foundation’s expansion into Amityville and expand its job placement efforts.⁴

To obtain a RFW designation, you might consider the following steps:

- ▶ Pilot the concept at the local, regional, and state level based on the level of interest a state currently has;
- ▶ Conduct outreach to businesses through workforce boards, chambers of commerce and cold calls to educate employers on the RFW initiative and create awareness or gain more support;
- ▶ Connect with other businesses, organizations, or local governments that are doing work in the same space to build a network for FRW efforts in your region;
- ▶ Educate business on what a RFW designation is and how it benefits them; and,
- ▶ Establish relationships with local government agencies such as town managers and COG’s (Council of Governments) to connect with businesses in the region.

³ https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasl_get_blob.cfm?ID=14184&file_name=WTP_RFW_State_Profiles_072423_508.pdf

⁴ <https://greaterlongisland.com/smithtown-joins-babylon-town-and-gino-macchio-foundation-to-put-recovery-to-work/>

Who Do RFWs Partner with?

Businesses will be more successful employing people in recovery if they have partners who can help connect those people to essential supports like transportation, housing, and peer mentors. Partnerships like this help to ensure that employees in recovery are successful—which, in turn, helps the business retain employees. Further, RFW businesses *need* partnerships—it is not possible for one business to meet all the needs of employees in recovery.

Partners can also help validate the efforts and effectiveness of a RFW initiative by writing letters of support to state and local governments. Once RFW designation initiatives have begun, partners can be an asset to expand the network of RFW employers and their services.

Organizations that have a Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative may consider partnering with:

- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Social service organizations with supportive tools for employers and people in recovery
- ▶ State government agencies, local Chamber of Commerce, and workforce boards
- ▶ Organizations that are doing the same or similar work within the state

When finding partners, RFWs or organizations offering RFW designations are more successful when working through other organizations with a wide reach, like local chambers of commerce, workforce boards, or government agencies. Here are two examples of successful outreach strategies:

- ▶ [RFW Unity Recovery](#) in Pennsylvania asked existing business partners to leverage their networks and then reached out regionally to therapy groups and treatment centers to find businesses that were already linked with recovery efforts. Unity also worked with workforce development boards to offer RFW certification to additional businesses.
- ▶ [RFW Hamilton County](#) in Ohio leveraged their relationship with local county commissioners to send outreach emails to their network and developed a contract with their local chamber of commerce to spur further outreach to regional businesses.

Case Study

RFW Community of Practice in New Hampshire

In 2018, New Hampshire established a RFW designation program—the first in the nation—designed to combat the significant impact of addiction on their communities and economy. The Recovery Friendly Workplace program is housed within the New Hampshire Governor’s Office and works with businesses in New Hampshire and across the country to designate Recovery Friendly Workplaces. The program offers several benefits:⁵

- ▶ Connection to resources on substance use and behavioral health.
- ▶ Trainings and other services to help businesses better understand RFWs and begin the process of obtaining a designation.
- ▶ Support from public health organizations networked with the Recovery Friendly Workplace program.
- ▶ Evidence-based practices to improve employee wellbeing and increase retention and productivity.

The Community of Practice has reached businesses in over 25 states and continues to offer services to employers, free of charge. When networking with businesses, RFW uses this [one-pager](#) to explain the benefits of a RFW designation.

What Made the RFW Community of Practice Successful?

The New Hampshire Community of Practice was able to leverage preexisting relationships, along with an aggressive publicity campaign, to promote their services to a large group of businesses. For example, RFW’s partner SOS Recovery was able to connect with 100 businesses, helping RFW build a proof of concept for their program. One RFW partner wrote letters of support, touting the effectiveness of RFW’s programs, which brought many additional businesses on board.

Other marketing campaigns on LinkedIn and on the radio were less effective—indicating that the most promising avenue for outreach was to leverage partnerships with other recovery-oriented organizations.

How do Businesses Obtain a New Hampshire RFW Designation?

Businesses can obtain a RFW designation by completing the RFW [Checklist](#), which includes submitting a letter of interest, making a written commitment to employees, and establishing connections with local recovery organizations while informing employees of new resources. All of these tasks, with the assistance of a Recovery Friendly Advisor (a state employee), must be completed within one year for the business to qualify as an RFW.

⁵<https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/sites/default/files/2022-03/RFW%20Orientation%20Packet.pdf>

Lessons Learned

- ▶ An RFW can be an effective way to combat stigma in a community and for businesses to signal that they are champions for recovery.
- ▶ For businesses that wish to obtain a RFW designation, many programs are offered free of charge and will benefit the overall health and safety of your workforce
- ▶ Businesses which have a RFW designation benefit by developing a reputation as a proactive member of the community and by hiring hard-working, committed employees
- ▶ As with many components of recovery to work ecosystem development, the key is to reach out and develop personal relationships to help you build your network

Sources

- ▶ <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/initiative>
- ▶ <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/index.cfm?id=2621>
- ▶ <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/initiative>
- ▶ <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/sites/default/files/2022-03/RFW%20Orientation%20Packet.pdf>