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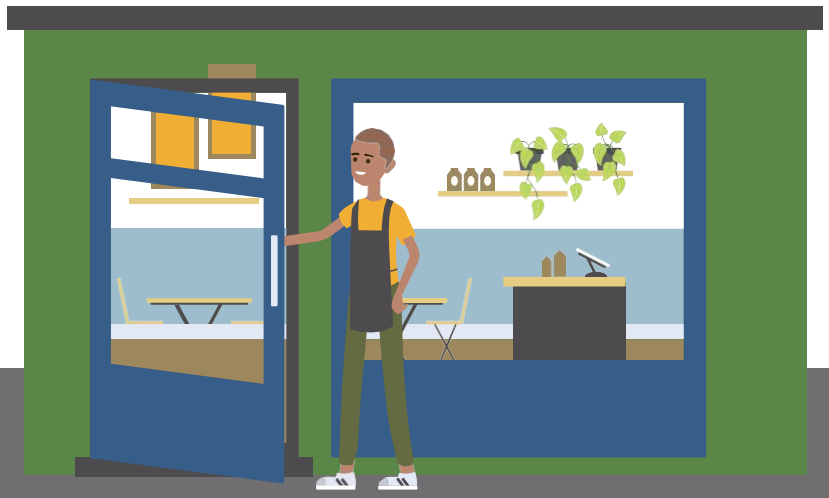
Building Equitable Employment in the Food Sector for System-Impacted Residents



INTRODUCTION

The Re-Generate Opportunity (Re-Gen) Program was launched by Mandela Partners in 2019 with funding from the California Workforce Development Board and the Employment Development Department. The Re-Gen Program was launched with the goal of addressing barriers to employment among reentry individuals in Alameda County. In partnership with Oak Harvest Kitchen — a produce-centered restaurant and kitchen incubator in downtown Oakland — the Re-Gen Program provides food-based job training to build a broad range of skills in the high-demand food and hospitality sector, as well as in food e-commerce.

Mandela Partners conducted in-depth interviews with local workforce development partners, local food businesses and restaurants, mission-aligned local food e-commerce companies, reentry residents who have been impacted by the carceral system, and grassroots organizations that work with and prioritize the skills and strengths of formerly justice involved individuals. These interviews helped shape the kitchen training curriculum as well as informed key strategies and recommendations of this resource guide.

There are several important resources—such as Root & Rebound's Roadmap to Reentry, Berkeley Underground Scholars, and reports from Prison Policy Initiative and the Urban Institute—that employ an asset-based framework for individuals impacted by the carceral system. However, overall, there are very few resources available that use this type of asset-based framing while also focusing on the food and food e-commerce sectors specifically. The food e-commerce sector, which is defined by buying and selling food products via the internet, is well primed for continued growth and job creation over the next five years.[1] Well-known corporations in this space include instacart, Grubhub, and several others, but smaller and more specialized food and beverage e-commerce companies—like Nona Lim, Urban Remedy, Cream Co. Meats, Burma Love, and countless others — are bubbling up across local urban markets. These companies are diversifying and growing their online sales channels and creating new job opportunities.

This resource will serve as a *north star* for working with workforce development partners, community organizations and service providers, food businesses and food e-commerce companies, and reentry individuals, specifically to:

- Take into consideration the deep inequities in our carceral system and create services and initiatives that are tailored to the assets and needs of reentry individuals for supporting successful employment
- Create a kitchen and culinary training program that is adapted to the needs of reentry program participants and include opportunities for mentorship and hands-on peer learning from kitchen team members with similar backgrounds
- Integrate interpersonal skills development into training curricula that is tailored to the unique skills and needs of reentry program participants

- Partner with and be able to connect reentry individuals to other community providers and social service agencies (i.e. housing support, mental health services, rehabilitation programs, community-based organizations) to help ensure that individuals are receiving proper care which, in turn, will positively impact long term employment, employer relations, and job growth.

Mandela Partners acknowledges the development of this strategy guide as a collaborative effort with community-based organizations, local businesses, and service providers. You can find the names and organizations of contributors and references listed on pages 23-24.

KEY TERMS

➔ **SYSTEM-IMPACTED:** includes those who have been incarcerated, those with arrests/convictions but no incarceration, and those who have been directly impacted by a loved one being incarcerated

➔ **CARCERAL SYSTEM:** a comprehensive network of systems that rely, at least in part, on the exercise of state-sanctioned physical, emotional, spatial, economic, and political violence to preserve the interests of the state (i.e. law enforcement and the courts, surveillance and data mining technology, conservative criminologists)

➔ **FORMERLY INCARCERATED PERSON and PEOPLE IN REENTRY:** anyone who has been in a carceral setting and is now released

➔ **FORMERLY JUSTICE INVOLVED PERSON:** individual with prior justice system involvement; person or individual previously incarcerated

**Definitions adapted from Berkeley Underground Scholars, Underground Scholars Language Guide*

THE INTERSECTION OF LOCAL SMALL FOOD BUSINESSES AND SUPPORT FOR SYSTEM-IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS

The challenges that reentry individuals face—from discrimination, to accessing public services, to having limited job resources available to them—is well documented.[2 3 4] However, community businesses, especially in the food sector, are often overlooked by traditional workforce development programs as an asset for supporting job creation and on-the-job mentorship for formerly incarcerated residents. For example, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in small businesses have been the bedrock of the Oakland economy for the last several decades.

THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IS NEARLY 5x HIGHER FOR FORMERLY JUSTICE INVOLVED PEOPLE THAN THE GENERAL UNITED STATES POPULATION. (3)

Oakland—a diverse metropolis east of San Francisco—has deep community ties and a strong history of resiliency. Oakland small business owners historically have led the way in hiring local residents and young people, many of whom have been impacted by the carceral system. These businesses cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit and strong work ethic, use sustainable practices for hiring and retaining employees, and help to recirculate money in the local economy. Local food businesses and restaurants, in particular, represent long-standing traditions and cultural reflections of the neighborhood, as well as signify familial ties to previous generations through food. Of the six local food businesses Mandela Partners interviewed at the start of the Re-Gen Program to assess on-the-job skills needed and interest in partnership, 100% of these businesses were interested in providing peer mentorship, employment, and on-the-job training to system- impacted new hires. Ultimately, 11 BIPOC-owned community food businesses partnered with the Re-Gen Program as

internship placement sites to help people in reentry gain relevant food industry experience and/or as hiring partners.

Additionally, these same businesses prioritized hiring individuals with effective interpersonal skills over having food-related technical experience. For example, Dionne Knox, owner of Zella's Soulful Kitchen and partner in the Re-Gen Program, noted that for her "communication is everything...Being able to multitask is key. You don't necessarily need to have worked in a kitchen before, but you need to be comfortable in the kitchen and love to cook at home."

"It's important that the folks we hire are good communicators, even in their own defense. If something doesn't work out for you, you need to be able to speak up... It helps if you are timely, enjoy kitchen work to some degree, and have some basic knife skills. Everything else feels teachable."

-Jamila Daniel, Owner of Hood Goods

Reentry individuals suffer disproportionately from poorer mental health, substance use, and co- occurring disorders than the general public, yet upon release from jail or prison, many of these individuals are unable to access appropriate services. A small fraction of those with substance use histories receive treatment during incarceration. For those who are able to take advantage of substance use treatment programs in prison or jail, relatively few continue to receive follow- up treatment once they return to their community.

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Based on feedback from Program partners and Mandela Partners' observations of five Re-Gen Program cohorts with reentry participants, people in reentry bring several key attributes that are unique to their experience. The majority of system-impacted participants are able to independently troubleshoot new, dynamic situations with little oversight. They ask for help when they need assistance, but generally feel comfortable problem solving and coming up with solutions on-the-job. This level of ingenuity is important to employers, especially food businesses that are typically fast-paced with "on the spot" decisions that are required. System-impacted individuals also show a strong desire to secure a job that they can grow in. "Once they become comfortable in a new position, their desire to do well and interest in growing in that company occurs at a rapid pace. This is beneficial to the business but also for co-workers," mentioned Sean Brekke-Miesner, Food Retail Manager at Mandela Partners and training supervisor of the Re-Gen Program at Oak Harvest Kitchen. "That beginning process can be slow, but the rewards are so much greater and bring a great energy to the workplace."

100% OF PARTNER BUSINESSES WERE INTERESTED IN PROVIDING PEER MENTORSHIP, EMPLOYMENT, AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING TO FORMERLY JUSTICE INVOLVED NEW HIRES.

People in reentry are also typically very comfortable working with new people and build team camaraderie quickly with both individuals in their cohort and the kitchen training team. They are personable and positive working with customers and demonstrate patience in their communication time and again with more challenging patrons. People in reentry are generally interested in learning about expectations and rules in advance to be able to follow them effectively. Even though this can be a positive attribute in the workplace, interest in "rule following" usually stems from strict schedules that were enforced while incarcerated. This may also mean that creativity and individualism may be stifled at first until trust is built with supervisors and team members, but once encouraged, can be gratifying for all parties. While these types of interpersonal skills are not usually documented as part of job qualifications, they are essential and should be utilized across multiple sectors.

There are also opportunities for further skill development in working with this population, as well as being able to meet them where they are. Depending on the individual, reliability and accountability may be an issue. There are many different reasons for this. For example, a reentry employee of one of the Re-Gen Program food business partners lived with his elderly father and inherited the duties of being his primary caregiver. For several weeks, he would call out of work unexpectedly due to his father falling ill and needing in-home medical care. Other people in reentry live in shelters or transitional homes and may face curfews or other restrictions that do not completely align with the hours or expectations of the job. "Group homes have certain rules," mentioned Daniel (Hood Goods). "If the boys break a rule, then they withhold work. They take the cellphone when they get in trouble so they can't communicate."

Dionne Knox, Owner of Zella's Soulful Kitchen

Missing work and not communicating properly often go hand in hand. Roger Chung, Faculty Lead at Laney College of the Restoring our Communities (ROC) Program, sums up this challenge:

"Reentry folks feel like they are on a shorter leash than everyone else and are more hesitant to communicate a restriction with their employer like needing to get a urine test, having a court date, etc. They fear that it will be penalizing and that they will lose their job. So instead, a lot of folks go off the map when they have a restriction or emergency. We need to work with these individuals to help them practice the right communication skills with an employer to help them keep their jobs and help employers understand this issue and address it head on with them before it happens."

Because linkages between workforce development programs and social services are inconsistent, inadequate access to supportive services and basic resources may hinder the ability of people in reentry to show up to job training and subsequent employment. Traditional workforce development programs do not screen for housing instability, food insecurity, mental health, transportation needs, interpersonal violence, or history of substance misuse— all of which impact the reentry population disproportionately. For example, one Re-Gen Program participant was completing his internship at a well-known restaurant in downtown Oakland. He excelled in every competency during the kitchen training, was consistently on time, had a positive attitude, and a strong desire to learn. During the first week of the internship, he demonstrated exemplary performance according to the restaurant owner and internship supervisor. By week two, after the participant received his first stipend check, he missed two days of his internship. On the third day, he showed up under the influence of a recreational drug and after having a discussion with the owner and being sent home for the

day, he never showed up again. This participant ultimately violated the terms of his parole and is currently incarcerated again. On another occasion, one of the Re-Gen Program participants who had successfully completed the kitchen training had suddenly stopped showing up for their internship. After several days of no communication, this participant reached out to their internship supervisor letting them know her husband had died unexpectedly in the tent they shared together under an overpass in Oakland. She had not felt comfortable sharing her housing situation with Re-Gen Program staff. In certain situations, participants may provide an address to be able to apply for programs and social services, but it may not be reflective of where they are actually residing.

Both of these situations demonstrate a communication breakdown for receiving adequate care that goes beyond finding employment alone. For both of these scenarios, Program staff would have benefited from learning about extenuating factors—like housing and history of substance use in this case—as part of the screening criteria, which is not typically part of workforce development agencies' recruitment process. It is clear that employment will not be successful if basic human needs are not met. Understanding the type of care people in reentry need upon their release will allow community-based organizations like Mandela Partners and workforce development partners to collaborate more effectively with a range of social service providers to address these needs and ultimately recruit individuals who are adequately prepared to seek training and employment.

COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES ACROSS SECTORS

These challenges and gaps in services among system-impacted people provide a window of opportunity for building comprehensive strategies to support long term, quality employment in the local food and food e-commerce sector. Based on key informant interviews and assessment of the Re-Gen Program, the following strategies and recommendations were identified:

1. Build partnerships that connect people in reentry to appropriate resources and build readiness for employment.
2. Meet participants where they are.
3. Facilitate an interactive, hands-on training environment over traditional classroom setting.
4. Collaborate with mission-aligned businesses for meaningful internships and employment.
5. Create comprehensive metrics for evaluating program impacts and assessing resource needs.

1 Build partnerships that connect reentry individuals to appropriate resources and build readiness for employment.

Collaborate with workforce development providers that support interpersonal skill-building and transitional employment.

Communication skills, showing up to work on time consistently, and staying employed at a new job after the first month are challenges that workforce development providers and employers noted in working with formerly justice involved individuals. Based on interviews Mandela Partners conducted with Re-Gen Program workforce development partners, it was clear that frontline staff who engage directly with reentry individuals are working to foster these skills through their programs. Centers for Employment Opportunities (CEO) in Oakland, for example, provides job readiness training and offers transitional employment to individuals who complete their training. Crews provide services for CEO partners that include state and local governments and community-based organizations. Participants work four days per week on transitional work crews and receive on-the-job training and coaching from their site supervisors. At the end of every shift, participants are paid and given feedback using CEO's digital assessment tool, Passport to Success (PTS). PTS is a way to track progress on-the-job and troubleshoot any issues (i.e. tardiness, scheduling conflicts), but it also serves as a vehicle for workforce development staff to have one-on-one time with participants each week to assess and improve upon their interpersonal skills.

"Being able to look you in the eye and talk about their conviction is a prerequisite for employment, because we know that is going to come up in an interview with an employer," stated Ebony Branner, Coordinator of Economic Opportunity at CEO. "During these check-ins, we work with them on communicating that, but also on how to communicate clearly in advance if they need to reschedule meetings or work."

Oakland UNITE—a program of the City of Oakland that worked to reduce violence and recidivism—recognized transitional employment as a way to practice the skills needed for maintaining a quality job. "Most reentry individuals have participated in the illegal economy, so their inroads look different," noted Jessie Warner, Program Planner with the City of Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention (formerly Oakland UNITE). "For the reentry population, the transitional employment model allows folks to have money in their pocket. They have a coach and an ally in this transitional process versus a supervisor that just says 'this isn't working' and lets them go."

Before participants enter into the Re-Gen Program, it is a requirement of the workforce development partner to recruit candidates who have demonstrated readiness to work and foundational communication skills. This is determined through transitional employment, but also through job readiness trainings, resume development, and mock interviews that workforce development partners provide. Another core component of the Re-Gen Program recruitment criteria is screening individuals to determine their interest working in culinary arts or food generally. The workforce development provider ensures that they either have their California Food Handler's Card before the start of the Re-Gen Program or are working toward attaining the Food Handler's Card. This additional food screening process helps ensure that candidates are committed to completing the Re-Gen Program training and internship, therefore minimizing participant dropout and also makes participants more competitive in job interviews with local food businesses.

Work with community organizations and social service providers.

In addition to workforce development service providers, there are great benefits to working with community-based and grassroots organizations that provide resources to families and communities most harmed by mass incarceration. These organizations have a pulse on current and emerging needs of formerly justice involved community members, and typically plan and develop programming through an asset-based lens. These may include but are not limited to organizations focused on affordable housing, homeless assistance, legal aid groups, educational attainment, and local policy. Root & Rebound—a community-based organization focused on legal advocacy—for example, recognizes that individuals coming out of prison often face a host of legal issues which may impact their ability to secure employment. According to Rashida Harmon, Root & Rebound's Bay Area Regional Director of Advocacy, "if workforce programs were able to share intake question responses about specific hardships a participant may be experiencing,

this would allow organizations like Root & Rebound to identify any legal issues that come up in an intake, for example."

As a result, Mandela Partners strengthened its intake process to better meet and understand the challenges individuals were facing outside of the Re-Gen Program—specifically related to substance issues and housing—by conducting semi-structured interviews with program participants during week three. The purpose of these individual discussions is to better understand internship interests to effectively match participants to the right food business internship partner, as well as assess extenuating circumstances that the individual may be facing outside of the training. Rather than asking potentially sensitive questions at the outset of the kitchen training, facilitating these discussions mid-way through the training allows for participants to build trust with the training supervisor and comfort discussing issues.

Similar workforce development training programs would benefit from conducting a landscape assessment of community-serving organizations and local social service providers that address common challenges that people in reentry face prior to starting the program. "Connecting formerly incarcerated people with the Transitions Clinic Network, for example, will help ensure that their medical and mental health needs are being met," noted Gunner Johnson, Reentry Manager with the Insight Garden Program— a nonprofit organization that connects incarcerated individuals to gardening and landscaping. After identifying current and prospective resource providers, program staff may consider meeting with those organizations to further identify resources offered, collaboratively develop intake questions, and establish a formal program partnership. This information gathering process will allow program staff to develop an inventory of social service referral partners before the start of the training with the goal of linking participants to these partners, as needed, prior to starting their internship and seeking long-term employment.

2 Meet participants where they are.

Take into account participant scheduling and transportation needs.

Prior to launching the Re-Gen Program, the Program Team collaborated with workforce development partners to schedule the kitchen and culinary training. This included planning the training around other programming and transitional employment and coordinating transportation to the training with workforce development staff. Staff accompanied the group of participants to the training since they were within walking distance of the training location. Because the kitchen training occurred one hour after transitional employment ended in the afternoon, CEO could easily shuttle Re-Gen Program participants involved in their transitional employment program to the training site.

Many of the system-impacted people in Mandela Partners' network mentioned there is a higher likelihood of being harassed by law enforcement or being targeted to engage in illegal economies in the late evening. As a result, the kitchen training was scheduled in the afternoon from 3:00 to 6:00 PM during the week to lessen the likelihood of any potential encounters. This schedule also provided ample time for reentry participants to meet with their parole or probation officers, attend court hearings, and travel to other appointments earlier in the day.

Provide participants meaningful monetary compensation.

In planning similar workforce development initiatives with reentry participants, it is essential to provide stipends to participants that are at least commensurable with minimum wage standards—with the ideal being stipends that are aligned with living wage standards. For the Re-Gen Program, participants receive stipends for both the training and internship aligned with Oakland's Minimum Wage rate. Program staff calculate the estimated number of participants enrolled, number of hours for the training and internship, the average participant dropout rate percentage, and the city's living wage requirement for that year and an estimate for the following year. Program staff may also benefit from researching and projecting the rate of people returning home each year to account for financial resources needed for program implementation. This is especially important during years when policies impact individual sentencing and there are larger influxes of people returning home. All of these factors combined help the program team make accurate projections for compensating participants as an essential component of the Re-Gen Program budget.

Match individuals appropriately based on their background and needs.

Understanding each participant's background to the extent possible will help in placing individuals appropriately at internships and employment that they will ultimately be successful. Several Re-Gen Program partners strongly recommended that participants should not be placed at businesses that serve alcohol, since it may be a trigger for those individuals who have struggled with substance misuse and are working on their sobriety. Food businesses that serve alcohol are also typically open late, which may be challenging for people in reentry who are in transitional housing with curfews. "If they violate these rules, they can get in trouble with their parole or probation officers," mentioned Haleh Zandi, co-founder of Planting Justice who designed and managed a holistic reentry program with a 90% recidivism rate. "Also, there is a higher chance they will be targeted by the police more at night." Placing individuals appropriately will increase the likelihood that participants will perform to their highest standard during the internship, build rapport with the restaurant owner and/or direct supervisor at the business, and increase opportunities for long-term employment.

3 Facilitate an interactive hands-on training environment over a traditional classroom setting.

Integrate interpersonal skills as part of training to support reentry individuals in multiple employment sectors.

Prior to the launch of the Re-Gen Program, community partners and field experts highlighted several areas that would strengthen "soft" skills, which are translatable into multiple employment opportunities. Training on the use of technology for time management and communications emerged as an area for further development. Individuals coming out of the prison system—especially those who have been incarcerated for five or more years—benefit from assistance in setting up email and using a calendar app, as well as storing contacts in their smartphone; using online virtual platforms like Zoom for interviews; and communication expectations and norms for text messaging employers and team members, for example:

> **"After 20 years, I didn't even know how to turn on the iPhone my brother gave me on the day of my release. I had never sent an email and didn't know how to add Apps to a computer or my iPhone. We give our participants smartphones during their gate pickups and spend time training those who need it when we stop for a meal on the way to their housing."**
>
> —Gunner Johnson, Reentry Manager of the Insight Garden Program

Many reentry workforce development programs integrate experiential types of activities to build self-confidence around handling real-life situations. This is essential in the onboarding process at Planting Justice. As part of the Re-Gen Program, the lead trainer integrates different "role playing" scenarios to encourage interpersonal skill development and reflection among participants. These scenarios focus on resolving conflict with team members, troubleshooting inappropriate communications with coworkers outside of work, effectively communicating scheduling conflicts and sick time requests, and navigating difficult conversations with supervisors.

Facilitate peer mentorship and peer learning into the training.

People in reentry who have thrived after incarceration can serve an important role in the transition process. Reentry peer mentors carry significant influence when working with other trainees from similar backgrounds. Research has demonstrated that support from other people in reentry, especially those in recovery from substance addiction, may be more effective in reducing recidivism than workforce development providers, social service agencies, or correctional officers.[5 6]

Similar reentry culinary and kitchen training programs may consider smaller cohort sizes, with five to eight participants per teacher. For the Re-Gen Program kitchen training, there was a maximum of eight individuals per cohort; additional prospective participants were assigned to a wait list.

This setting allows the Re-Gen Program kitchen trainer and supervisor to support individuals one-on- one based on their skill level. This environment helps individuals feel respected by their immediate peers and builds camaraderie with individuals from similar backgrounds.

The Re-Gen Program kitchen training also provides participants with the opportunity to work in a live kitchen as part of the kitchen and culinary training during regular restaurant hours alongside the kitchen team at Oak Harvest Kitchen. 100% of the kitchen staff at Oak Harvest Kitchen are system-impacted. Live kitchen experience at Oak Harvest occurs every Friday during each cohort. Participants work with the kitchen team to prepare food stations, develop and execute prep lists for the day, and navigate the point of sale (POS) system in real time. Live kitchen experience also allows participants to directly engage with customers, giving participants a holistic view of the whole restaurant business rather than only focusing on "back of the house," which aims to strengthen dyadic communication skills.

"This type of training—both in terms of the size and the hands-on structure—helps ensure that every participant who walks through our doors has the space to practice what they are learning, feels heard, and has a built-in support network if they slip up," mentioned Brekke-Miesner (Oak Harvest Kitchen).

4 Collaborate with mission-aligned businesses for meaningful internships and employment.

Assess food business hiring practices.

Prior to developing formal business partnerships, businesses should be interviewed and vetted to ensure that hiring practices and policies support people in reentry. Specifically, understanding if the business has hired and retained reentry participants in the past, if the business provides a living wage, why they work with (or are planning to) work with reentry individuals, how they prioritize training and skill cultivation, and what mechanisms they use for providing and receiving employee feedback are important questions to ask the business. It is also essential to observe "how" they speak about working with formerly justice involved individuals. As Roger Chung from Laney College puts it,

> **"[Reentry] folks are often made to feel that you are lucky to get a job versus you bring a wealth of experience that contributes to that job."**

For example, Mandela Partners met with a human resources representative from a large food business to discuss a potential Re-Gen Program business partnership. This individual described reentry individuals they work with as being "grateful to the company for giving them a job" but when asked about who these individuals were, they could not recall them or give specific examples. Employers that have preconceived notions about formerly justice involved individuals often do not make strong internship and hiring partners. Therefore, this kind of vetting process helps determine what the internal practices of the business demonstrate, as well as their openness to or understanding of working with formerly justice involved individuals.

Providing the right onboarding and training tools.

Several Re-Gen Program partners noted that business partners—in the food space and in multiple sectors—would benefit from receiving a prison abolition training as part of the onboarding process. Prison abolition trainings deconstruct the prison industrial complex in America, and shed light on the fact that there are certain people exempt from the carceral system based on gender, class, and race while others are targeted and tracked

into that system. Planting Justice, for example, provides training to all staff about the justice system to reorient individuals who have not been directly impacted by these systems, to better understand their colleagues' experiences and preemptively work on communication that could become misaligned without the opportunity for listening, learning, and empathizing with someone who has been system-impacted. Prison abolition trainings help bring clarity and empathy around the challenges people in reentry experience. These types of educational opportunities, as well as policy advocacy initiatives, show formerly incarcerated individuals that their voice is valued.

As part of the onboarding process, food businesses should receive clear guidelines for participating as an internship site partner. As part of the Re-Gen Program business partnership agreements, food business partners agree to providing supplemental capacity building on-the-job during their internship for strengthening skills developed in the kitchen and culinary skills training. This includes giving participants a tour of the kitchen/space, discussing business ground rules for successful operations, providing a tutorial on the point of sale (POS) system, reviewing menu items and providing step-by-step training on specific dishes. Supportive resources are included for each food business partner—like a checklist of guidelines and supplemental skill building areas from the agreement, time cards, and reporting tools to discuss participant feedback with Re-Gen Program staff.

Keep hours predictable.

Many formerly justice involved individuals, especially within the first year of release, have many other priorities outside of work. This ranges from being the sole caretaker of a family member, to meeting with parole or probation officers, to taking a driver's license test. Because of these extenuating factors, internship supervisors and employers can benefit from creating schedules that are consistent week to week based on their availability. In the case of major schedule changes, this should be communicated with the intern or employee with ample time to make adjustments where needed. While this may seem like an additional step for employers, it will help ensure that reentry interns and new employees have some level of predictability as they navigate other demands and expectations related to their reentry process that are less flexible.

5 Create comprehensive metrics for evaluating program impacts and assessing resource needs.

Traditional workforce development programs typically administer quantitative evaluation components (i.e. number of jobs created or secured), but do not take into consideration other nuances that impact individual performance and long-term employment. Developing a holistic evaluation approach with both quantitative and qualitative indicators using an asset-based lens helps identify gaps in programming, assess participant strengths and needs, and further improve upon the workforce development program. In addition to assessing skills developed as a result of the kitchen training, workforce development programs looking to implement similar initiatives may benefit from integrating the following components:

CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE INTAKE PROCESS

With a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, the intake process should be facilitated with participants before the start of each training cohort. For the Re-Gen Program, this is conducted during a one-hour orientation—a week before the first day of the kitchen training. The intake process includes information about participant demographics and background (e.g. race/ethnicity, zip code, employment history), experience in food and culinary settings, and the type of support they need from program facilitators and partner organizations.

HOLD SPACE FOR MIDPOINT CONVERSATIONS

Building from the individual intake responses, the training facilitator may consider conducting individual conversations with participants using a semi-structured interview format. For the Re-Gen Program, the program training supervisor facilitates these conversations one-on-one with participants by the end of week three of the kitchen training. The purpose of these conversations is to match reentry participants with food business internship partners based on skills and interests, document scheduling preferences, and assess other needs and priorities that participants feel comfortable sharing to be able to link them to appropriate local service providers and resources (i.e. legal aid, housing services), as needed.

CREATE INTERNSHIP EVALUATIONS

A formal evaluation should occur with both the business internship partner and program intern after the internship commences; however, the program team and food business partner should meet at touchpoints throughout the internship. For the Re-Gen Program, the program supervisor meets with the business after week one and week two of the internship, and bi-monthly thereafter to assess participant progress, troubleshoot any potential issues, and answer additional questions. The purpose of the internship evaluation with partner food businesses is to determine the kinds of supplemental support and mentorship offered to interns, strengths and areas for improvement among the intern that program staff can further cultivate as part of the kitchen training, and other support needed to facilitate a successful internship with future participants. The intent of the internship evaluation with program participants is to assess their overall experience interning with the food business partner, including training and mentorship; communication, and engagement with other workers; potential challenges they experienced; and recommendations for further program improvement.

FOLLOW UP AFTER EMPLOYMENT IS SECURED

To the extent possible, program staff should check-in with participants who have secured employment. Re-Gen Program staff check-in with new hires at the end of the first month and again at the end of the fourth month of their employment. Program staff assess overall job satisfaction, their perceived trajectory for advancement and career growth, supervisor/supervisee relationship and dynamics working with other employees, as well as other support and training they may need. This check-in allows the program team an opportunity to make a final link to other resource providers as they make this transition to full-time employment and offer a continuity of services. Organizations implementing similar programs have also integrated measures of agency and autonomy as part of their program evaluation process with individuals. "Autonomy feels so restricted when someone is incarcerated and can seem limited while on supervision," noted Johnson (Insight Garden Program). "When they are stable in their employment, agency over their own lives develops more and this allows them to work toward other goals—like education, family, and even hobbies and recreation."

CONCLUSION

Individuals face numerous challenges when reintegrating in their communities following incarceration; however, they have a wide rage of unique assets that employers can utilize more effectively. This is a key element towards building a just and equitable employment system—one that invites justice involved individuals into the workforce and nourishes their professional development. Our hope is to bring equity to a system that often perpetuates policies and practices of discrimination.

Mandela Partners is thrilled to be working with a diverse set of partners and organizations who helped make this strategy guide possible. The work of so many innovative initiatives have laid the foundation for implementing the Re-Gen Program, and it is an honor to be able to share best practices and recommendations that further support formerly justice involved individuals gain access to fair wage employment in the growing food and food e-commerce sector.

Dionne Knox, Owner: Zella's Soulful Kitchen
Ebony Branner, Coordinator of Economic Opportunity: Centers for Employment Opportunities
Gunner Johnson, Reentry Manager: Insight Garden Program
Haleh Zandi, Co-founder: Planting Justice
Jamila Daniel, Owner: Hood Goods
Jessie Warner, Program Planner for the Department of Violence Prevention: City of Oakland
Lamonte Beverly, Manager: Oak Harvest Kitchen
LaShawn Raybon, Owner: I AM CAFE
Lonnie Tuck, Alameda County Director: Centers for Employment Opportunities
Rashida Harmon, Bay Area Regional Director of Advocacy: Root & Rebound
Rene Lontoc, Owner: Thank Que Grill
Roger Chung, Faculty Lead of the Restoring our Communities Program: Laney College
Sean Brekke-Miesner, Food Retail Manager (Re-Gen Program Supervisor): Mandela Partners

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people, Prison Policy Institute, July 2018
- Reentry Planning Toolkit, Root & Rebound, retrieved from: https://www.rootandrebound.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2018.07.03_SSP - Toolkit-st.pdf
- Returning Home Publications: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry, Urban Institute, retrieved from: https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/returning-home-study/publications-returning-home-understanding-challenges-prisoner-reentry
- Roadmap to Reentry, Root & Rebound, retrieved from: https://roadmap.rootandrebound.org/