

What does research say are barriers for employment? Employer perspectives and Offender perspectives. Barriers to employers hiring ex-offenders vs. barriers ex-offenders face to becoming employed.

Through the development of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) of the Pikes Peak Region, and the CJCC's Transition to Workforce Committee's Employers Association, a high degree of feedback has been gathered from employers stating that they are hesitant to hire offenders because they have to leave for appointments with PO or may test positive for a UA and lose job. Working with the PO to do things like extend office hours so they can meet with PO/do UA outside of work hours. Other suggestions about shuttle services for offenders and a call in for UA pings the night before to determine if they're selected for testing that day were made, to help make arrangements for meeting release requirements/conditions.

Harley (2014) and Swensen et al. (2014) outline various barriers to employment and makes recommendations for improving employment outcomes.

Concerns from employers:

- Attitudinal perceptions of employers and the stigma associated with a criminal record
- Statutory limitations on certain professions, logistical issues related to release and/or community supervision
- Concerns about safety, injury, trustworthiness, future crimes, and putting companies, employees, and their clients at risk (liability and fear of victimization)
- Negative impacts to the company's reputation
- Lack of work skills or history
- Often depends on the type of offense, how the offense might relate to the job duties, and how much time has passed since the ex-offender's last offense

Concerns from ex-offenders:

- Offender antisocial attitudes; Personality patterns
- Criminogenic beliefs
- Antisocial peer groups; Lack of prosocial community ties/networks
- Unemployment or underemployment and lack of experience prior to justice involvement
- Lack of social skills (hinders presenting themselves positively during interview; can lead to passive approaches in searching for employment, lack of confidence to actively job search, discouragement/assuming the effort of applying is not worth the rejection)
- Not knowing how to address/discuss their legal history, unawareness of job restrictions, unrealistic expectations for employment and wages
- Issues obtaining state issued identification in order to complete employment forms
- Difficulty being contacted by potential employers when living in shelters or transitional housing, especially if finances do not allow for the purchase of a cell phone
- Discrimination, the criminal record, lack of stable housing, lack of transportation, substance abuse, mental health and health issues, financial concerns, educational challenges, legal barriers
- A history of trauma that is a barrier to working

Improving a company's willingness to hire an ex-offender

- Completion of a transitional employment program
- Working with rehabilitation counselors
- General work readiness/training
- Specific job skills/training
- Higher level communication and writing skills
- Ability to work as a team member
- Job placement and accountability plans
- Access to and getting help from career counselors and employment specialists
- Positive work-related experiences such as volunteering, internships, training programs, and job readiness/skills development workshops

Nally et al. (2014) discusses the need for “employment-focused correctional education programs”. The Nally article and the Harley article both discuss the primary sectors/industries in which ex-offenders are employed:

- Administrative support, waste management, and remediation services
- Accommodation and food services
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Retail Trade
- Health care and social assistance
- Temporary help services
- Transportation
- Other service-based and structural work industries

Resources:

- Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2013). Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness. <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/Publications/CSG-Reentry-and-Employment.pdf>
- Harley, D. A. (2014). Adult Ex-Offender Population and Employment: A Synthesis of the Literature on Recommendations and Best Practices. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 45(3), p. 10-21.
- Nally, J.M., Lockwood, S., Ho, T., Knutson, K. (2014). Indiana Industry Sectors That Hire Ex-Offenders: Implications to Correctional Education Programs. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 65(3), p.43-65.
- Swensen, J.G., Rakis, J., Snyder, M.G., & Randall E.L. (2014). Engaging Employers and Businesses in the Hiring of Individuals with Criminal Records. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 45(4), p15-24.