**Collaboration for Social Benefit**

One significant societal problem today is that a labor shortage exists in various industries. The inability to find sufficient labor impacts companies’ sustainability and is a drain on the economy.

A second significant societal problem is the very real and expensive problem of recidivism. As addressed in my essay, “A Parallel Path”, the cost of recidivism to taxpayers is enormous; in Illinois alone, the projection is $13.5 billion over the next five years. A major factor in reducing recidivism is access to jobs that pay a living wage and provide benefits.

I designed the “Collaboration for Social Benefit” model to address these problems of labor shortages and recidivism based on my deep-seated experience in the criminal justice system and understanding of the challenges individuals face when they’re released from prison after serving their sentences. The model is further based upon my understanding of the labor market and shortages that exist in various industries.

As Vice President of Training & Development for [2nd Opportunity L3C](https://2ndopp.com/), I share our programs with currently and formerly incarcerated individuals who are seeking to create a path to a fulfilling life; I also speak with employers about the benefits of hiring people with a background.

The following is a visual of the “Collaboration for Social Benefit” model:

 **Hiring Firms**

**Formal Training Tax**

*Pool of Employable Talent*

**Programs Incentives**

**Job Readiness and**

 **Employment Socialization**

At the center of the “Collaboration for Social Benefit” diamond is the talent readily available through the state and federal prison systems, which return 600,000 individuals to society every year. This group can be accessed through a purposeful approach to training coupled with ongoing support to help individuals adapt to the expectations of current society, which has changed during their time of incarceration. Technology, tools, systems, and prison “inactivity” are a few barriers that we need to overcome upon release.

Surrounding this pool of employable talent are the four components to the “Collaboration for Social Benefit” model:

1. **Hiring firms.** At 2nd Opportunity, we targeted industries that have a need to attract talent and express a willingness to hire from traditionally neglected groups. Specifically, we proposed hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, veterans, and individuals from economically impoverished areas.
2. **Formal training programs.** We have identified programs that provide specific skills training (trades) and licensing in the identified industries. Many of these programs are run by organizations that are funded by government grants. Examples are the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2015) and the Workforce Equity Initiative (2019). In general, these programs offer a certification within three to four months. Companies can participate by giving their employees flexibility to complete this training, resulting in a well-trained employee able to contribute in a meaningful way to the company. Specific skills can also be developed during incarceration. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor offers apprenticeship programs inside prisons throughout the country (Please check back for my upcoming blog post, “The Value of Prison Apprenticeships”).
3. **Job readiness and employment socialization.** 2nd Opportunity provides the skills training that helps individuals reintegrate into society and acclimate to employment scenarios. This work includes skill building in communications, conflict resolution, trauma-induced behavior, financial literacy, and goal setting. The work is performed both during incarceration and upon release and includes ongoing peer support and mentoring. We also provide support to hiring firms through management workshops and onboarding assistance. 2nd Opportunity is a pioneer in this inside-out approach to working with men and women during incarceration and then continuing post-release to provide ongoing virtual peer support and personal mentor programs by those with lived experience. We are able to scale our impact by providing access to our programs through the computer tablets inside jails and prisons, in addition to having a web-based education platform for those who have been released and are winding their way through a halfway house or probation.
4. **Tax incentives.** The Federal work opportunity tax credit and other state and local tax incentives provide financial reimbursements to qualified employers who hire eligible candidates.

The “Collaboration for Social Benefits” model relies on lived experience with a deep knowledge of the essential needs for re-entry and an understanding of the gaps that exist.