



Employment

Multiple researchers have found that stable employment leads to a greater reduction in recidivism rates. It should definitely be a priority to seek out employment so that you have steady income and can hopefully get other benefits from your employer as well. Since starting this part of the reentry process can feel overwhelming and like you're under a lot of pressure, this part of the guidebook has laid out multiple different sections including: steps to take to find employment, how to find potential jobs, networking, online networking, online safety, record keeping, the application process, suggestions on how to address your criminal history, creating a resume, writing a cover letter, how to prepare for interviews, and more.

Other resources throughout the state that may be helpful to you in securing employment will also be provided at the end of this section. Obviously this will understandably be one of the most stressful parts of your reentry process, but hopefully having this information laid out makes it a bit easier to get all of your ducks in a row so that you can successfully find employment.



Preparing for Employment

Steps to Take to Prepare:

There is a lot to do in order to prepare for employment during the reentry process. Sitting down and thinking about all the various components of finding jobs, applying to jobs, and eventually being hired for a job can be very useful. In order to help you plan and prepare for employment, there are some brief descriptions below of two important starting points to the beginning of your job search.

Gather Your Important Documents: It is a good idea to make sure you have all your important documents available when you are beginning to look for employment. These documents can include your driver's license, social security card, citizenship documents, certificates, a resume or list of previous jobs and skills, and anything else you think might be important for the job you are applying to.

Determine What Field You Want to Work In: When you are looking for potential jobs it is helpful to have a field of work or interest to help guide your search. This could be based off of work you did before you were incarcerated that you enjoyed, work you did while you were incarcerated that you enjoyed, a trade you are interested in or have experience with, or any work you would like to get into. Having a set interest or a field of work you want to go into can help narrow the pool of potential jobs and keep you from being overwhelmed.



Finding Possible Jobs

Finding Possible Jobs:

Networking can be a great resource to find employment opportunities. Below are different tips and information on networking and networking online to give you some pointers on how to get started.

Networking: Networking is a crucial part of finding possible jobs upon release. Networking involves communicating with others in an effort to exchange information and build professional connections. These connections can help a lot as you start your search for work. While you try to expand your network it is important to keep in mind, not everyone you talk to will have a job offer for you. This does not mean those people are not worth talking to though. They might not know of a job for you in the moment, but if you take the time to connect with them, they might think of you next time they are looking to hire someone. They could also put you in contact with someone who is looking to hire a new employee. This is why networking is so important, by taking the time to talk about your interest, skills, and desire for a job to a few people, you create an entire web of resources and connections.

If you are networking in person, we suggest you start by reaching out to friends or family who might know someone who works in the field you would like to work in. If they know someone, ask them to help put you in contact with them. If they don't know anyone, try reaching out to a person who works in the field you're interested in, even if you don't personally know them yet. This can be done by sending an email or calling a phone number explaining who you are and why you are interested in learning about their job. Once a meeting is set up, it is important to ask them what work they do, what to expect in that field, any ideas or suggestions they have for you, and if they know of any available jobs. Another great option for employment opportunities is going to a staffing agency. A staffing agency will have a large variety of jobs available and will be able to best match you, the type of work you are interested in with the right employer for that type of work. Most jobs that staffing agencies have available are called temp to hire. That means that you will work for an employer for a set amount of time while being paid by the staffing agency. Once that set amount of time is up, the employer will likely hire you on to their own payroll. One of the other great benefit to applying for work through an agency, is that you can be open with them about your background because they know which of the clients they work with will be open to working with your criminal history.



Networking Continued

Online Networking: Online networking is a great option to expand your network without the face to face interaction. If you have been incarcerated for a long time, using online networking sources might seem a little overwhelming or confusing. The best thing you can do is be patient with yourself and ask for help if you need it. If you choose to do online networking there are many websites to check out. These include: ziprecruiter.com, indeed.com, careerbuilder.com, and glassdoor.com. These websites help you find available job opportunities based on what skills you have and the field you want to get into. If you are overwhelmed by the amount of job matching websites try www.indeed.com, which is the largest source of job postings in the world, collected from employer websites, job boards, association websites, publications, and more, is a good place to start. All of these sites could put you in contact with various employers and employees who can help you build your network, learn new skills, and find a job.

Another option for online networking is looking directly at the website of the places you are interested in working at. Most websites have a link on their homepage for available jobs usually titled, "Careers" or "Employment". These links can take you to a list of currently available jobs. These pages usually explain where to apply, how to apply, what skills they are looking for in a potential employee, and what the job requirements are. If you don't see a link to current jobs, you can usually find an email or phone number at the bottom of the website and use this to reach out to the owner, manager, or contact for the job to inquire about possible openings.

Another important aspect of online networking is the social networking sites. We suggest you use <https://www.linkedin.com> for any social networking you are looking to do. LinkedIn is currently the most effective professional social network. You can use your email to set up the account. The reason why LinkedIn is so useful is because it can expand your network and help keep you connected with people who you can work with in the future.



Additional Tips

Internet Safety: While using online sources to find job openings and create a network can be really helpful, it is important to remember that there are certain risks to doing anything online. If someone is requesting you send them sensitive and personal information for a job, suggest a face to face meeting to go over the information and fill out paperwork. If face to face meetings are not accessible try for a virtual face to face meeting. This way you can be sure they are who they say they are before you hand over information. Scammers may be on certain sites that you're using to look for employment since they may be able to easily access sensitive information. You shouldn't share any personal information that can identify you (social security number, date of birth, address, etc.) as well as any financial information (credit/debit card numbers, online payment information, banking logins or users, routing/account numbers, etc.). Don't be afraid to ask for help from people around you if you're not sure if a website or someone reaching out to you is trying to scam you, it's better to be safe than sorry since it can be difficult to handle the aftermath of being scammed.

Record Keeping: Keeping a clear record of people you connect with when looking for employment can be very helpful. If you have an in-person meeting with someone to expand your network, ask for their business card. They are easy to keep and have information such as their job, email, and phone number in case you need to reach out again or end up applying for a job at the same company. It may be useful to also digitally save their information in your phone or laptop's contacts, so that if you lose the physical business card you still have easy access to their contact information. You should also keep track of different places you apply to, and also document which employers scheduled interviews, follow up phone calls, etc.. On the next page there's an example image of an interview log so you can get an idea of how to track that information and which details may be important to write down.

Job Application Record

Job Title	Company Name/ Website	Contact Name/Title	Phone/Fax/ E-mail	Mailing Address	Resume Sent (Date)	How Sent	References Sent	Job Description/ Keywords	Application Status/ Date	Interview/ Date

Keeping record of the job title, the company name, contact info of the employer/interviewer including their phone number, mailing address, email address, etc., your resume status, your references sent, a description of the job, the application status/date, and the interview date can all be useful information to you. It can be challenging to juggle multiple job applications and interviews at once, and you don't want to accidentally confuse two companies or jobs for one another and make a mistake at an interview. Tracking this information and keeping it organized should make that more avoidable, and hopefully help you stay clear and focused on everything you're doing.

You can easily create a similar spreadsheet using Google Sheets, it is a fairly easy template to use and you can create similar columns to manage all of this information. Google Sheets and Google Accounts of all kind are 100% free.

The Application Process

The Application:

Your job application is the first step on your path to getting a job. A good application will lead to getting an interview and getting your foot in the door. Reviewing applications is the most common way employers thin the pool of applicants for their specific job and determine who they would like to interview for the position.

Your application is the first impression your potential employer will have of you. It is extremely important to make sure your application stands out. The best way to do this is to ensure your application is clear, concise, and professional.

You may be wondering what to list in the "employment" or "previous employment" section of your job application, especially if you have been incarcerated for a long period of time. It is completely acceptable to list "The State of Oregon," "Oregon Corrections Enterprises," or the name of the specific prison you were in. List whichever jobs you had inside, as well as the duties, skills, and expertise that you gained from each position. It is recommended that you don't list your salary or wages, and instead write "will discuss at interview." This is suggested so that you are not underpaid, or paid for less than what your skill set is worth. You should also consider planning your answers to questions for why you moved between jobs or left certain positions you had inside. This could be because you became more focused on your education, were moved to a different institution (or lost your job outside of prison after being arrested), wanted to try working in a different type of field, you were offered better pay in a different position, or because the work hours were set to a specific brief amount of time.

As for application references, it is not recommended to list family members as references for a job. Instead, references should be: former/current teachers, employers who you had a positive professional relationship with, social workers, anyone who you have volunteered with or for, or even people from your religious institution.

A person wearing a light-colored suit jacket and a white shirt with a gold necklace is visible in the background. The text is overlaid on this image.

Addressing Criminal History (Application)

In Oregon, most employers are not allowed to ask about prior felonies on applications. This is due to Oregon's Ban the Box efforts. While most places will not ask about criminal history on the initial application, some still do. If you see this question and want to continue your application, don't be intimidated. The best thing you can do is answer honestly. If you didn't tell the truth on the application, and get the job or an interview because of it, it's more likely than not that you would lose the interview or position once a criminal background check is completed. Even worse, if you get through the application and interview process entirely and the criminal background check is completed when you've already begun to work for your employer, you would probably be fired. This would just make your job hunt more challenging, so it's best to disclose that information if you're required to rather than risk more drastic measures being taken later. You won't get in trouble for saying that you do have a criminal record, but there would definitely be consequences if you lied about it.

With that being said, it's understandable why you'd be hesitant to disclose that information or want to hide that piece of information so that you have a better chance at getting the job. Studies have shown that getting a job post-incarceration is one of the most challenging parts about reentry, and that is undoubtedly true. But the best thing you can do is take full responsibility for your actions and explain that you have learned from the situation. It's still definitely worth noting that Oregon is a more progressive state in trying to mend this issue of employment discrimination and job insecurity amongst formerly incarcerated individuals because of their Ban the Box initiatives. Cities like Portland have even gone a step further, making it so that employers must wait until a conditional job offer has been made before making an inquiry about an applicant's criminal record.

Resume & Cover Letter

Building Your Resume:

A good resume and cover letter are crucial when looking for employment. Most employers will require both a resume and cover letter along with your application. This is a secondary way to thin the pool of applicants for employers. A good resume and cover letter will help your potential employer see if you will be a good fit for the job.

A resume is a one page document that focuses on your previous work history, your skills and abilities, and could include a brief section on your education level. Once you have created a resume, you can submit the same document to each employer. It's important to work on your resume as soon as possible, even if you're not sure what types of jobs you're looking to apply to. Making a strong resume takes time, and you don't want to feel rushed when you do need it. If you're not sure how to make a solid resume, there are plenty of online resources that you can use as examples. Some helpful sites include: [indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com) and [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com) (search for how to make a resume once you arrive on the webpage). Additionally, there is a free online tool called [canva.com](https://www.canva.com), Canva is completely free, and has resume templates that are already pre-made with an existing format - all you have to do is type in your specific information into each column provided. It is simple to use and there is also a help section so that you can get any information you need while you are working on it. Additionally, you can contact your local Goodwill Store and ask if they can direct you to the nearest Goodwill Job Connection. Not only will they make a resume for you, they will also have a list of job leads for you.

Building a Cover Letter:

A cover letter is a letter you will write personally to each of your potential employers. While you can reuse the format of the cover letter, it is important to write a new letter with updated information for each job you apply to. This is because different employers are looking for different things, so you should be specific and intentional about what you're writing to each individual employer. The letter itself should be one page long. It should include information on who you are, why you are interested in the job you are applying for, your background, and things you feel are important about you, such as skills or reasons why you think you are a good fit for the job. A cover letter may also take some time so be sure you give yourself the ability to write them strongly. You can also search for cover letter examples online to get an idea of the formatting, but typically you want to write about how your strengths and skill set will be applicable and necessary for the job, why you want the job/are interested in the field, and of course any previous experience that you have that makes you a strong applicant. There will be a sample cover letter on page 73 of the guidebook. Finally, if you are able to, it would be very beneficial for you if a friend, relative, or someone who works in the industry you're interested in reads over your resume and cover letter to check for any errors and provide you with feedback.

A close-up photograph of two hands shaking, symbolizing agreement or a deal. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

The Interview

After submitting your application, resume, and cover letter you will have to wait to be contacted by your potential employer. After they review your information, they will determine if they feel you could be a good match for their available job. If they decide to interview you, they will reach out either by phone or email to let you know when your interview will be.

It is important to be patient while waiting to hear back from a potential employer about interviews. Sometimes it can take a week or more for an employer to review all the applications they received. It is also important to keep in mind that not every application you turn in will result in an interview. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, you will not always be the right fit for the jobs you are interested in. Due to this, it is important to keep applying to jobs until you have fully secured employment somewhere.

It is normal to be nervous for an interview, especially if it's your first one on the outside since being incarcerated. It's okay to be stressed and overwhelmed, but there are plenty of ways to combat your nerves and reduce your stress. Preparing for the interview ahead of time can be one of the best ways to achieve this. Having someone prep you for the interview is one way of doing this, if you tell a friend or relative a little about the position you have applied for, they should be able to ask you questions similar to what you may be asked in the interview. Additionally, getting all of your important information and resources put together before the interview will help you be organized and completely ready on the actual day of the interview. Below are some tips on what to consider.

What to Bring:

The last thing you want to do is forget an important piece of information or document that your employer would have wanted to see in the interview. Even though you have most likely already sent them a resume and cover letter, you should always bring extras of both. Sometimes you may be interviewed by multiple people, and they all may want a copy. You should also bring a copy of your application in case they want to review that with you as well. It's also important to remember your identification cards (social security, ID, drivers license, immigration documentation, etc.). Lastly, bring a notebook and pens for yourself so you're able to write down any information you may need to remember.



Interview Prep. Continued

When to Arrive:

It is a good idea to leave early for your interview. If you are walking, driving, taking public transportation or biking you should plan your route ahead of time and check to see how long it will take you to get there. It is best to arrive for an interview about 10 to 15 minutes early. This ensures you are on time, able to get to where you need to be, fill out any paperwork you might have before the interview, and prepare. By showing up a little early you show your potential employer you have good time management, are responsible, and that you're eager to meet them.

What to Wear:

Planning your outfit the night before an interview is a good way to ensure you have an appropriate outfit and everything is clean and looks presentable. You should attempt to pick an outfit that is professional and on the formal side. If you don't have any clothes that you feel are interview appropriate, you can go to thrift stores or even check websites online where you can buy nice clothing secondhand (Poshmark, Mercari, thredUP, etc.).

What Questions to Ask:

Usually at the end of an interview, the interviewer will ask if you have any questions for them. We suggest you prepare a few questions ahead of time to ask them. Doing this shows you are interested, engaged, and came prepared. Some good questions include: What characteristics and abilities does a successful employee here generally have? What would I most likely be working on in my first few weeks here? What recommendations do you have for pursuing professional development and advancement at this company? What's the biggest challenge you've had working here? What are the next steps in this process, and when can I expect to hear from you?

These questions and others that you may find useful to prepare in advance (or think of during the interview) will show your engagement, curiosity, and enthusiasm for the potential work opportunity. All of those things will serve you well in an interview.



Addressing Criminal History (Interview)

Addressing your criminal record during an interview can be a difficult conversation to have. If you are asked about your criminal record it is best to be honest and forthcoming. In this section, there are some tips and suggestions provided on how to ease the conversation.

Comforting the Employer:

If your offense did not occur on the job or was not work related, that would be an important piece of information to provide. If your offense did occur during the job or in your place of work, it may be best to reach out to an employment counselor to help you develop a strong interview strategy on how to best address this. All Star Labor & Staffing in Salem, OR specifically works with people who were formerly incarcerated.

Owning It:

If you acknowledge that you made a mistake in your past, and express remorse, it will come across much better than justifications or over explanations. It's important to bring up what you've learned and changed since the time of your offense. This could be an opportunity to bring up programs you enrolled in while incarcerated, whether they be rehabilitative, educational, or both.

How to Keep it Positive:

Continuing on from discussing programs you completed on the inside, it's important to express continuation of those interests and activities now that you're free as well. Whether that be art, volunteer or community-based work, activism, etc., all of that is helpful information that shows that you've made changes in your life. You should also express your career goals and why you're interested in certain professional pursuits.

Encourage the Employer:

Solidifying that you're a hard worker, that you want the job, and need an opportunity to show your skills to an employer are all important things to add during this discussion at an interview.

A background image showing several hands of different skin tones reaching towards a laptop screen, symbolizing teamwork or collaboration.

Addressing Criminal History (Interview) Continued

Saying Enough:

It can be difficult to draw the line between saying enough and saying too much when talking about your criminal history. When you are talking about your criminal history there is a fine line between being honest and upfront with your criminal history and not talking too much about it. It is appropriate and necessary to disclose your record especially if they already have done a criminal background search on you. However, it is not appropriate to talk about the details regarding the crime, your time in prison, or anything outside of professional conversation. If you are doubting whether or not something is appropriate to talk about with a potential employer, it's most likely best to error on the side of caution and refrain from discussing it at all.

Conclusion:

Hopefully this section has provided useful information to you on how to best search and secure employment once you're released. It is definitely overwhelming, so try to celebrate the little accomplishments (completing your resume, purchasing an interview outfit, etc.) and don't let yourself get discouraged. The next few pages will have example documents so you can see them clearly laid out, but don't forget about the websites and resources discussed in previous pages in case you need or want more references and examples.

Example Resumes

First Lastname

Construction Worker

Seattle, WA
firstlast@email.com
555-555-5555

Effective at using forklift's, hand trucks and pallet jacks to move merchandise. Skilled at inspecting stock, tagging product and updating computer tracking systems. Well-versed in warehouse operations, inventory audits and loading and unloading procedures.

Eligible to work for any employer in the U.S.

Work Experience

Construction Worker

NewCompany

January 2018 to Present

Unpacked and assembled all new merchandise using variety of power tools and lean manufacturing. Heavy Lifting. Measuring. Organize Building Materials. Read and Interpret Drawings. Safety. Supported technicians in equipment maintenance and repair. Organized Warehouse Operations.

Crew Lead

CompanyCo, Inc

July 2017 to December 2017

Trained employees so that they were well-educated in time management and the proper ways to complete their job duties. Utilized all machinery and equipment while observing various safety precautions and practices. Ensured that job tasks were completed to standards and in accordance with company guidelines. Maintained the job site on a daily basis and checked to see that all trash and refuse was removed. Completed daily forklift safety checklists. Located proper slots on storage racks and set pallets in place with forklift and pallet jack.

Education

High school or equivalent

Ged Program - NewCity, NC

April 2015 to February 2016

Skills

Lean Manufacturing - 1 year
Pallet Jack - 2 years
Packing - 1 year
Construction Labor - 2 years



FIRST LASTNAME

Construction Worker

Seattle, WA - 555-555-5555 - firstlast@email.com

Effective at using forklift's, hand trucks and pallet jacks to move merchandise. Skilled at inspecting stock, tagging product and updating computer tracking systems. Well-versed in warehouse operations, inventory audits and loading and unloading procedures.

Eligible to work for any employer in the U.S.

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EDUCATION

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Ged Program - NewCity, NC

April 2015 to February 2016

SKILLS

Lean Manufacturing - 1 year

Pallet Jack - 2 years

Example Cover Letter

123 Main Street, Anytown, CA 12345 · 555-212-1234 · josephq@email.com

August 17, 2020

Jane Smith
Director, Human Resources
Acme Company
123 Business Rd.
Business City, CA 54321

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am interested in the author's assistant position at Acme Company, as advertised on LinkedIn. I am currently employed as legislative director for Assemblywoman Nora Kiel, Chairperson of the NYS Assembly. I believe that the skills and experiences I have gained at this position make me an ideal candidate for the job of author's assistant.

As legislative director, I have developed strong writing and editing skills. For example, one of my main duties is to prepare Assemblywoman Nora Kiel's personal legislation, which deals with issues related to her position as Senior Member of the NYS Assembly Standing Committee.

This duty requires meticulous writing and editing skills, and an ability to convey complex legal ideas clearly. I have prepared dozens of pieces of legislation and received praise for the clarity of my writing.

I have also gained extensive experience in legal and policy research – fields that you state the author's assistant must be familiar with. My experience in the NYS Assembly has afforded me the opportunity to become familiar with the consolidated and unconsolidated laws of the State of New York. In particular, through my work with Assemblywoman Nora Kiel, I have become heavily involved in the current welfare and Medicaid reform movement. I am always eager to learn more about state legislation, reading up on these topics on my own time to become more knowledgeable. I would love to bring this passion for policy and law to your company.

I am confident that my experience in the Legislature and my research and writing skills qualify me for consideration. If you would like, I can provide you with current samples of my work. I have also enclosed my resume. I look forward to meeting with you and discussing my qualifications in more detail.

Sincerely,

Joseph Q. Applicant (signature hard copy letter)