

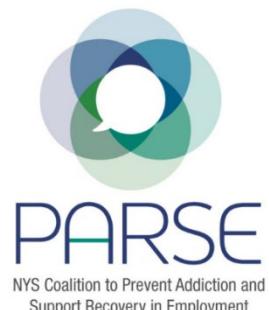


# New York State Recovery Ready Workplace Toolkit

August 2025

## Abstract

A toolkit and an instructor training to support peers and employers through the process of becoming a Recovery Ready Workplace.



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# Introduction

This toolkit is brought to you by Friends of Recovery – New York and the NYS Coalition to Prevent Addiction and Support Recovery in Employment (PARSE). The goal of creating a toolkit and an instructor training is to support peers conducting outreach to employers and to guide employers through the process of becoming a “Recovery Ready Workplace.”

Friends of Recovery – New York is proud to serve as a pivotal co-founder of the PARSE Coalition as well as the funder of the work accomplished by PARSE. This support has allowed for a Recovery Ready Workplace Symposium in 2023 as well as numerous Recovery Ready Workplace Workshops virtually and in-person all across New York. Friends of Recovery – New York and PARSE aim to develop relationships with businesses and provide ongoing technical assistance and support for growing needs and changes in policy, both legislatively and within the workplace.

## What is Recovery?

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) working definition of recovery is:

A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

## What is a Recovery Ready Workplace?

A Recovery Ready Workplace (RRW) (also called a “Recovery Friendly Workplace”, or RFW) is a place of work in which the employer, in collaboration with employees, establishes, maintains, and continually enhances policies, practices, and a culture and work environment that are supportive of current and prospective employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, substance use disorders.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) states the aims of a recovery-supportive workplace are:

“To prevent workplace factors that could cause or prolong a substance use disorder; and lower barriers to seek and receive care, and in maintaining recovery. A recovery supportive workplace teaches managers and workers about substance use disorders to reduce the stigma around this.”



## What Do Recovery Ready Workplaces Do?

Prevent	Support	Provide	Reduce	Reduce
Prevent initiation of new cases of misuse and addiction related to workplace injury and stress through primary prevention of exposure to job hazards and stressors.	Support employees who are struggling by providing access to treatment and a pathway to return to work.	Provide healthy, safe, and gainful employment for people in recovery.	Reduce stigma around issues of addiction and recovery.	Reduce absenteeism, presenteeism, and lost productivity among employees with substance use disorder.

## Who is this Toolkit for?

This toolkit is intended for peers – people with lived recovery experience – to work with one or multiple employers, to identify them and guide them through the steps of becoming a recovery ready workplace.

Specifically, peers are individuals who are in recovery from substance use or co-occurring mental health disorders. Their life experiences and recovery allow them to provide recovery support in such a way that others can benefit from their experiences. Peers can play a critical role in identifying workplaces for people in recovery to work and in helping a workplace to become recovery ready.

Once a RRW status is established, it is critical to stay in contact with the employer and help them troubleshoot problems that come up, as well as continue to support them.

We intend to make other toolkits specifically for employers or labor unions, however this particular toolkit is specifically for peers.

This toolkit is meant to be flexible. Feel free to tailor to your needs.



## Is this Toolkit for You?

### Am I a Peer - a person with lived recovery experience?

- Yes: then this toolkit is for you.

### Do I have resources to reach out to an employer?

- Do I have an organization providing support for me?
- Am I working with others to troubleshoot issues that come up?
- Do I have materials to help employers that I work with figure out what to do?

### What employer am I thinking of?

- [INSERT EMPLOYER NAME]

### Do I have a connection with that employer? For example, someone who works there who has a connection to recovery or someone who works there who is sympathetic to creating recovery ready workplaces?

- No: Find a person you know within a business that can help.
- Yes, I have a connection: Contact that person! Phone is best but it could start with an email.\*\*\*

\*\*\*Cold calling businesses does not yield results.  
Connections yield results!!!

### Example language for reaching out to point of contact:

Dear [INSERT NAME],

I know we have discussed ways your business is already doing things to support recovery. Can we work together to create recovery ready culture or policies at your workplace?

Let's set up a time for me to come in to speak with you and HR or someone in management to discuss how we can move forward.



# Setting up your first meeting

## Schedule a calendar invitation

- Make sure your connection and someone in a decision making role is in the meeting.

## Meeting Tips

- Do not be late (10 minutes early is on time!)
- Do not go empty-handed. Bring outreach materials, but start the meeting off with a conversation.
  - PARSE outreach materials can be found at <https://for-ny.org/parse-outreach/>.
- Share your personal story and how having an employer support your employment helped you.

## Present your pitch

- See pitch template below.

## Share the statistics

- Employees in recovery save their employers an average of \$8,500 annually due to avoiding turnover, replacement, and healthcare costs. Between 2009 – 2015, an estimated 225,000 New York workers were lost from the labor market due to opioids. New York's economy cumulatively lost \$179.4 billion in real economic output, which translates to the state's annual real GDP growth rate slowing by 0.8 percentage points. The workplace is a key location for intervention, where employers can be active participants in our communities' Recovery Oriented Systems of Care.
- See Resources Section for additional resources and information.

## Ask the people in the meeting

- Do you know what a Recovery Ready Workplace is?
- Why are you interested in a recovery ready workplace?
- Is this a good time in your business to work on this project?
- What are your goals in creating a recovery ready workplace?
  - Map out those goals.
- Come up with next steps? Examples:
  - Creating an advisory committee.
  - Do we want to focus more on policy?
  - Do we want to focus more on culture?
- Policy: Review employee handbook for policies related to Mental Health and Substance Use disorder
  - Are they friendly? Are they punitive?
- Culture: What do we do to support our colleagues and create a supportive workplace? Do all of our outside work activities involve alcohol? Are there other activities to build relationships we could add that are more inclusive of people in recovery?



## Pitch template for your first meeting

Hello, my name is [INSERT NAME],

I am working on helping businesses become a Recovery Ready Workplace (RRW). An RRW is a place of work in which the employer, in collaboration with employees, establishes, maintains, and continually enhances policies, practices, and a culture and work environment supportive of current and prospective employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, substance use disorders. RRWs are important for employers because:

Employees in recovery save their employers an average of \$8,500 annually due to avoiding turnover, replacement, and healthcare costs. Between 2009 – 2015, an estimated 225,000 New York workers were lost from the labor market due to opioids. New York's economy cumulatively lost \$179.4 billion in real economic output, which translates to the state's annual real GDP growth rate slowing by 0.8 percentage points. The workplace is a key location for intervention, where employers can be active participants in our communities' Recovery Oriented Systems of Care.

I would like to help you become an RRW. Is this something you would want to work with me on? Please let me know!

Thank you for your time. Please let me know if you are interested in continuing this conversation.

[Then proceed to ask the meeting attendees questions about moving forward]



## Questions for Potential Partners

Do you know what a Recovery Ready Workplace is?



What are your interests of becoming an RRW?



What are your concerns of becoming an RRW?



Is it a good time for you to engage in this process?

Yes



Ok, let's make a plan to work together. See next steps.

No, not right now



Ok, can I continue to send you information and can we stay in touch?



## Example Outreach Letter

Date: [INSERT DATE]

To: [INSERT NAME]

From: [INSERT NAME]

Subject: Recovery Ready Workplace

Thank you for taking the time to meet about Recovery Ready Workplaces (RRW) and for your interest in exploring a potential plan for your business to become a RRW!

The PARSE coalition (Preventing Addiction and Supporting Recovery in Employment) includes employers, labor unions, recovery and other nonprofit organizations, as well as community and government officials. The coalition has been promoting implementation of RRW throughout New York state. We offer support to employers by interacting with leaders about the benefits of becoming an RRW, considering steps the organization may take in conducting a needs assessment addressing mental health, addiction, and recovery in the workplace, providing leadership training, and referrals to supportive resources.

Our experience shows that each employer has unique needs, opportunities, and constraints. We can help facilitate a process; however, the first step is whether the organization is ready to commit the time and energy necessary to develop the program. To help you decide, below and attached is some basic background information as well as a proposal for [INSERT COMPANY NAME] to work with PARSE to consider developing a RRW program.

### **Background Information:**

#### **What is Recovery?**

The Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's working definition of recovery is: A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

#### **What is a Recovery Ready Workplace (RRW)?**

A RRW (also called a "Recovery Friendly Workplace", or RFW) is a place of work in which the employer, in collaboration with employees, establishes, maintains, and continually enhances policies, practices, and a culture and work environment that are supportive of current and prospective employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, substance use and or mental health disorders.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) states the aims of a recovery-supportive workplace are:

"To prevent workplace factors that could cause or prolong a substance use disorder; and lower barriers to seek and receive care, and in maintaining recovery. A recovery supportive workplace teaches managers and workers about substance use disorders to reduce the stigma around this."

RRWs are gaining traction [across the country](#). New York State has recently passed legislation creating a voluntary recovery ready workplace program for employers ([A.521/S.3730-A](#)).



## **What are the Benefits of Becoming a Recovery Ready Workplace?**

In addition to being “the right thing to do,” employees in recovery save their employers an average of \$8,500 annually. Employers who establish RRW programs have saved money due to reduced absenteeism, healthier work environment, greater productivity, and lower healthcare costs.

## **What are key steps to make your business “Recovery Ready.”**

**We are proposing an initial meeting with a small group of key workplace leaders to discuss:**

- 1) What is a RRW and the potential benefits of establishing an RRW program at [INSERT COMPANY NAME]?
- 2) What are some of the key concerns that must be addressed?
- 3) What are the components of developing an assessment of the organization’s current policies, practices, needs, and concerns addressing prevention and responding to mental health and addiction problems in the workplace?
- 4) Will [INSERT COMPANY NAME] work with PARSE to plan a leadership training program to expand interest and feedback on the value of establishing a program at [INSERT COMPANY NAME]?

Attached are PARSE factsheets that outline the benefits to employers as well as key steps in becoming certified as an RRW.

Please let us know if this proposal meets your needs and interest. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME]

**Please note: Allison Weingarten used this note to do outreach to a Director of Human Resources up to the CEO of a company. It would have been preferable to have met directly with the CEO. Unfortunately, after receiving this letter, the CEO rejected this request. Therefore, please use this letter at your discretion. However, please note that the best way to interact with the business is in-person meetings, phone calls, or video calls as often as possible.**



## Next Steps

Create an advisory committee. This would include workers, human resources, and management.

Schedule the first advisory committee meeting.

Create a 12-month action plan and assign roles. Make sure 12-month goals are SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Survey the advisory committee meeting. Does the committee want to focus on policy, culture, or both?

### Example policy changes:

- Updating employee handbook. Review employee handbook for policies related to Mental Health and Substance Use disorder
- Review benefits packages covering SUD treatment, after-care, and counseling.
- Making Naloxone available at your workplace.

For a comprehensive list of changes, see the [RRW checklist](#).

### Example culture changes:

- Distributing a declaration to employees stating your workplace's commitment to RRW principles and its participation in this initiative.
- Provide trainings to management and workers on reducing stigma
- Including flyers around the workplace that encourage support and point to resources.
- Encouraging a sober environment or sober options for happy hours and outside of work events.

For a comprehensive list of changes, see the [RRW checklist](#).



**Reminder: Please remember to be flexible. We are working with their schedules. Be conscientious of their time. Use your best judgment in reaching out. Stay engaged with them but don't overburden them. If they have other priorities that come up, we must respect that. Always ensure that we are facilitators providing guidance, but they are the experts in their own workplace, and they need to be the ones leading the decision making.**

## Ongoing steps

- Continue meeting with the advisory committee and supporting their needs. Consider collecting data and testimonials to further advance Recovery Ready Workplace goals in your community.
- End of year evaluation. Did policies change and what were they? Were any cultural changes made? Collect testimonials expressing these changes.
- Continue to provide support to the employer. Consider encouraging the employer to work with other potential RRW-interested businesses and employers, creating a peer network among employers who can share best practices and outcomes.

**Remember: This work continues!**

## Resources

- [Colorado Legislation](#)
- [CPWR and North America's Building Trades Unions \(NABTU\) Opioids in the Workplace Initiative](#)
- [Friends of Recovery – New York](#)
- [Minnesota Recovery Friendly Workplace](#)
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Training Program [Opioids & Substance Use: Workplace Prevention & Response](#)
- [National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute](#)
- [National Safety Council Employer Opioid Toolkit](#)
- [New Hampshire Recovery Friendly Workplace](#)
- [NYS Coalition to Prevent Addiction and Support Recovery in Employment \(PARSE\)](#)
- [Recovery Friendly Ohio](#)
- [US DOL Hub](#)
- [US DOL Recovery Ready Workplace Toolkit](#)



# Appendix

## About Friends of Recovery – New York

Friends of Recovery – New York (FOR-NY) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to demonstrate the power and promise of recovery from addictions and its value to individuals, families and communities throughout New York State and the nation. We actively seek to advance public policies and practices that promote and support recovery.

We envision a world in which recovery from addiction is not only common, but celebrated; a world in which the entire spectrum of effective prevention, treatment, and support services are available and accessible to all.

## About the NYS PARSE Coalition

Established in 2022, the NYS PARSE Coalition is committed to creating a culture of recovery-supportive workplaces within New York State that actively develops resources for preventing substance use and addiction.

More information on the steps for becoming a Recovery Ready Workplace and related resources are available here: <https://for-ny.org/parse/>.

## Join the PARSE Coalition

Email: Annette Bernhardt, [Annette@ginomacchiofoundation.com](mailto:Annette@ginomacchiofoundation.com)

For more information or assistance, please contact Chris Assini, Director of Policy for Friends of Recovery – New York at [cassini@for-ny.org](mailto:cassini@for-ny.org) or Jonathan Rosen, Safety & Health Consultant, National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety & Health Training at [jrosen396@gmail.com](mailto:jrosen396@gmail.com)

