

Waiver Request
Use State Set-Aside Rapid Response to Support Ex-Offender Reemployment
Program
State of Indiana
Effective July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

While Indiana's unemployment rate remains high, employers are nevertheless challenged to find skilled reliable workers. Annually, more than 20,000 offenders are released from Indiana prisons, many eager to obtain a job and lead a productive life. Research indicates that there both employment and education are among the greatest deterrents to recidivism; data shows that ex-offenders are employed are nearly 15 percent less likely to return to incarceration than those without employment. Additionally, research indicates that one of the greatest barriers ex-offenders face when searching for employment is the reluctance of businesses to hire ex-offenders – nearly 71 percent of private businesses indicate a reluctance or a refusal to hire ex-offenders. In order to help ex-offenders overcome the barriers they face when attempting to reenter the workforce and to assist businesses overcome their reluctance to hire ex-offenders, Indiana plans to establish a pilot program that provides reemployment services to this vulnerable group of out-of-work individuals.

Identify the statutory or regulatory requirements that are requested to be waived and the goals that the State intends to achieve as a result of the waiver.

The State of Indiana respectfully requests a waiver of the regulatory requirements found in 20 CFR Part 665.310 and 20 CFR Part 665.320 that defines the use of state set-aside rapid response funding (Section 133(a)(2) and Section 134(a)(2)(A)).

Specifically, the Indiana Department of Workforce Development would like to use up to fifty percent of funds set-aside for rapid response activities each year to establish a reemployment program for ex-offenders.

Describe the actions that the State has undertaken to remove State statutory or regulatory barriers.

No State statutory or regulatory barriers exist at this time.

Describe the goals of the waiver and the expected programmatic outcomes if the request is granted.

Indiana would like to utilize a portion of its statewide rapid response funds to implement a reemployment program for ex-offenders, which would focus on providing long-term incarcerated (two years or longer) ex-offenders an opportunity to reenter the workforce. This program would provide eligible ex-offenders with the training, support, and counseling needed to eliminate employment barriers they face when being released from a correctional institution, and would leverage resources to provide employers with incentives for hiring these ex-offenders.

The program would be structured as a partnership between Indiana's WorkOne system and the State's Department of Corrections. Prior to an individual's release, the

Department of Corrections would assist the WorkOne system to identify persons that have displayed a positive track record at the correctional institution, have been identified as having a low risk of re-offending, and have shown that they have the motivation and commitment necessary to successfully reenter the workforce. These individuals would be matched with employment opportunities, provided with supportive services, counseling and case management, and businesses or organizations that employ them would be offered incentives in the way of federal work bonds, federal work opportunity tax credits, and on-the-job training, where appropriate.

Specifically, the State would utilize the Rapid Response funds made available through this waiver to provide job matching, evaluation and testing, job readiness and career readiness classes, case management and counseling, supportive services, on-the-job training, and follow-up services to the eligible participants in this program.

Over the past two years, Indiana has placed a great emphasis on providing on-the-job training to individuals throughout the State. In Program Year 2009, the State developed and implemented a statewide policy that governs on-the-job training, and began a regionally-based outreach campaign to businesses to encourage the use of on-the-job training. In Program Year 2010, over 1,000 WIA participants were provided on-the-job training, and preliminary data from Program Year 2011 indicates that the number of WIA on-the-job training participants could double. While local areas have been encouraged to utilize local allocations to fund on-the-job training, the State authorized the usage of WIA statewide funds to support the initiative. With the decrease in WIA funding that Indiana and its local areas have seen in Program Year 2011, it is essential that this program be funded through statewide WIA funds, as opposed to mandating that local areas utilize local WIA Adult funds to support it.

Because of the State's recent history of success with on-the-job training, and the skill barriers that many ex-offenders possess, a statewide pilot program pairing recently released ex-offenders with on-the-job training opportunities would be extremely valuable

The overarching goals of the program would consist of:

- Increasing the employment rates of ex-offenders following release from correctional institution;
- Increasing the number of ex-offenders served by Indiana's WorkOne system;
- Decreasing the unemployment rate among the target population;
- Reducing recidivism rate among program participants; and
- Encouraging businesses to employ this hard-to-serve population.

Describe the individuals impacted by the waiver

The group that would be impacted the greatest by this waiver request are ex-offenders that have served for two or more years in a correctional institution, who have displayed a positive record at the institution, and have been identified as a low risk to re-offend by the Indiana Risk Assessment System.

Employers throughout Indiana will also be positively impacted by this waiver in that these Rapid Response funds will be used to provide on-the-job training at employers that are willing to hire and provide training to these ex-offenders. The reimbursement of up to fifty percent of the workers' wages will help offset the extraordinary costs of training the employer assumes when it hires an eligible participant.

This waiver would not have a great impact on dislocated workers normally served by statewide rapid response funds. Because the State would only utilize up to 50 percent of its rapid response funds for the ex-offender program, the State would still have adequate funding to provide rapid response services to workers when major dislocations occur. Historical data shows that the State has always had ample Rapid Response funds available, and that the use of up to 50 percent for an ex-offender reemployment program would not greatly impact those individuals normally served through the use of Rapid Response funds.

Describe the process used to monitor the progress in implementing such a waiver.

If granted this waiver, the State would closely monitor the implementation of the program established with these funds. The State will establish a comprehensive set of performance metrics for the program that aligns with the overall goals of the program, with reports generated and reviewed on monthly, quarterly, and annual bases. The State will also publish policy regarding the expected design and outcomes of the program, and will conduct regularly scheduled technical assistance meetings and monitoring visits to ensure the successful implementation of the program.

Additionally, the State will closely monitor the amount of funds utilized by this program, ensuring that adequate Rapid Response funds are available to provide services when major dislocations occur. The State will always place a priority on using Rapid Response funds for providing activities and support surrounding major dislocations, and should the need arise, funds provided through the use of this waiver would be deobligated and utilized in support of traditional Rapid Response activities.