



FAIR CHANCE HIRING 2026 COHORT OVERVIEW

OPPORTUNITY

Accessing talent will continue to be a critical concern for business in the coming decades. Long-term demographics and immigration trends tell us that companies that open opportunities to untapped talent pools will gain a competitive advantage in the years ahead.

One such group is the 80 million Americans—one in three adults—who have a criminal record. Despite data that show the vast majority are qualified and carry no more risk in hiring than the general population, they face substantial barriers to employment because of unexamined corporate practices and regulatory barriers.

The good news is that more and more companies are learning how to reduce those barriers and embrace fair chance hiring by changing their practices and navigating regulations effectively.

These employers are joining global companies and small and medium-sized businesses that are benefitting from strong talent, increased retention, and meaningful improvements to their internal culture.

JOIN THE FAIR CHANCE HIRING COHORT

To help companies tap this vast talent pool, the Corporate Coalition of Chicago and its partners, Cara Plus and the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance, lead one of the nation's most in-depth cohort-based fair chance hiring programs. The program centers on peer-to-peer learning, bringing the knowledge and experience of companies who hire fair chance talent, nationally recognized experts, workforce organizations, and individuals with records who have navigated employment barriers.

Over the nine-month program, cohort members receive ongoing support as they dive into their specific talent practices and discuss concerns in a trusting environment.

Program content is designed to meet the needs of participating companies. Through individualized analysis, employers gain an understanding of internal roadblocks and create practical plans to overcome them. Cohorts are small to ensure plenty of time for one-on-one coaching and other supports. They include a diverse mix of industries, company sizes, and levels of regulation. To date, 20 companies and 96 employees have participated in the first three cohorts. More information on fair chance hiring and the cohort program content is on the back of this page.

FIND OUT MORE TODAY AND GET READY TO JOIN US IN WINTER 2026

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WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PROGRAM

- Extensive cohort curriculum – programming on how to tackle background checks, support retention, get buy-in and more
- One-on-one coaching – expert guidance tailored to your organization
- Peer learning and alumni engagement opportunities

Cohort Program Topics:



Recruiting and building a talent pool

- Learn how fair chance hiring can help you address talent acquisition challenges
- Identify specific positions or departments to be your starting point



Shaping inclusive background check practices

- Learn how to “screen in” and use individualized assessments



Reframing concerns about regulatory barriers

- Identify the right questions to ask
- Understand how to handle exemptions



Developing retention strategies

- Determine what supports are most effective to retain fair chance talent
- Create pathways to advancement



Getting buy-in

- Navigate staff and customer concerns
- Develop effective internal communication strategies



Creating an inclusive culture

- Promote internal change and build a welcoming environment



Launching a program

- Design a pilot program, identify resources, scale the effort

From 2024 cohort members

“This cohort was a great opportunity to add to the practice of our mission.”

“The learnings from the cohort were a valuable tool in the implementation process for us.”

“I learned about various strategies that can be incorporated at my organization to provide fair chance hiring.”