

UNDERSTANDING & MITIGATING BARRIERS TO WORK

EMPLOYER RESOURCE GUIDE



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

Turnover is expensive. On average, every time an entry-level employee leaves, it costs a company more than \$2,000.¹ Your talent is your most valuable asset. To understand how to attract and retain your low-wage earners, you must understand poverty in your local economy.

GLI's [Understanding & Mitigating Barriers to Work Resource Guide](#) is designed to help you strategically compensate your workforce by understanding the challenges and needs of low-wage earners. This will increase retention and develop sustainable recruitment practices. This guide provides a collection of exemplary policies and community assets to mitigate common barriers to work.

THE BENEFITS CLIFF

To attract and retain low-wage workers, you must understand poverty in our community. One in six workers in Greater Louisville lives below 200% of the federal poverty line, making them eligible for various public assistance (benefits) programs. Approximately 69.2% of public assistance program recipients are working, and nearly half of them (46.9%) are working full time.²

Public assistance can include housing assistance, childcare subsidies, food stamps, health insurance, utility support, and much more. Workers in low-wage jobs often require public assistance to cover their expenses and create financial stability. Sometimes accepting a promotion or pay increase can cause low-wage workers to lose some or all of their public assistance. This does not mean, however, they are earning enough to meet all of their bills without assistance. This can force low-wage workers into a worse financial position and cause stability and sustainability to disappear, much like falling off a cliff.

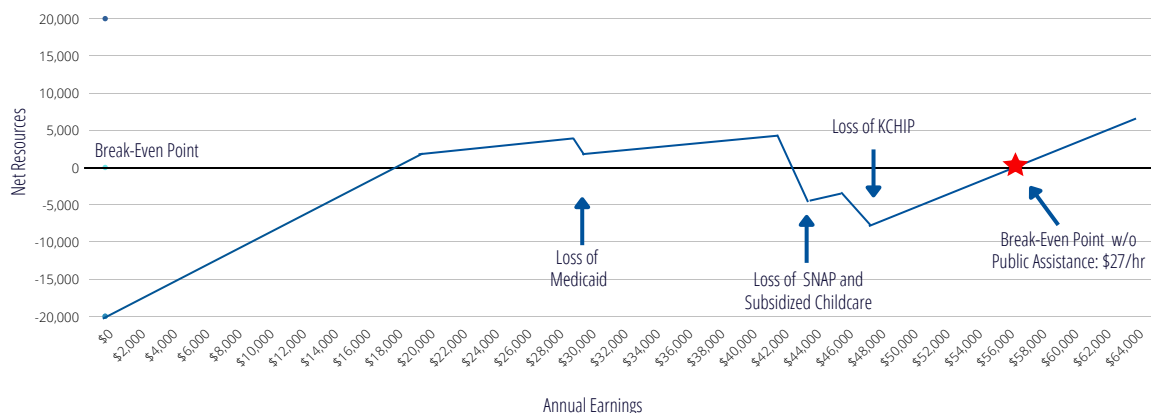
The benefits cliff is a real threat to your low-wage workers' stability. The chart on the following page showcases how low-wage workers become susceptible to these cliffs on their path to upward mobility. GLI's Advocacy team is working at the state and federal levels to promote responsible approaches to transform your low-wage positions from the need of being augmented with public assistance to providing a gradual transition to a livable wage. Companies should be cognizant of the obvious impact low wages have on the individuals who hold those positions and the greater effect on regional economic advancement.

THE FAMILY RESOURCE SIMULATOR

The [Family Resource Simulator](#) shows the trade-offs workers face when they earn more but lose work support in the process. It is important for employers to understand these low-wage position supports, childcare subsidies, housing, healthcare, etc., and how even minimum wage increases can actually push workers into poverty.

1: <https://www.kentuckianaworks.org/news/benefits-cliffs>

2: <https://www.epi.org/publication/wages-and-transfers/>



Source: NCCP Family Resource Simulator. Note: Data reflects one working adult with two children living in Jefferson County, KY.

STEPS TO HELP EMPLOYEES WITH BARRIERS

While removing barriers to work entirely can be a long process, there are some things that employers can do on a shorter-term basis to help employees mitigate common workforce barriers.

➤ ESTABLISH AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

An EAP is a work-based intervention program designed to assist employees in resolving personal problems that may be adversely affecting their performance. Programs are typically delivered at no cost to employees by stand-alone EAP vendors as part of comprehensive benefits plans.

➤ DEVELOP EMPLOYEE PEER GROUPS

Employee Resource Networks can be established for specific demographics, such as female employees, Hispanic employees, LGBTQ+ employees, or other minority groups. These groups create a sense of belonging and can offer amenities such as mentoring or professional development.

➤ DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP WITH A COMMUNITY CENTER

Even if your company is unable to provide access to career coaches and wrap-around services, there are many community assets that can assist employees in crisis. Research the resources in your community and develop partnerships when possible. Partnerships can provide direct referrals, strengthening your pipelines, in addition to offering wrap-around services when employees or candidates face barriers.

➤ DESIGN WORK-RELATED EXPENSE BENEFITS

When appropriate, consider how to adjust requirements for professional attire, appropriate footwear, safety equipment, clean uniforms, etc. If your workforce struggles with any of the following barriers it may be difficult for them to afford the expensive gear and/or laundry services. Consider providing stipends to support the cost of these goods and offer laundry service on-site to save employees time and money.

➤ CONSIDER EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY

Many low-wage workers and those who have just entered or re-entered the workforce have to make difficult decisions between paying for food or other basic needs. Consider offering snacks and low-cost meals. Treat employees to lunches as incentives. A few cans of soup and a safe space to store their lunch can make a huge difference to someone who is experiencing food insecurity.

EXPLAINING THE MOST COMMON WORKFORCE BARRIERS

High turnover rates in low-wage positions are due to multiple barriers experienced by people in poverty. One out of every six workers lives in poverty. Approximately 69.2% of public assistance recipients are working. This isn't the working poor; this is the working poverty. Barriers are the expression of poverty. Listed below are the most common barriers to the retention of long-term, self-sustainable employees.



Transportation

Many workers struggle with daily transportation needs and access.



Child Care

Child care facilities in Kentucky have been reduced by 45% between 2012-2021.



Justice Involvement

Mandatory minimum sentences and racial inequity have contributed to increased rates of justice involvement.



Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity can include affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing



Utility Payments & Groceries

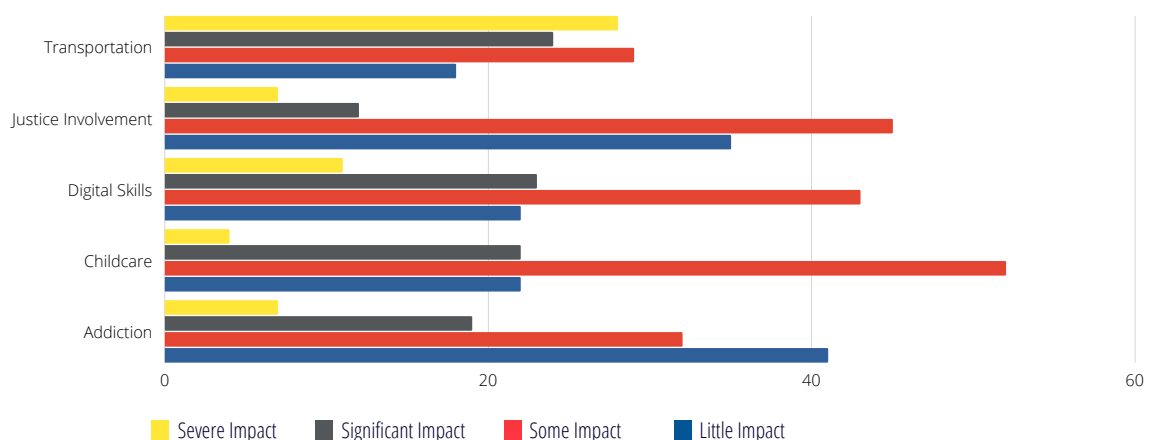
With other barriers in place, utility payments, groceries and other bills can become an issue.



Addiction Recovery

Recovery from substance abuse is a physical, mental, and psychological process.

The chart below shows the most common barriers to work and the severity of their impact on the workforce. It is important to note that many employees face multiple barriers simultaneously, so these should not be thought of in a vacuum.



TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

Louisville is a city with a robust public transportation system, but many low-wage workers may find public transportation inaccessible due to the cost, difficulty accessing transit stops, and availability of transit due to shifting schedules. Consider the following solutions and community assets as options to increase the mobility of your workforce.

➤ COORDINATE RIDESHARE PROGRAMS

Using existing community assets, you can coordinate, and even incentivize, the usage of a rideshare carpooling system. Not only are these programs environmentally friendly, but they also cut down costs of gas for employees and increase the reliability of arrival. Some vendors, like the companies mentioned below, may offer to analyze your zip code saturation of employees to assist in designing the program.

➤ OFFER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION STIPENDS

The cost of public transportation can be prohibitive for low-income employees. Consider offering employer-paid or sponsored bus/transit passes. Provide this as an upfront benefit as opposed to reimbursement which can be a deterrent for low-income employees.

➤ DESIGN A MOBILITY SAVINGS BENEFIT

Saving for a car and insurance is timely and requires budgeting skills. Consider offering employees a payroll deduction opportunity to save for an automobile or matching funds like a 401k. While 401ks are great benefits, when transportation, housing, and basic needs are top of mind, saving for the future can be very challenging.

➤ CREATE A CULTURE OF AWARENESS

Consider designating a staff person as a transportation coordinator to assist employees with transportation barriers.

TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES



CHILD CARE

Supporting an employee can also mean identifying resources to support their family. Connectivity with and knowledge of community child care assets and flexible policies will ensure that your company is competitive in attracting and retaining talent. Access to reliable child care is an issue that affects workers across socioeconomic demographics and education levels.

➤ INCLUDE CHILD CARE ASSETS IN ONBOARDING

The state and federal governments provide several resources to monetarily assist families and help identify care options. Ensure your HR department is aware of these options and explicitly includes them in your HR onboarding processes, when applicable. Develop relationships with organizations, such as those listed below, so employees can contact them directly with questions.



➤ OFFER FLEXIBLE SHIFT OPTIONS OR GRACE WINDOWS

While some positions require timely and mandatory shift start times, consider offering shift flexibility or buffer windows to allow employees with children extra time to arrive for work. A child may be sick, need to be picked up from school, or they may have a delayed bus pickup, making the parent late for a shift. Consider variables that are beyond the employee's control and factor these into your policies. When possible, offer employees the option to work remotely in emergency circumstances.

➤ OFFER EMERGENCY CHILD CARE OPTIONS

Consider purchasing emergency waivers or providing emergency stipends that employees can access if their childcare provider is inaccessible or unavailable.

➤ UNDERSTAND SUBSIDIES AND INCOME BRACKETS

While you may be excited to promote a high-performing employee, income increases can cause parents to lose child care subsidies. Understand how your employee's earnings impact their qualifications and ensure that well-deserved salary increases do not leave employees worse off. Create programs or additional benefits that help build a bridge across the benefits cliff.

CHILD CARE RESOURCES



HOUSING BARRIERS

The most basic human need is reliable and consistent shelter. Housing insecurity and lack of a permanent residence can impact the workforce as they apply for jobs, receive mailed paychecks, and consider their tax status. This issue is even more severe for candidates who have to rely on shelters while trying to get back on a path of self-sufficiency.

➤ PROVIDE UNIQUE HOUSING BENEFITS

Consider partnering with a local lender to offer down payment assistance to employees who have met tenure requirements and key benchmarks. Incentivizing a benefit like down payment assistance can increase productivity and retention, while offering your employees a chance to improve their lives.



➤ PARTNER WITH HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Many housing developments are willing to reserve units for partner employers. Consider building relationships with nearby housing complexes to offer opportunities for your employees to live nearby. This can also help in mitigating transportation issues.

➤ DEVELOP AN EMERGENCY FUND

Unexpected bills can be detrimental to employees facing barriers and beginning their careers. Consider creating an emergency fund or scholarship that employees can access for one-time use for a variety of cases like housing payment assistance to avoid a missed mortgage or rent payment when unexpected bills arise.



HOUSING RESOURCES



ADDICTION RECOVERY

With the recent spike in Kentuckians experiencing substance abuse and addiction, it is more relevant than ever to consider recovery resources for employees to freely access and utilize without penalty. In addition to employees in recovery, research tells us that mental health services can be both treatment-oriented and proactive to support an employee's overall wellbeing. Consider your business' transparency and access to these services, as many employees may be hesitant to share their conditions with HR representatives directly.

➤ INCLUDE RECOVERY AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN ONBOARDING

The cost of treatment can be insurmountable and not just for low-wage employees. Assess your healthcare package to ensure your employees have access to comprehensive mental and physical health services and access to affordable and quality care.

➤ CONSIDER MODIFYING HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

EAPs and Employee Peer Groups can help create a culture of belonging, compassion, and openness. Reducing the stigma associated with addiction is a powerful mechanism to support individuals experiencing addiction. Consider allowing an Al-Anon or Nar-Anon meeting after hours in community spaces.

➤ OFFER AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) OR PEER GROUP OPTIONS

Assess your community's resources, such as the ones listed below, that employees may not be aware of prior to employment at your company. Ensure that your HR department is aware of these options and explicitly include them in your onboarding processes. Develop a relationship with organizations so employees can contact them directly with questions.

➤ DEVELOP A FLEXIBLE LEAVE POLICY

Employees may be reluctant to seek the treatment they need if they lose their job as a result. Consider developing a recovery-conscious leave policy that would allow valuable members of your team to return to work after seeking help.

ADDICTION RECOVERY RESOURCES



JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT BARRIERS

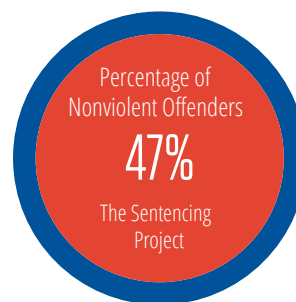
Involvement with the justice system can significantly impact a person's earning potential. Employers can make a difference by considering their policies regarding justice-involved employment candidates. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, there are 41,000 people incarcerated in Kentucky today. Many of these people will soon be re-entering the workforce and can be valuable contributors to our economy with proper support.

➤ MODIFY JOB APPLICATIONS & HIRING PROCESSES

Regardless of your HR policies for hiring, even asking a candidate to identify their record can deter them from applying to your company. Many employers who are willing to offer second chances list that they require background checks on their application or job descriptions that might prevent qualified candidates from applying. If you are unable to offer opportunities to individuals with criminal records, consider conducting an internal analysis of the procedures to determine if you can adjust these practices.

➤ APPOINT SPECIALIZED TALENT ACQUISITION TEAMS & WORKFORCE SUCCESS NAVIGATORS

Assign staff to recruit and support justice involved individuals who are specially trained on their unique needs and barriers. Offer supports like coaching, soft skills classes, financial literacy, and career exploration. Investing in someone creates a sense of loyalty. You just might come across your best employees by offering second chance opportunities and supporting this population as they grow and develop at your company.



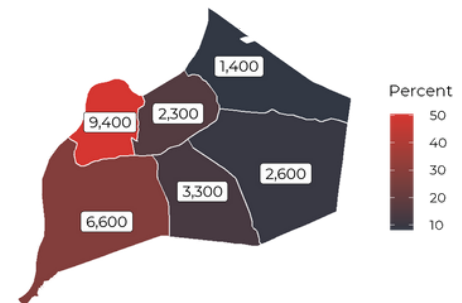
RE-ENTRY RESOURCES



DIGITAL ACCESS

We live in a world dominated by technology, but the forms of technology utilized, and the level of proficiency varies dependent on age, culture, income, and training. For example, a low-income job candidate may only utilize a cell phone and have limited access to WIFI or a home desktop. An older candidate may be able to navigate Microsoft at their local library but might struggle with nuanced application systems on smaller devices. Candidates are out there, but recognition of the digital divide is the first step to addressing this gap.

Children Ages 5-18 in Households Without High Speed Internet Access



➤ POST ON FACEBOOK JOB GROUPS

Meet your potential candidates where they are. Utilize existing social media platforms to market to job seekers who may not be skilled in navigating job boards. Many communities have local Facebook job boards. You might also choose to have your recruiters create specialized Facebook work accounts to connect with candidates.

➤ OFFER REFERRAL PROGRAMS

Incentivize current employees to recommend recruits. The best marketing for your company is your own employees, so leverage word of mouth by offering monetary benefits, extra vacation time, or fun incentives to employees who attract applicants.

➤ DEVELOP TECHNOLOGY-RELATED INITIATIVES AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Consider developing incentives for benchmarks and exceptional performance such as high-tech mobile devices, tablets, and laptops. Consider subsidizing internet and phone bills when possible. Invest in your workforce by offering ongoing training for relevant technology programs and digital literacy.

➤ OFFER POP-UP APPLICATION SITES

Plan an application fair where candidates can meet at a local public space to complete applications on paper or on the computer and meet with HR in person. Not only does it create personal connections with candidates, but it gives you the opportunity to address questions in real-time, and hopefully increase your pool of applicants.

DIGITAL ACCESS RESOURCES



OTHER GLI TALENT CENTRAL INITIATIVES

➤ WORKFORCE ECOSYSTEM HUB

Navigating the existing workforce resources in Greater Louisville can be difficult. To help, GLI has created a Workforce Ecosystem Hub where employers and job seekers can find the information they need to identify training providers for upskilling and reskilling, connect with higher educational institutions, learn about implementing or participating in apprenticeship programs, identify refugee assistance programs, and find helpful resources to overcome workforce barriers.

➤ JOB SEEKER CONNECTION PROGRAM

Through our [Job Seeker Connection Program](#), GLI identifies employers who need talent and matches them with employees seeking work. GLI staff actively look for talent in the marketplace and maintain a list of those candidates. When candidates match open positions, we connect you to them.

➤ LIVE IN LOU

[Live in Lou](#) is the region's premier talent attraction and retention initiative. GLI has developed a suite of tools to assist you as you recruit top talent to the region. Employers can post open jobs, download relocation information, and point candidates to information on what makes Greater Louisville unique. We've even developed a City Champs program that connects new or prospective residents with trained brand ambassadors to provide a warm and friendly welcome.

➤ LINKEDIN TALENT INSIGHTS

Through a partnership with LinkedIn, GLI can develop customized campaigns to help you hire that hard-to-find talent. We analyze available talent across the U.S., identifying geographical areas where the supply of that talent outpaces demand, where salaries and/or cost of living are comparable or beneficial to Greater Louisville, and curate a list of potential candidates who fit those parameters. We then contact the candidates on your behalf and send qualified, interested candidates to your inbox.

➤ CUSTOMIZED PRIVATE LABEL TALENT ATTRACTION CAMPAIGNS

If you are looking to expand your business or need to fill large numbers of open positions, GLI can build a customized talent attraction campaign for you. We develop the creative, place and monitor the media, provide weekly optimizations, and report regularly on engagement. Your role? To accept resumes, interview, and hire great candidates.

CONTACT US

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