

National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute

**Recovery Friendly Workplace
Definition and 2024 National Certification Standards**

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Acknowledgments

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I. Introduction

In November 2023, New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu [announced](#) the launch of the [National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute](#) (the Institute) as part of a White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) event promoting new recovery friendly workplace resources. The Institute is an initiative of the [Global Recovery Initiatives Foundation](#) (GRI or the Foundation), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. The Institute is the first national public- and private-sector initiative seeking to equip every employer to become, and thrive as, a “Recovery Friendly Workplace” (RFW).¹ The Institute is informed by research, employers, the lived experience of people in recovery in the workforce, and insights from those who are implementing RFW programs.

An RFW landscape analysis published in August 2023 by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences found that the criteria for becoming a certified RFW are inconsistent across programs.² To address the need for clarity and consistency among RFW programs nationwide, the Institute recruited a diverse group of experienced RFW stakeholders to build consensus on (1) a concise definition for the term “RFW”; and (2) national RFW certification criteria. The purpose of this document is to set forth the consensus-based RFW definition and to establish the standards for national employer certification. This document also provides a brief background on existing RFW initiatives and the Institute, describes the Institute’s planned national RFW certification framework, and explains the process used by the Institute to build consensus.

II. Key Terminology

The terms below have the following meanings as used in this document:

Addiction. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) defines addiction as a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.³

¹ RFW programs are distinct from, yet complementary to, Drug-Free Workplace programs. For a comparison of RFW and Drug-Free Workplace programs, and ways in which the two programs’ elements may be combined, see the federal government’s interagency Recovery-Ready Workplace Toolkit. Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *Recovery-Ready Workplace Toolkit: Guidance and Resources for Private and Public Sector Employers* 1, 70-75 (Nov. 2023), https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/RRW-hub/pdfs/RRW_Toolkit_508_FINAL_v5%2011.8.23.pdf.

² Nat’l Inst. of Environmental Health Sciences, *Recovery Friendly Workplace Landscape Analysis* 1, 26 (Aug. 2023), https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasl_get_blob.cfm?ID=14183&file_name=WTP_RFW_Report_072423_508.pdf.

³ Am. Soc’y of Addiction Medicine, *Definition of Addiction* 1, 2 (Sept. 15, 2019), [https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/quality-science/asam-s-2019-definition-of-addiction-\(1\).pdf](https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/quality-science/asam-s-2019-definition-of-addiction-(1).pdf).

Mental health disorder. Mental health disorders are characterized by clinically significant disturbances in cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior, and are usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas of functioning. Examples include anxiety and depressive disorders.⁴

Recovery. ASAM defines recovery from addiction as an active process of continual growth that addresses the biological, psychological, social and spiritual disturbances inherent in addiction, and includes the following factors:

1. The aim of improved quality of life and enhanced wellness as identified by the individual;
2. An individual's consistent pursuit of abstinence from the substances or behaviors towards which pathological pursuit had been previously directed or which could pose a risk for pathological pursuit in the future;
3. Relief of an individual's symptoms including substance craving;
4. Improvement of an individual's own behavioral control;
5. Enrichment of an individual's relationships, social connectedness, and interpersonal skills; and
6. Improvement in an individual's emotional self-regulation.⁵

RFW Multistate Community of Practice. The RFW Multistate Community of Practice is a networking and resource-sharing group through which representatives of states, local governments, and other entities implementing or interested in learning about RFW initiatives communicate through an e-mail list and meet several times per year through a web-based collaboration hub to collaborate, share best practices, and discuss challenges and solutions.

⁴ The World Health Org., *Mental Disorders* (Jun. 8, 2022), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>.

⁵ Am. Soc'y of Addiction Medicine, *Public Policy Statement on the Role of Recovery in Addiction Care* (Apr. 11, 2018), <https://downloads.asam.org/sitefinity-production-blobs/docs/default-source/public-policy-statements/2018-statement-on-role-of-recovery-in-addiction-care.pdf>. GRI has long recognized that recovery from SUD is defined in a variety of ways in the SUD treatment and recovery fields and among advocacy communities, reflecting a wide range of paradigms and personal experiences. In the Summary Report of its 2020 Virtual Summit on Assessing Progress and Setting Priorities in Recovery Research, GRI recommended that "We need a multifaceted, measurable, person-centered definition of recovery that encompasses the stages of the recovery process, their potential duration and recurrence, the many recovery pathways, and how factors, such as policy and the social determinants of health, may interact with these different variables." Global Recovery Initiatives Found., *Summary Report, Global Recovery Initiatives Foundation* 1, 4 (Jun. 2021), <https://globalrecoveryinitiatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Recovery-Research-Virtual-Summit-Summary-Report-1.pdf>. Building consensus on the definition of recovery was not within the scope of this RFW definition and certification project.

Substance use disorder (SUD). SUD is a clinical term that is often used as a synonym for the term addiction.⁶ Individuals may be diagnosed with an SUD if they meet the criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5), relating to the use of alcohol or other drugs (AOD).⁷ SUDs are characterized as mild, moderate, or severe based on the number of diagnostic criteria met. AOD addiction is generally understood to roughly correspond to severe SUD.

III. Background

A. SUD Recovery

ASAM defines recovery from addiction as an active process of continual growth that addresses the biological, psychological, social and spiritual disturbances inherent in addiction, and includes the following factors:

1. The aim of improved quality of life and enhanced wellness as identified by the individual;
2. An individual's consistent pursuit of abstinence from the substances or behaviors towards which pathological pursuit had been previously directed or which could pose a risk for pathological pursuit in the future;
3. Relief of an individual's symptoms including substance craving;
4. Improvement of an individual's own behavioral control;
5. Enrichment of an individual's relationships, social connectedness, and interpersonal skills; and
6. Improvement in an individual's emotional self-regulation.⁸

Employment can play a crucial role in recovery. For many individuals, employment can provide purpose and daily routine, economic and social stability, independence, and resources to participate in society.⁹ Employment can also provide a sense of community and a supportive collegial network, especially when it takes place at organizations that have developed recovery friendly cultures and work environments.

Workplaces have a significant opportunity to serve communities by effectively preventing and responding to substance use and supporting SUD recovery. Doing so is not only an exercise in good corporate citizenship; it is a way to improve an organization's bottom line.¹⁰ Recognizing this opportunity, the federal government and an increasing number of state and local

⁶ The term SUD is narrower than addiction, as it only exclusively applies to addictive conditions involving alcohol and other drugs, excluding behavioral or "process" addictions. However, it is broader in scope as it encompasses not only conditions that are typically described as addiction but also earlier stages in the progression of such conditions, which might not yet require treatment. Additionally, the term SUD is sometimes considered less stigmatizing than the term addiction.

⁷ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Servs. Admin., *2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological Summary and Definitions* 1, A-83 (Nov. 2023), <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt42729/2022-nsduh-method-summary-defs/2022-nsduh-method-summary-defs-110123.pdf>.

⁸ Am. Soc'y of Addiction Medicine, *supra* note 5.

⁹ Nat'l Inst. of Environmental Health Sciences, *supra* note 2, at 11, 25.

¹⁰ Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1, at 3, 9.

governments, nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce, labor unions, and other entities have implemented RFW initiatives to support employers in adopting RFW policies.¹¹

B. State RFW Initiatives

In 2018, New Hampshire's Office of the Governor launched [RFW New Hampshire](#) “to promote individual wellness by creating work environments that further mental and physical well-being of employees; proactively preventing substance misuse[;] and supporting recovery from [SUDs] in the workplace and community.”¹² New Hampshire employers seeking to become certified RFWs apply for designation and receive consultation from a RFW Advisor, who helps them review their current policies and practices and map out steps the organization will take to become recovery friendly. Designated RFWs have access to various resources through the initiative, including mental health and SUD educational materials, trainings, and other services. Additionally, designated RFWs can market themselves using the initiative's RFW logo.¹³ As of November 2023, New Hampshire RFW had grown to more than 350 participating businesses with over 95,000 employees.¹⁴

New Hampshire also launched the RFW Multistate Community of Practice, a networking and resource-sharing group through which representatives of states, local governments, and other entities implementing or interested in learning about RFW initiatives communicate through an e-mail list and meet several times per year through a web-based collaboration hub to collaborate, share best practices, and discuss challenges and solutions.¹⁵ In December 2023, New Hampshire transferred the RFW Multistate Community of Practice to the Institute. State RFW initiatives currently vary in their programming and degree of implementation.¹⁶ Additionally, they might not be called recovery-friendly or recovery-ready workplace initiatives. Examples of such efforts include Kentucky's Transformational Employment Program and Indiana's Workforce Recovery Program. Some states and counties have replicated or adapted the RFW New Hampshire model, in some cases using the branding developed by New Hampshire, which the state freely makes available to organizations in other states.¹⁷ As of May 2024, statewide programs promoting RFW are being planned or implemented in 28 states.¹⁸

¹¹ *Id.* at 9-10.

¹² State of New Hampshire, *NH Governor's Recovery Friendly Workplace* 1, 1 (2019), <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/sites/default/files/2020-07/RFW%20Orientation%20Packet.pdf#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20the%20NH%20Governor's%20Recovery,substance%20use%20disorders%20in%20the%20workplace%20and>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ The White House, *Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Actions to Support Recovery-Ready Workplaces and Strengthen Our Economy* (Nov. 9, 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/11/09/biden-harris-administration-announces-new-actions-to-support-recovery-ready-workplaces-and-strengthen-our-economy/>.

¹⁵ Recovery Friendly Workplace, *New Hampshire*, <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/otherstates> (last visited May 14, 2024).

¹⁶ Colorado Consortium, *The Colorado Recovery Friendly Workplace Toolkit* 1, 8 (Aug. 2022), <https://corxconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/Colorado-Recovery-Friendly-Workplace-Toolkit-2022.pdf>.

¹⁷ Interview with Eliza Zarka, Dir. of State Engagement, Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute (May 15, 2024).

¹⁸ National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute, *Recovery Friendly Workplace Engagement by State*.

C. Federal RFW Initiatives

At the federal level, the President's 2022 National Drug Control Strategy (the Strategy) identified supporting recovery as a key component of a long-term response to SUDs and the national overdose crisis.¹⁹ Among the actions the Strategy identifies to achieve this goal are cross-agency federal government efforts to expand employment opportunities for people in recovery and to promote the adoption of recovery ready workplace (RRW) policies in both private and public sector workplaces.²⁰ In support of this effort, the White House convened the Federal Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup (Federal IWG) through which it developed an RRW Toolkit and the RRW Resource Hub, an online resource hosted by the U.S. Department of Labor.²¹

D. The National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute

GRI has played an instrumental role in educating policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders in support of people in recovery. The Foundation's work has centered almost exclusively on SUD recovery for decades. In recent years, GRI has worked with ONDCP and hosted Recovery Research Summits in 2020 and 2022 to develop strategies for advancing recovery research. The summits brought together federal leadership, national recovery organizations, researchers focused on recovery, and business and union leaders.

To help advance the White House goal of a recovery friendly nation, the Institute is supporting and strengthening the already active grassroots movement of employers, advocates, elected officials, and service providers who have joined forces to promote recovery in the workplace. Engaging major national business and professional associations and multinational corporations is a top priority for the Institute.

In consultation with stakeholders, the Institute is promoting organizational cultural change through the following activities:

- Articulating a concise definition of RFW;
- Developing and promoting the use of uniform criteria for RFW certification;
- Implementing a national RFW certification program for multistate and multinational employers;
- Working to ensure that every state has an organization dedicated to promoting RFW programs and certifying employers;
- Implementing an RFW accreditation program for consultants who will advise workplaces as they build and manage their RFW initiatives;
- Leveraging and disseminating existing research and evidence-based practices;
- Evaluating emerging evidence to improve practices;

¹⁹ The White House, Off. of Nat'l Drug Control Pol'y, *National Drug Control Policy* 1, 7 (Apr. 21, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf>.

²⁰ RRW is synonymous with RFW. Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1 at 40.

²¹ Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1; U.S. Dep't. of Labor, Employment and Training Admin., *Recovery-Ready Workplace Resource Hub*, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub> (last visited May 15, 2024).

- Supporting RFW research and data collection;
- Curating an RFW resource library to complement the federal RRW Resource Hub;
- Serving as a convenor of RFW stakeholders across public and private sectors; and
- Working to ensure that RFW efforts promote recovery capital development at the individual and organizational levels and embrace and support diverse recovery experiences and pathways.

More information on the Institute’s planned activities for 2024 and beyond can be found at [RFWInstitute.org](https://www.rfwinstitute.org).

IV. Benefits of RFWs

The economic and human costs of SUD are substantial. SAMHSA estimates that 44 million Americans aged 18 and older had an SUD in 2021 (i.e., either a drug use disorder or alcohol use disorder, or both).²² More than 60 percent (26.9 million) of such individuals were employed, the vast majority (20.9 million) of whom worked full time.²³ Additionally, an estimated 23 million employed Americans aged 18 and older reported illicit drug use during the past month,²⁴ while nearly 40 million reported binge alcohol use and 10.8 million reported heavy alcohol use during the past month in 2021.²⁵

Problematic substance use and SUDs have significant impacts on workplaces and the U.S. economy. Active SUDs among workers are associated with absenteeism, productivity loss, increased disability and turnover, higher health care costs, and occupational injuries.²⁶ According to a 2017 study, the excess cost to employers for each employee with an untreated SUD ranged from \$2,600 to \$13,000 annually, depending on the industry.²⁷ With respect to the U.S. economy more broadly, a 2021 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that opioid use disorder and fatal opioid poisonings alone cost the U.S. economy \$1.02 trillion in 2017.²⁸ These costs were associated with health care and criminal justice system involvement, productivity losses, reduced quality of life, and increased mortality.²⁹ Today, that figure is likely

²² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Servs. Admin, *2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health Detailed Tables* (Oct. 2022) at Table 5.1A, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-nsduh-detailed-tables>.

²³ *Id.* at Table 5.7A.

²⁴ *Id.* at Table 1.25A.

²⁵ *Id.* at Tables 2.28A and 2.29A.

²⁶ Michael Frone et al., *Workplace Supported Recovery from Substance Use Disorders: Defining the Construct, Developing a Model, and Proposing an Agenda for Future Research*, 6 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SCIENCE 475-511, n. 2 (Dec. 2022); Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1.

²⁷ Eric Goplerud et al., *A Substance Use Cost Calculator for US Employers with an Emphasis on Prescription Pain Medication Misuse*, 59 J. OF OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE 1063, 1070 (Nov. 2017).

²⁸ Curtis Florence et al., *The Economic Burden of Opioid Use Disorder and Fatal Opioid Overdose in the United States*, 218 DRUG AND ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE 1, 1 (2021). The \$1.02 trillion figure excludes the economic costs of the misuse of alcohol and other drugs. Federal government statistics on the economic burden of alcohol misuse in the U.S. rely on out-of-date data from 2010. Nat’l Inst. on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, *Economic Burden of Alcohol Misuse in the United States* (2023), <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/economic-burden-alcohol-misuse-united-states>.

²⁹ Curtis Florence et al., *supra* note 28, at 2-3.

over \$1.02 trillion given that rates of opioid-involved drug poisonings and use of non-opioid substances have increased in the years following CDC’s study.³⁰

These statistics paint a dire outlook. Indeed, narratives around substance use often center on the negative consequences of SUDs, such as fatal drug poisonings and crime; however, this viewpoint obscures the fact that most Americans with an SUD eventually live in recovery.³¹ A 2017 study found that around nine percent of Americans (roughly 22.3 million people) live in recovery from an SUD.³² This figure is corroborated by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) which arrived at a similar estimate using a different methodology, finding that, in 2022, an estimated 21.3 million American adults identified as “in recovery” or as “recovered” from an SUD.³³ About 13.3 million U.S. workers report that they are in recovery or have recovered from a substance use problem.³⁴

In its November 2023 RRW Toolkit, the Federal IWG recommended that employers proactively adopt policies and practices to effectively address SUD in the workforce, assist those who misuse alcohol or other drugs or are otherwise at risk of developing an SUD, and support individuals in recovery.³⁵ The toolkit notes that “research suggests there is a substantial return on investment for companies that adopt recovery-[friendly] workplace policies” as such policies may increase productivity, lower health care costs, reduce turnover-related costs, and reduce substance-related incidents.³⁶

An analysis published in 2020 found that each employee in recovery from an SUD saved their employer an average of \$8,500 in annual costs related to absenteeism, productivity, health care, and workers’ compensation.³⁷ Additionally, the analysis found that employees in recovery can be strong, dependable members of an organization’s workforce, as workers in recovery missed nearly 14 fewer days each year compared to workers with an untreated SUD, and 3.6 fewer days than employees without an SUD. It also noted that workers in recovery tend to stay in their jobs longer, have fewer primary care visits, and are less likely to be hospitalized.³⁸

³⁰ See Nat’l Inst. of Environmental Health Sciences, *supra* note 2, at 7, 10.

³¹ Christopher Jones et al., *Prevalence and Correlates of Ever Having a Substance Use Problem and Substance Use Recovery Status Among Adults in the United States*, 214 DRUG AND ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE 1, 5 (Sept. 2020); Brian Mann, *There is Life After Addiction*, NPR (Jan. 15, 2022, 7:00 AM ET), <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/15/1071282194/addiction-substance-recovery-treatment>.

³² John Kelly et al., *Prevalence and Pathways of Recovery from Drug and Alcohol Problems in the United States Population: Implications for Practice, Research, and Policy*, 181 DRUG AND ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE 162-69, n. 7 (Dec. 2017).

³³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Servs. Admin., *2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health Detailed Tables* (Nov. 2023), at Table 8.43A, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-detailed-tables>.

³⁴ Michael Frone et al., *Workplace Supported Recovery: New NIOSH Research Addresses an Evolving Crisis*, Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention (Nov. 20, 2022), <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2022/11/30/workplace-supported-recovery/>.

³⁵ See Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1, at 3.

³⁶ *Id.* at 6-7.

³⁷ Nat’l Safety Council, *New Analysis: Employers Can Save Average of \$8,500 for Supporting Each Employee in Recovery from Substance Use Disorder* (Dec. 2, 2020), <https://www.norc.org/research/library/new-analysis--employers-stand-to-save-an-average-of--8-500-for-s.html>.

³⁸ *Id.*

In addition to the benefits for employers and employees described above, RFW policies and practices may also help improve worker well-being, expand the available workforce through increased hiring of people in recovery, reduce stigma associated with SUD, increase communication in the workplace, and build trust and loyalty within an organization.³⁹ Importantly, employers that adopt and publicly promote RFW policies and practices convey that they are good corporate citizens striving to help address SUDs and the national drug poisoning crisis.⁴⁰

V. Development of Consensus

To develop consensus on a standard RFW definition and establish the criteria for 2024 national RFW certification (“Certification Standards”), the Institute formed a Certification Working Group, whose members included multiple employees in recovery and individuals with the following backgrounds, among others:

- HR management professional,
- Corporate social responsibility manager,
- Behavioral science and resiliency researcher,
- RFW advocate,
- Co-founder of a Fortune 200 resource group for employees in recovery,
- Labor union representative,
- Co-chair of a statewide RFW employer group,
- Director of health and wellness benefits for a multinational manufacturer, and
- Representative of the federal government.

Certification Working Group members provided valuable feedback that informed the Institute’s RFW definition and Certification Standards.

To begin the process of developing the definition and standards, the Institute reviewed the RRW Resource Hub, RRW Toolkit, and the resources shared within the RFW Multistate Community of Practice. Next, the Institute examined state RFW definitions and researched literature on RFW programs and model business certification programs, such as the HRC Foundation’s [Corporate Equality Index](#), Disability:IN’s [Disability Equality Index](#), and Mental Health America’s [Bell Seal for Workplace Mental Health](#). It then drafted a preliminary RFW definition and Certification Standards and submitted a questionnaire to the Certification Working Group to solicit input on the proposed definition and standards. The Institute incorporated the Certification Working Group’s feedback into a second draft of the RFW definition and Certification Standards.

Following an additional round of review and feedback from the Certification Working Group, the Institute finalized the definition and Certification Standards and published this

³⁹ Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1, at 3-4.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 9.

document, which provides a mechanism for readers to propose edits or additions for future iterations of the national RFW certification criteria.

VI. RFW Certification Framework

A. National RFW Certification

The Institute will offer a national RFW certification to qualifying multistate or multinational commercial and not-for-profit employers. To be eligible for national certification, qualifying multistate or multinational employers must (1) be incorporated in the U.S.; and (2) have physical operations in two or more states; alternatively, they may (3) be a U.S. division or subsidiary of a foreign-based multinational employer that has U.S. employees.

With the exception of U.S. based divisions or subsidiaries described in item 3 above, the Institute will not certify employers based outside of the U.S. GRI's goal is to expand RFW certification to employers and worksites outside of the United States by launching a Global Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute in the future.

B. State RFW Certification

The Institute will certify qualifying multistate or multinational employers. The Institute will not certify employers operating in only one state. The Institute considers certification of single-state employers to be the province of statewide RFW certification organizations.

The Institute will collaborate with all 50 states and the District of Columbia to advance their statewide RFW organizations, which will provide training and technical support in addition to state certification. The Institute will also accredit qualifying RFW service providers, such as RFW educators and trainers, and work with states to align national and state certification and accreditation standards.

VII. RFW Definition

The Certification Working Group reached consensus on the following definition of an RFW:

A "Recovery Friendly Workplace" (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 Institute developed the first iteration of the definition above after thoroughly reviewing how state organizations and the Federal RRW Toolkit define or otherwise describe RFW, RRW, or similar terms. As explained below, these sources greatly influenced both the content and form of the consensus-based definition. In the discussion that follows, the Institute

does not intend to discount the utility of any other RFW definition or description used by other programs or entities.

RFW is a relatively new concept. To promote consistency and facilitate understanding, the Institute worked to develop a concise, clear, and accessible definition of an RFW. This definition identifies the overarching goal of an RFW but does not detail specific policies or practices organizations may adopt to achieve such goal. In contrast, the Federal IWG defines RRW to mean:

A workplace or employer that has adopted policies and practices that expand employment opportunities for people in or seeking recovery, respond to SUD as a health condition and foster SUD and recovery literacy across the organization, inform employees in recovery of their potential eligibility for reasonable accommodations, reduce the risk of substance misuse and SUD, including through education and steps to prevent injury in the workplace.⁴¹

This definition is detailed and informative but does not readily lend itself to dissemination.

Many state RFW programs concisely define RFW by referring to workplace culture. For example, New Hampshire defines RFW to mean “...a business that chooses to go above and beyond for its employees by creating a workplace culture that supports people in recovery from [SUD], as well as all those impacted by substance misuse.”⁴² States including Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Texas, use similar language to define RFW.⁴³

Additionally, state RFW programs and other entities also commonly refer to workplace environment when describing what an RFW is. For example, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and the National Safety Council each describe RFWs as workplaces that:

support their communities by recognizing recovery from [SUD] as a strength and by being willing to work intentionally with people in recovery. RFWs encourage a healthy and safe environment where employers, employees, and communities can collaborate to create positive change and eliminate barriers for those [impacted by addiction].⁴⁴

⁴¹ Fed. Recovery-Ready Workplace Interagency Workgroup, *supra* note 1, at 40.

⁴² State of New Hampshire, *supra* note 12.

⁴³ Recovery Friendly Workplace Missouri, *Become a Designated Recovery Friendly Workplace*, <https://recoveryfriendlymo.com/rfw-designation/> (last visited May 14, 2024); United Way of Missoula County, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <https://missoulaunitedway.org/frequently-asked-questions> (last visited May 14, 2024); Foundation for Recovery, *Nevada Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative: Employer Orientation* (2021), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DP2Yp8YOmkdH5pW0ytAMprhLaX2Tr4i/view>; Recovery Friendly Workplaces Pennsylvania, *Recovery Friendly Workplaces*, <https://recoveryfriendlypa.org/about/> (last visited May 14, 2024); Recovery Friendly Workplaces Texas, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <https://recoveryfriendlytexas.com/about/faq/> (last visited May 14, 2024).

⁴⁴ Recovery Friendly Workplace Illinois, *Recovery Friendly Workplaces*, <https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplaceil.org/> (last visited May 14, 2024); *see also* Nat'l Safety Council, *Opioids at*

Having been influenced by the work of others, the Institute chose to use “culture and work environment” in its definition. While there is no single definition for either term, workplace culture generally reflects the shared norms, values, attitudes, and practices that form a company’s identity and influence how decisions are made.⁴⁵ Work environment is distinct, but impacted by, workplace culture. Workplace environment refers to several different factors that characterize an employee’s work conditions, such as company culture, physical workspace, hours, and benefits.⁴⁶ As such, employers that implement policies and practices enumerated under the Certification Standards can positively influence workplace culture and environment for current and prospective employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, SUDs.

For recovery friendly policies and practices to have a meaningful impact, however, management and recovery program leaders must do more than establish them. Management and leadership must work together to effectively weave RFW principles into the employer’s employment practices, employee benefits, educational programming, and workplace culture. Management and leadership must also communicate policies to employees regularly to ensure awareness of them across the organization; monitor for consistent application; evaluate the extent to which policies achieve their intended goals; update policies and practices to reflect changes in the evidence base; and address any gaps or shortcomings identified during implementation.

The 2022 Workplace Recovery Survey identified compelling data that underscores the importance of taking actionable steps to ensure employees are aware of, and feel safe seeking, help for SUD and support for recovery at work. For example, the survey found that around half of employees would be willing to speak with a supervisor if they needed help with an SUD, and therefore, supervisors should be trained on communicating appropriately about SUDs. The survey also found fewer than one-third of employees knew that their health benefits included coverage for SUD treatment or recovery support, highlighting the need for organizations to educate employees at all levels about health benefits and other recovery resources through multiple communication channels.⁴⁷

RFW definitions and descriptions typically use broad language. The definitions set forth above, for example, use phrases such as “supports people in recovery from [SUD], as well as all those impacted by substance misuse” and “eliminate barriers for those impacted by addiction.” RFW Texas is slightly more detailed. It describes such beneficiaries as “people in or seeking

Work Employer Toolkit, <https://www.nsc.org/getmedia/3ded8f5b-32a2-4470-827e-e99eed6fe2d7/building-recovery-friendly-workplace.pdf.aspx> (last visited May 14, 2024); Recovery Friendly Workplaces Pennsylvania, *supra* note 43.

⁴⁵ See Belle Wong and Kelly Main, *What Is Company Culture? Definition & Development Strategies*, FORBES ADVISOR (Aug. 15, 2023, 7:22 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/company-culture/>.

⁴⁶ See Jennifer Herrity, *6 Different Work Environment Types (With Examples)*, INDEED (Apr. 18, 2024), <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/different-work-environment-types>.

⁴⁷ Fors Marsh, *New National Research from Fors Marsh Calls for Employers and Supervisors to Support Workers in Recovery* (Mar. 23, 2023), <https://www.forsmarsh.com/2023/03/23/new-national-research-from-fors-marsh-calls-for-employers-and-supervisors-to-support-workers-in-recovery/>.

recovery from substance use or mental health disorders, as well as those family members, loved ones, and community members also impacted.”⁴⁸

The Institute took a similar approach by broadly stating that RFWs are “supportive of current and prospective employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, substance use disorders.” Such language includes current and prospective employees with any of the following characteristics:

- In SUD recovery;
- Has or is at risk of SUD; and
- Has one or more loved ones who are in recovery, have SUD, or are at risk of SUD.

Finally, as noted above, many existing RFW definitions refer to SUD, substance misuse, or addiction, without reference to mental health disorders. Some others (e.g., RFW Texas) make an express reference to mental health disorders. Substance use and mental health disorders often co-occur. According to one estimate, approximately 40 percent of adults with an SUD also have a mental illness.⁴⁹ Substance use and other mental health disorders may be caused by overlapping factors, including genetic and epigenetic vulnerabilities, issues within similar areas of the brain, and environmental influences.⁵⁰ For example, individuals with an anxiety disorder who use alcohol to help manage their symptoms may be particularly prone to developing alcohol use disorder. For many individuals, the SUD recovery process involves addressing concurrent mental health disorders that may impact the individual’s wellness, cravings, emotional self-regulation, and behavioral control.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Recovery Friendly Workplaces Texas, *supra* note 43.

⁴⁹ Nat’l Inst. on Drug Abuse, *Comorbidity: Substance Use and Other Mental Disorders* (Aug. 15, 2018), <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/comorbidity/comorbidity-substance-use-other-mental-disorders-infographic>.

⁵⁰ Nat’l Inst. on Drug Abuse, *Why is There Comorbidity Between Substance Use Disorders and Mental Illnesses?* (Apr. 2020), <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/why-there-comorbidity-between-substance-use-disorders-mental-illnesses> (citing Eric Nestler, *Epigenetic Mechanisms of Drug Addiction*, 76 NEUROPHARMACOLOGY 259-68 (2014); Thomas Kelly and Dennis Daley, *Integrated Treatment of Substance Use and Psychiatric Disorders*, SOCIAL WORK IN PUB. HEALTH 388-406 (2013); Jose Pelayo-Terán, et al., *Gene-environment Interactions Underlying the Effect of Cannabis in First Episode Psychosis*, 18 CURRENT PHARMACEUTICAL DESIGN 5024-35 (2012); Ming Tsuang et al., *Genetics of Smoking and Depression*, 131 HUMAN GENETICS 905-15 (2012); Stephen Ross and Eric Peselow, *Co-occurring Psychotic and Addictive Disorders: Neurobiology and Diagnosis*, 35 CLINICAL NEUROPHARMACOLOGY 235-43 (2012); Leonardo Fontenelle et al., *Obsessive-compulsive Disorder, Impulse Control Disorders and Drug Addiction: Common Features and Potential Treatments*, 71 DRUGS 827-40 (2011); Magdalena Cerdá et al., *Genetic and Environmental Influences on Psychiatric Comorbidity: A Systematic Review*, 126 J. OF AFFECTIVE DISORDERS 14-38 (2010)).

⁵¹ See Nat’l Inst. on Drug Abuse, *Diagnosis and Treatment of Drug Abuse in Family Practice – American Family Physician Monograph* (Feb. 20, 2023), <https://archives.nida.nih.gov/publications/diagnosis-treatment-drug-abuse-in-family-practice-american-family-physician-monograph/assessment>; Am. Soc’y of Addiction Medicine, *supra* note 5; The CHIME model has been acknowledged as a framework for the optimal conditions for mental health recovery. The CHIME model includes five key elements: Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning, and Empowerment. Jasmine Hancock and Tania Perich, *Personal Recovery in Psychological Interventions for Bipolar Disorder: A Systematic Review*, 57 AUSTRALIAN PSYCHOLOGIST 215, 216 (2022) (citing Jannis Kraiss et al., *Exploring Factors Associated with Personal Recovery in Bipolar Disorder*, 94 PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY: THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE, 667-85 (2021); Mary Leamy et al., *Conceptual framework for personal recovery in mental health: Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis*, 199 BRITISH J. OF PSYCHIATRY 445-52 (2018); Barbara

The Certification Working Group did not reach consensus on whether to expressly include mental health (i.e., “substance use and mental health disorders”) in the definition of RFW. Given the lack of consensus, the Institute did not include mental health in the definition at this time. The Institute nonetheless acknowledges that achieving recovery entails addressing mental health, and the 2024 national RFW certification criteria reflect the fact that appropriate employer support for employees in recovery includes prioritizing employees’ mental health.

VIII. 2024 National RFW Certification

A. Categories and Criteria

The Certification Working Group reached consensus on national RFW certification criteria set forth under four categories: 1) Culture; 2) Hiring, Retention, and Advancement; 3) Benefits; and 4) Education and Awareness. The Institute’s Council on Certification will rate eligible applicants for RFW certification on a scale from 0 to 100 with points awarded for satisfying each criterion. Applicants that earn points under each of the four categories and score 40 points or higher will be certified.

Culture (25 points available)

- **RFW Policy:** The employer has instituted a written RFW statement or policy affirming that:
 - SUDs are treatable health conditions, comparable to cancer or diabetes;
 - SUD recovery is common;
 - Federal law requires health insurance coverage of substance use and mental health disorders to be in parity with coverage of physical health conditions, and the employer asserts its best efforts to comply with this requirement; and
 - Under federal law, workers with SUDs may be protected against discrimination and harassment at work related to their condition, and proactively self-identifying or seeking help for an SUD is encouraged and will not lead to punitive action. (5)
- **Resource Group:** The employer provides space for recovery-focused meetings and recognizes a recovery-focused employee resource group that includes the participation of an employee or consultant who holds a peer recovery support specialist, professional recovery coach, or similar Institute-recognized SUD-related certification. (5)
- **Substance-Free Options:** If alcohol is present during work functions, the employer provides non-alcoholic beverages (e.g., mocktails) and publicizes that those options are available. (5)
- **Highly Placed Ally:** The employer has a senior executive (within two levels of the CEO) who is a visible ally for the recovery community. (5)

Mezes et al., *Psychological Factors in Personal and Clinical Recovery in Bipolar Disorder*, 280 J. OF AFFECTIVE DISORDERS 326-37 (2021); Vicki Shanks et al., *Measures of Personal Recovery: A Systematic Review*, 64 PSYCHIATRIC SERS. 974-80 (2013). RFWs promote and advance the five CHIME elements; therefore, in addition to supporting SUD recovery, RFWs provide conditions favorable to mental health more broadly.

- **Charitable Support:** The employer has, during the prior 12 months, provided significant financial or in-kind support to an external charitable organization or event supporting people in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, SUDs. (5)

Hiring, Retention, and Advancement (30 points available)

- **Fair Chance Hiring:** In accordance with the laws that govern its workplaces, the employer permits individuals with SUD-related criminal records or debt to compete for job opportunities. (10)
- **Contingent or Return-to-Work Agreement:** In the event of problematic substance use, a candidate or employee is offered screening, assessment, and conditional or continued employment under a contingent employment or return-to-work agreement. (10)
- **Proactive Recruiting:** The employer collaborates with third parties to recruit candidates in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, SUDs. (5)
- **Flexible Work:** The employer provides reasonable accommodations, such as flexible work options, to support employees' (and their families') health and wellness. (5)

Benefits (25 points available)

- **Credible Medical Guidelines:** Employee benefits include health insurance coverage of:
 - SUDs, including the use of *The ASAM Criteria* to inform placement and continuity of care decisions and coverage appeals; and
 - Mental health disorders, including the use of the Level of Care Utilization System for Psychiatric and Addiction Services (LOCUS) to inform placement and continuity of care decisions and coverage appeals. (10)
- **Reliable Health Insurance:** The employer verifies, at least annually, through a review of services, benefits utilization analysis, participant satisfaction survey, or other means, that under the employer's health plan:
 - Covered SUD and mental health treatment is available as directed by the participant's health care provider without administrative hassles or delays, such as prior authorization and step therapy;
 - SUD and mental health provider network adequacy is consistent with the federal and state network adequacy standards applicable to small business marketplace plans; and
 - Licensed providers who render covered services to plan participants receive timely payments based on market rates. (10)
- **No-Cost Assistance:** Employee benefits include access to an SUD recovery-informed service provider, such as an employee assistance program (EAP) or member assistance program (MAP), that provides no-cost aid to employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, SUDs. (5)

Education and Awareness (20 points available)

- **Employee Awareness:** The employer or recovery program leader communicates with employees during orientation and at least twice annually thereafter about:
 - The employer's RFW statement or policy;
 - The availability of the SUD recovery-informed service provider, such as an EAP or MAP, to provide no-cost aid to employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, SUDs;
 - Workplace recovery support services, recovery-focused employee resource groups, or other resources for employees in recovery from, or otherwise affected by, SUDs;
 - Employee health insurance coverage of substance use and mental health disorder benefits in parity with physical health benefits; and
 - The availability of SUD treatment and recovery support services in communities surrounding the employer's workplaces and via telehealth. (10)
- **Supervisor Education:** At least one human resources staff member and all supervisors have participated in education on:
 - SUDs as treatable health conditions from which personal recovery is common;
 - Overcoming SUD stigma and communicating with compassion and appropriate language; and
 - The rights of employees and obligations of employers under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Additionally, the aforementioned education is available to all employees. (5)

- **Naloxone Access:** Two or more employees in each of the employer's workplaces are trained annually on overdose prevention and reversal, such training is available to all employees, and naloxone is readily accessible at all workplaces. (5)

For more detailed information on some of the RFW evidence base and best practices that informed the development of these Certification Standards, please refer to the [Federal RRW Toolkit](#) and Recovery Friendly Hamilton County's [website](#) and [User Manual](#).

B. Scoring

The Institute's Council on Certification will rate eligible applicants for RFW certification on a scale from 0 to 100 with points awarded for satisfying each criterion.⁵² Applicants that earn points under each of the four categories and score 40 points or higher will be certified. Given the impracticality of an all-inclusive certification checklist, actions not included in the checklist that the Council on Certification deems recovery friendly will also count toward RFW certification. The Council on Certification will provide applicants with feedback and transparency on how their scores were calculated, and if an eligible applicant does not qualify for national certification, the Council on Certification will recommend actions the applicant may consider taking to qualify for certification.

⁵² Members of the Council on Certification will be disclosed on the Institute's website (rfwinstitute.org).

C. Benefits of Obtaining National RFW Certification in 2024

Nationally certified RFWs can distinguish themselves as an employer of choice in the marketplace by signaling to prospective and current employees, investors, customers, and the broader community that they view recovery as a positive attribute in employees; aim to reduce stigma related to SUDs; and desire to provide welcoming, safe, supportive, and productive workplaces.

Benefits of national certification in 2024 include:

- Use of the Institute's nationally certified RFW logo as an emblem of distinction in the marketplace
- Listing among certified RFWs on National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute website
- Joint RFW certification news releases including quotes from Institute leadership to support company messaging campaigns
- Institute social media announcement of company certification
- Digital marketing support, including sample social media posts and images
- Inclusion in the Institute's 2024 Recovery Month Report to the President of the United States
- Invitation to participate in the Institute's Certified RFW Council

D. Application Process for National RFW Certification

Eligible entities seeking national RFW certification will complete an application and submit supporting documentation. Institute staff will review applications and supporting documents to ensure that they are complete and the organization applying for certification is eligible. Complete applications for eligible entities will then be evaluated by the Institute's Council on Certification, a committee of volunteers with experience in RFW research, advocacy, education, and program management. The Council on Certification will determine whether an applicant qualifies for national certification based on the RFW certification criteria, as described in Section VIII(A) above.

In 2024, the Institute will certify qualifying multistate or multinational employers for a period of one year. If an eligible applicant does not qualify for national certification, the Council on Certification will recommend actions the applicant may consider taking to qualify for certification. Nationally certified employers may seek recertification at the end of each certification term through an abbreviated recertification process.

E. Fees

Applicants for national RFW certification will pay a non-refundable processing fee for new and recertification applications. Fees will be based on an applicant's number of employees.⁵³

F. Continuous Improvement

The Institute anticipates that the scope and rigor of the Certification Standards will increase in the future as new evidence emerges and RFW employers and employees share their experiences and feedback.

Interested persons may propose changes to future iterations of the Certification Standards by emailing certification@rfwinst.org. While not required, individuals who offer feedback on the criteria are encouraged to include a brief rationale and citations to support their proposed changes to the criteria. Doing so will assist the Institute in its consideration of each proposal.

At least once per year, the Institute will review the certification criteria and make updates, as necessary, to reflect changes in the RFW landscape, lessons learned, and feedback received.

IX. Conclusion

Employment plays a key role in recovery from SUDs, as it can provide individuals with a sense of purpose, economic and social stability, a supportive social network, and the resources to participate more fully in the community. As such, employers have a tremendous opportunity to support people in recovery and strengthen their communities and their organizations through investment in recovery friendly policies and practices. By becoming a nationally certified RFW, employers may experience a beneficial return on their investments due to higher employee productivity, lower health care and turnover-related costs, and fewer substance-related accidents. Simultaneously, they may distinguish themselves in the marketplace as good corporate citizens that desire to provide supportive and productive workplaces.

The Institute would like, once again, to thank the Certification Working Group participants for their efforts in building consensus on a standard RFW definition and the Certification Standards. Given that the RFW is a relatively new concept, and this document sets forth the very first consensus-based RFW definition and national certification criteria, the Institute reiterates its commitment to enhancing these standards over time as new evidence emerges, RFW employers and employees share their experiences, and readers of this document provide their feedback.

⁵³ This sliding fee schedule is consistent with multiple other business certifying organizations. For example, each of more than 20 regional affiliates of the National Minority Supplier Development Council uses a similar sliding fee scale. *See, e.g.*, Western Regional Minority Supplier Development Council, *Minority Businesses*, <https://wrmsdc.org/certified-mbe/> (last visited May 14, 2024); *see also* Women's Bus. Enterprise Nat'l Council, *Certification*, <https://www.wbenc.org/certification/#cost> (last visited May 14, 2024).

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