



The 2025 Council Market Outlook (Non-Cannabis) Working Group – Recommendations

Relevant Statute: [Public Act 24-166 Sec.43. – Referring to any other matter the working group deems relevant for the purposes of this section.](#)

Common Themes Addressed by Subcommittee Members:

- 1. Community-Centered Workforce Development**
 - a. Balance industry-driven to neighborhood-centered approaches.
 - b. Emphasis on creating pathways for individuals in Disproportionately Impacted Areas (DIAs).
 - c. Need for long-term wrap-around support beyond short-term programs.
 - d. Industry needs vary by region (ex. manufacturing in southeast, finance in southwest, insurance and healthcare in central, etc.) with retail and restaurant/hospitality potentially cutting across all regions.
- 2. Entrepreneurship Growth**
 - a. Uptick in post-COVID service-based startups throughout Connecticut, with specific discussion of growth in Bridgeport area.
 - b. Micro-grants and support for reentry and DIA populations to foster entrepreneurship.
- 3. Barriers to Employment and Financing**
 - a. Reentry populations face challenges due to background checks despite being loyal workers.
 - b. Lack of financial literacy and expired LLCs hinder access to loans and financing.
- 4. Youth Engagement**
 - a. Internship programs connecting high school students with local businesses are in development via statewide ReadyCT Career Connect program and other local programming.
 - b. Practical work experience is seen as a key component for workforce readiness.
- 5. Community Trust and Awareness**
 - a. Skepticism among community members toward external organizations.
 - b. Need to clearly define target audiences and communicate program benefits.
 - c. Importance of identifying gaps and testing initiatives based on best practices.

Recommendations based on Common Themes and Relevant Statute:

1. Develop Long-Term Workforce Support

- a. Create programs that combine short-term training (e.g., 12-week bursts) with ongoing mentorship and career navigation.
- b. Include wrap-around services such as childcare, transportation, and counseling.

2. Expand Entrepreneurship Support

- a. Launch micro-grant programs and financial literacy workshops for DIA and reentry populations.
- b. Provide technical assistance for maintaining LLCs and qualifying for financing.

3. Strengthen Reentry Employment Pathways

- a. Educate employers on fair-chance hiring practices to reduce barriers caused by background checks.
- b. Partner with local businesses to create dedicated reentry employment programs.

4. Scale Youth Internship Initiatives

- a. Increase the weight work-based learning carries as part of the high school scorecard index to encourage K-12 career exploration.
- b. Incentivize via funding (ex. school construction funds) DIA high school career pathway programs with internships as part of the curriculum.
- c. Integrate these programs with workforce boards for sustainability.

5. Build Community Trust

- a. Engage community leaders and organizations in co-designing programs.
- b. Conduct listening sessions to identify further gaps and tailor solutions to local needs.
- c. Use transparent communication and success stories to reduce skepticism.

