

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP BY EXONEREES GUIDE FOR NGOS

Integrating exonerees into leadership and staff roles can transform advocacy work, deepen organizational impact, and support the healing and empowerment of those most affected.

RETHINK RECRUITMENT AND ONBOARDING

- Use flexible hiring criteria that value lived experience equally with credentials.
- Develop clear, supportive onboarding that explains roles, structures, and expectations.
- Assign a mentor or peer guide during the onboarding process.

Why does it matter?

Many exonerees may not have traditional resumes or formal work experience due to years lost to incarceration, but they bring unique skills, insight, and leadership capacity.

BUILD TRAUMA-INFORMED WORKPLACES

Why does it matter?

Wrongful conviction is a traumatic experience. Exonerees may suffer from PTSD, anxiety, or health issues related to their incarceration. A trauma-informed approach supports a safe and sustainable work environment.

- Plan flexibility around scheduling and workload.
- Offer access to mental health resources or peer support.
- Ensure a culture of respect, consent, autonomy and dignity.

CENTER DIGNITY AND SELF-DETERMINATION



Ask exonerees what work they want to do and support their goals.

Recognize individual skills beyond their incarceration stories



Assign only “lived experience” roles without room for growth or leadership.

Why does it matter?

Empowering exonerees means allowing them to define their roles, interests, and boundaries, not assigning them based solely on their experiences.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP BY EXONEREES GUIDE FOR NGOS

FOSTER SHARED LEADERSHIP AND INCLUSION

- Include exonerees on your board of directors.
- Involve exonerees in high-level discussions/decisions.
- Each exoneree is unique, so don't expect all exonerees to lead the same way.

Why does it matter?

Inclusion isn't just about hiring, it's about building shared power at every level of the organization.

CREATE SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACES

Why does it matter?

Exonerees may need support navigating systems, technology, or workplace norms. Especially if they were incarcerated for decades.

- Provide space to build confidence in a professional setting.
- Don't interpret unfamiliarity with norms as lack of ability.
- Be patient and understanding of unique challenges faced.

No need to start from scratch. Learn from organizations that have successfully integrated exoneree leadership.

Reach out to organisations like
www.witnesstoinnocence.org
for guidance, resources, and best practices.

Centering exonerees in organizational leadership is not just right, it's essential for building credible, effective, and just movements. When those most impacted lead the way, real change becomes possible.