

Since its establishment in 2014, VOAN (Vincentian Ohio Action Network) has worked toward fostering a culture of leadership and civic engagement among communities that experience financial hardship and marginalization. With a foundational commitment to addressing various root causes of poverty, VOAN has empowered these communities to organize and come to the table with policymakers on issues that directly impact their lives. In 2017, VOAN launched the Accompanying Returning Citizens With Hope” (ARCH) project which would become a fully functioning entity and d.b.a. managed under the 501(c)(3) of VOAN.

This proposal outlines ARCH’s plan to expand its reentry work to focus on incarcerated women obtaining trade credentials through the Construction Service Program at the Ohio Reformatory for Women (ORW). Additionally, ARCH is initiating the “Reentry Solar Workforce Training Initiative” (RWT) to provide justice-involved women with employment opportunities in the green energy field through Impact Solar, a collaboration between Columbus Partnership and Community Renewable Energy. WANTO funds would be utilized for reentry planning, building employer relationships, housing assistance, case management, outcome tracking, collaboration building, and program documentation. ARCH envisions RWT as a proof of concept that could be replicated in other Ohio prisons. The organization has partnered with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association (MREA) to provide solar panel technology training, which is already supported by staff within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) at ORW.

While solar workforce training exists in Central Ohio, ARCH would be the first organization to offer a pre-release solar class for incarcerated women, wraparound services, and

additional training or licensure upon release. The Impact Solar project is expected to create 600 local jobs and generate \$60 million in payroll. With successful implementation and expansion into multiple prisons and correctional facilities, job opportunities for graduates are projected to increase significantly. Graduates will be prepared for full-time solar panel installation jobs paying between \$25 and \$28 per hour, surpassing Ohio's minimum wage of \$10 per hour.

The initiative aims to achieve housing stability, poverty reduction, and diversification of the solar power industry by providing second-chance employment opportunities to BIPOC women disproportionately affected by the justice system. WANTO funds would also support the sustainability of the solar training initiative through a “train the trainer” program. Three individuals would undergo rigorous training through MREA to become certified solar technology instructors. ARCH could then conduct its own pre-release training and generate revenue by deploying trainers to other nonprofits seeking to support marginalized individuals in the solar and green energy sector.

ARCH ensures comprehensive support for returning citizens through its range of wraparound services, enabling them to excel as Experienced Solar Panel Installers or NABCEP-certified trainers. In January 2023, ARCH opened an eight-bedroom transitional house providing trauma-informed linkages to behavioral healthcare, peer support, financial literacy, workforce development, harm reduction training, and connections to community partners and resources. The organization aims to expand its transitional housing efforts by collaborating with Scioto Properties, a real estate solutions provider specializing in housing for populations with special needs. ARCH recognizes the heightened risk of recidivism among reentering women due to substance use, mental health challenges, and trauma history. Their housing options cater to women assuming custody of children, those in need of intensive case management, and those ready for longer-term housing as their employment and emotional well-being stabilize.