

GARDEN OF HOPE INTERNATIONAL

WHITE PAPER

Beyond Beadwork

A Value-Creation Framework for Employment Programs in Frontline Human-Service Organizations

Baibin (Leon) Yin

Founder & President, Garden of Hope International, Inc.

Shengxi Jin

Co-Founder & Treasurer, Garden of Hope International, Inc.

Pensacola, Florida

2026

Contents

Executive Summary..... 3

1. The Problem: One Product, Four Jobs It Can't Do.....3

2. The Value-Creation Reform Framework.....4

3. Evidence From the Field.....5

4. A Practical Roadmap: Seven Steps..... 6

5. Where This Framework Applies — and Where It Doesn't.....7

About Garden of Hope International, Inc..... 7

Sources & Further Reading..... 7

Executive Summary

Frontline human-service organizations — those serving people returning from incarceration, experiencing homelessness, or recovering from addiction — routinely turn to simple craft work (beadwork, knitting, basic assembly) as a source of both therapy and income. This white paper argues that this default choice rests on a hidden analytical error: it asks one activity to deliver four different kinds of value — therapeutic, training, market, and mission-financing — that were never designed to travel together.

When these four values are collapsed into one product, a predictable and self-reinforcing cycle follows: low-value products cannot command real prices, real prices cannot support real wages, and thin wages cannot support the year-plus, failure-tolerant support that reintegration actually requires. The organization ends up needing donor sympathy to sell its product and permanent subsidy to keep its participants employed — a treadmill, not a pathway.

Drawing on more than a decade of direct operating experience in China and long-term observation of a parallel model in South Korea, this paper proposes an alternative sequence: build genuine market value first, convert the resulting operating contribution into unrestricted "mission space," and use that space to regulate the pace at which ordinary life's obligations return to a participant — a process we call responsibility buffering. The paper closes with a seven-step implementation roadmap that boards, funders, and program staff can use to evaluate or redesign an employment program.

This is a practitioner's framework, grounded in operating records rather than a controlled study. It is offered to funders, partner agencies, and fellow frontline organizations as a tool for asking better questions about employment programming — not as a proven formula.

1. The Problem: One Product, Four Jobs It Can't Do

Across social-welfare fairs, nonprofit exhibitions, and assistance organizations in China, South Korea, and the United States, the same product keeps appearing: beaded jewelry, knitted goods, small decorative crafts, displayed beside a story of hardship. This is understandable — these tasks require little startup capital, can be taught quickly, and produce a visible sign of completion. They can genuinely help someone rebuild concentration, routine, and confidence.

The problem is not that these activities are worthless. The problem is that they are quietly asked to do four different jobs at once:

Value	What it does	The test
Therapeutic	Stabilizes emotion, rebuilds routine, creates a sense of accomplishment	Does it help the person recover basic function?
Training	Builds punctuality, task completion, ability to accept responsibility	Does it prepare the person for a harder next stage?
Market	Solves a real customer problem through quality, design, or reliability	Would a stranger still buy it without knowing the maker's story?

Mission-financing	Leaves a real surplus after materials, wages, and overhead are paid	Does repeated trade generate money the mission can actually use?
-------------------	---	--

An activity can be excellent therapy and terrible business at the same time. Pride in making something is real; it is not evidence of market demand. When the four values are collapsed into one craft table, a predictable cycle sets in:

Low-value product → weak, unstable pricing → low wages and narrow jobs → no real skill or responsibility progression → the person stays classified as "permanently vulnerable" → the product becomes even more dependent on sympathy to sell.

This cycle hurts organizations as much as participants. Without real operating surplus, it becomes almost impossible to retain the product developers, salespeople, and case managers a good program actually needs — so low pay and staff burnout get relabeled as "sacrifice," when they are really symptoms of a product that was never built to carry the weight placed on it.

None of this is an argument against craft activity as therapy or as a first, temporary task. It is an argument against letting a participant's easiest first task quietly define their wage, their job, and their long-term future.

2. The Value-Creation Reform Framework

The alternative is not "charge more for the same craft table." It is a sequence: build real market value, convert the resulting surplus into discretionary capacity, and use that capacity to pace how quickly ordinary responsibilities return to someone who is still rebuilding the ability to carry them.

2.1 A genuine price premium — four conditions

A product earns a real premium — not a donation dressed up as a sale — when it meets four conditions:

1. Relative price space. The offering can command a higher price than a low-end substitute because customers see a real, defensible difference.
2. Positive contribution after full cost. Materials, quality control, delivery, management, and fair wages are all paid before anything counts as a surplus.
3. Purchase not dependent on sympathy. Customers have a reason to buy — and buy again — even if they never learn the maker's story.
4. Durable mission contribution. Over time, the surplus becomes an ongoing resource for the mission, not a one-time ceremonial sale.

A high price with no repeat business, unreliable fulfillment, or no real margin does not qualify. Neither does a product whose main appeal is the customer's desire to help someone visibly disadvantaged. Gross sales are not mission finance — a venture can ring up revenue while quietly underpaying workers or absorbing unpaid volunteer labor, and still generate nothing the mission can actually use.

2.2 Mission space: capacity, not just more income

Restricted grants specify who qualifies, what costs are allowed, and how success is measured — necessary for accountability, but often useless exactly when the real barrier sits outside the budget category. A governed operating surplus works differently: it can become mission space, the organization's discretionary capacity to respond to the person in front of it rather than the average case a grant was written for. Mission space has three parts:

- Financial space — unrestricted funds for wages, transportation, ID recovery, emergency housing, legal help, or debt crises.
- Temporal space — staff time for training, recovery, follow-up, and crisis response.
- Decision space — the authority to vary support around the real person instead of a fixed program category.

An unrestricted dollar only becomes mission space when governance actually makes it available to the frontline. Money absorbed into unrelated overhead never becomes mission space at all, no matter how it was earned.

2.3 Responsibility buffering: the bridge to reintegration

Getting a job is not the end of reintegration. Rent, transportation, debt, family obligations, stigma, and workplace expectations often return all at once, while a person's actual capacity to handle them returns gradually. We call this gap responsibility shock. Responsibility buffering is the deliberate use of wages, progressive job roles, crisis adjustment, ongoing follow-up, and a credible path back after an initial failure — to regulate the pace at which that gap closes.

Put together, the full sequence is more specific than "earn more, help more":

Real market value creates price and profit space → profit space is governed into mission space → mission space allows the organization to pace the return of responsibility → responsibility buffering improves the odds that a job, a home, and a relationship actually hold.

3. Evidence From the Field

This framework is not a hypothesis built in the abstract. It is drawn from direct operating experience in China and long-term observation of a parallel model in South Korea.

3.1 Yilingquan (Eylin Spring) — Beijing, China

Yilingquan was a lunch restaurant built inside a Chinese social enterprise that had no charitable fundraising authority and so had to fund its mission entirely through trade. Its opening question was never "will customers help a disadvantaged group?" It was "will customers pay more for a healthier, more transparent, reliably delivered work lunch?"

- The first-day trial menu never mentioned the organization's social mission — only ingredient standards, hygiene procedure, and price (RMB 10–18).

- Ordinary nearby lunches ran about RMB 6–7 and branded fast food about RMB 10; Yilinquan entered above that segment on food quality alone.
- The restaurant used a distinctive "naked cooking" method — no heavy seasoning to mask ingredient quality — which raised, rather than lowered, the operating discipline required.
- A salary-day meal voucher (RMB 12 and RMB 15 denominations) let young office workers prepay a month of lunches on payday — solving a cash-flow problem without discounting the product or stigmatizing the buyer.
- Iteration eventually narrowed operations to one concentrated weekday lunch service, freeing afternoons for staff training and mission-related work.

Yilinquan shows that a mission-driven organization with limited capital can state a premium-value hypothesis before entering the market, test it on ordinary customers, and redesign payment — not price — to expand access.

3.2 The Up — South Korea

The Up is a cookie enterprise operating inside a longer Korean tradition connecting Christian community, productive work, and addiction recovery. Observed continuously from its earliest workshop stage through the present, its development followed a clear arc:

Workshop-scale trial → product and market validation → brand and product-line development → standardized production → retail and bulk supply → recovery employment and mission support.

A 2025 report on the parent recovery system described eighty-two program cohorts, with The Up's cookie factory employing ten regular and thirty to forty part-time workers. The enterprise's public marketing leads with ingredient quality, consistent process, and fulfillment capacity for large orders — the mission is disclosed on the packaging, but it is not the reason a customer places the first order.

3.3 Qicheng — progressive employment for people with justice-system histories

A related initiative applied the same logic to a product supply chain rather than a single storefront, building progressive roles — from entry-level production tasks through to higher-responsibility positions — so that a participant's first task was a doorway into more responsibility, not a permanent ceiling.

None of these cases is a controlled study, and none should be read as proof of a specific profit margin or reintegration outcome. What they establish is more modest and, for a practitioner audience, more useful: that the sequence described in Section 2 is operationally achievable, has been sustained over years rather than months, and does not require large startup capital to begin.

4. A Practical Roadmap: Seven Steps

These steps translate the framework into a sequence a board, funder, or program director can use to evaluate or redesign an employment program.

1. Establish independent market value first. Ask: if the social story disappeared from the package, what would still make a customer want this?

2. Bring in professionals to raise the value ceiling. Participants in early recovery should not be expected to carry product development, branding, and sales alone — professional staff raise the ceiling participants step into, they don't replace participants.
3. Decompose the product into progressive roles. Entry-level tasks are legitimate only when they lead somewhere — describe in advance how skill, wage, and responsibility will grow.
4. Secure early customers and design payment before major investment. Look for businesses, anchor institutions, or public purchasers willing to pre-order; use prepayment or subscriptions to solve cash-flow problems without discounting the product.
5. Start small without choosing a low-value destination. Limited capital should shape the size of your first pilot — it should not force you into beadwork.
6. Govern the surplus into mission space. Decide in advance, at the board level, how operating contribution will fund wages, training, crisis response, and reserves — and watch for private benefit or mission drift.
7. Evaluate product, employment, and reintegration separately. Sales figures are not social outcomes, and headcount is not product competitiveness — track all three domains on their own terms.

5. Where This Framework Applies — and Where It Doesn't

Intellectual honesty matters more here than anywhere else in this paper. This framework works best where a genuine, differentiable product or service exists or can realistically be built, and where the organization can tolerate a multi-year runway before the venture is self-sustaining. It is not a quick fix for an organization facing an immediate cash crisis, and it does not replace the therapeutic or training value of simple activities for people who are not yet ready for market-facing work.

It should also not be mistaken for a claim that market value alone reintegrates anyone. The framework's own weakest links are its later stages: the connection between mission space and durable reintegration outcomes is a reasoned extension of this operating experience, not something these cases prove on their own. Any organization adopting this approach should track its own employment and reintegration outcomes rather than assume the results described here will repeat automatically.

About Garden of Hope International, Inc.

Garden of Hope International, Inc. is a Florida 501(c)(3) nonprofit headquartered in Pensacola, Florida, focused on vocational rehabilitation and social reintegration for returning citizens and people experiencing homelessness in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Its founder brings over twenty years of community-based practice in social reintegration and vocational rehabilitation across China, South Korea, and the United States.

Sources & Further Reading

This white paper draws on a longer academic manuscript, "Value-Creation Reform in Frontline Human-Service Organizations," which includes a full evidentiary framework, literature review, and complete citations. Selected sources engaged in that manuscript include:

- Dees, J. G. (1998). The meaning of "social entrepreneurship."
- Emerson, J. (2003). The blended value proposition.
- Alter, K. (2007). Social enterprise typology.
- Ebrahim, A., Battilana, J., & Mair, J. (2014). The governance of social enterprises: Mission drift and accountability challenges in hybrid organizations.
- Shon, J., Hamidullah, M. F., & McDougale, L. M. (2019). Nonprofit response to revenue diversification.
- Wiepking, P., & de Wit, A. (2024). Unrestricted funding and nonprofit capacities: Developing a conceptual model.

A copy of the full academic manuscript, with complete case documentation and an evidentiary appendix, is available on request.