

# TIME TO GROW:

20 ACTIONS STATES AND COMMUNITIES CAN TAKE  
TO CAPITALIZE ON SKILLED IMMIGRANT TALENT



**IMPRINT**

JULY 2012

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## *Time to Grow: 20 Actions States and Communities Can Take to Capitalize on Skilled Immigrant Talent*

### **An Economic Development Strategy**

States and regions with a better-educated workforce have a competitive advantage in the global economy. Demographic shifts and population mobility mean that talent retention and attraction must be a key focus of states' and communities' economic development efforts.

*Time to Grow* is a roadmap for how states and communities can capitalize on the talent already resident but not yet able to fully contribute. Incorporating skilled immigrants into the professional workforce – as workers and entrepreneurs – pays powerful dividends for individuals and the communities in which they reside.

### **Drawing on an Untapped Asset**

Skilled immigrants who are underemployed in low-level jobs represent an untapped asset. States and communities can capitalize on this human capital by making modest adjustments to existing infrastructure and policies. Smart implementation of recommended strategies can lead to strong fiscal and social returns.

### **Focused Recommendations**

*Time to Grow* provides distilled recommendations for policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners who want to address skilled immigrant issues in their communities. Recommendations fall into three categories: Filling the Leadership Gap, Remediating the Information Gap, and Closing the Access Gap.

#### **Select Recommendations:**

- Create online resources such as career and re-licensing roadmaps for skilled immigrants
- Convene stakeholders to raise visibility of skilled immigrant issues and coordinate activities
- Create a staff position for an expert liaison across state agencies
- Incorporate skilled immigrant issues in state policy agendas
- Implement baseline data collection and measurable performance outcomes for workforce services to skilled immigrants
- Provide professional development training on skilled immigrant issues to staff at One-Stops, community colleges, and refugee resettlement agencies

### **Experienced Advisors**

IMPRINT, the coalition that produced this report, is comprised of five nonprofits with deep expertise in skilled immigrant integration. IMPRINT members have a track record of strong outcomes in human capital advancement and economic development in nine locations nationwide.

**To learn how your state or organization can get involved, contact IMPRINT Director Jennifer Brennan:  
(847) 796-0076 | [jennifer@imprintproject.org](mailto:jennifer@imprintproject.org)**



*Time to Grow* draws on the deep knowledge of IMPRINT, a national coalition launched in 2011 by five nonprofit organizations with decades of collective expertise in skilled immigrant economic integration.

#### **IMPRINT:**

- Broadcasts promising practices to organizations that serve skilled immigrant populations
- Creates and disseminates resources
- Advocates for effective policies

#### **IMPRINT members:**

**Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education**

[www.cccie.org](http://www.cccie.org)

**Upwardly Global**

[www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org)

**Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians**

[www.welcomingcenter.org](http://www.welcomingcenter.org)

**Welcome Back Initiative**

[www.welcomebackinitiative.org](http://www.welcomebackinitiative.org)

**World Education Services**

[www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)

**IMPRINT**

## TIME TO GROW RECOMMENDATIONS



### Fill the Leadership Gap

1. Use the bully pulpit to change the discourse around skilled immigrant workforce development.
2. Put skilled immigrants on the state policy agenda.
3. Increase appropriations for skilled immigrant integration.
4. Fund and implement demonstration projects.
5. Create a specific staff position within state government to oversee initiatives for skilled immigrant workers.
6. Build capacity of the state Workforce Investment Board as a resource for skilled immigrant issues statewide.
7. Eliminate redundancies in professional licensing requirements.

### Remedy the Information Gap

8. Provide targeted professional development training and resource materials to adult educators, workforce development providers, and refugee resettlement staff.
9. Convene policymakers and service providers serving skilled immigrants to facilitate information sharing.
10. Convene periodic meetings between regulatory agency staff and advisors in community colleges or nonprofit organizations who are working with internationally-educated licensing candidates.
11. Encourage state professional licensing boards to adopt a standardized set of criteria by which they select credential evaluators, and publicize the list of approved evaluators
12. Ensure that information about economic development and small business services is made available to all aspiring entrepreneurs, including skilled immigrants.
13. Ensure that data collection processes for adult education and workforce programs capture relevant data on skilled immigrants.
14. Assess state human resources processes to collect data and take action on skilled immigrant representation as job candidates and as employees.

## Close the Access Gap

15. Affirm skilled immigrants' eligibility for existing and expanded educational and workforce services.
16. Ensure that sector-specific workforce development efforts draw on the talent pool of underutilized skilled immigrants in those fields.
17. Encourage use of a sliding scale for professional licensure application fees for all applicants, or establish a microloan fund for same.
18. Provide centralized access to online resources that will foster skilled immigrants' entry into the U.S. professional workforce.
19. Provide specialized English courses for skilled immigrants who have moved beyond "survival-level" English.
20. Eliminate unnecessary U.S. citizenship requirements for specific state jobs.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IMPRINT would like to offer special thanks to readers Audrey Singer of the Brookings Institution, Margie McHugh of the Migration Policy Institute, Ann Morse of the National Conference of State Legislatures, and Eva Millona and Shannon Erwin of MIRA Coalition for their thoughtful insights into *Time to Grow*. IMPRINT also gratefully recognizes the support of the J.M. Kaplan Fund and especially of Suzette Brooks Masters, the Migration Program Director at the Fund. The J.M. Kaplan Fund is a leader in the emergent field of skilled immigrant integration. A special thanks to David Seyferth, IMPRINT National Policy Intern, for publication layout.

## ABOUT IMPRINT

Founded in 2011, IMPRINT is a coalition of nonprofit organizations dedicated to advancing immigrant professional integration at the national, state, and local levels. It does so by raising awareness of the beneficial impact of investing in skilled immigrants; identifying strong, replicable field-tested practices; working with a variety of stakeholders; and promoting systemic change to advance these objectives. Through its member organizations, IMPRINT also supports the direct provision of career and re-credentialing services to workers. IMPRINT members have decades of combined experience in the field and a presence in 11 states.

IMPRINT members include:

- Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education [www.cccie.org](http://www.cccie.org)
- Upwardly Global [www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org)
- Welcome Back Initiative [www.welcomebackinitiative.org](http://www.welcomebackinitiative.org)
- Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians [www.welcomingcenter.org](http://www.welcomingcenter.org)
- World Education Services [www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)

The IMPRINT consortium is uniquely and strategically positioned to implement promising practices, measure outcomes, and contribute to the advent and improvement of programming that transform the professional outlook for skilled immigrants while meeting U.S. employer needs. Our member expertise encompasses:

- Direct services to skilled immigrants, including educational case management, job search training, and placement
- Resource development, including career guides, informational websites, training toolkits, and curricula
- Technical assistance and issue education
- Program development, evaluation, and original research
- Credential evaluation
- Sector work in healthcare and engineering
- Small business support for immigrant entrepreneurs
- Establishing partnerships with state and local government

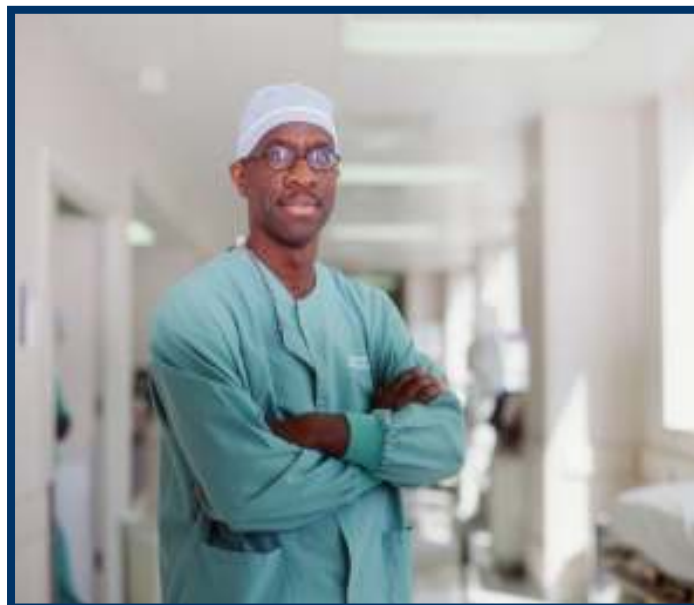
IMPRINT welcomes your comments, questions, and ideas. Please contact IMPRINT Director Jennifer Brennan at [jennifer@imprintproject.org](mailto:jennifer@imprintproject.org) or 847-796-0076.

# TIME TO GROW: 20 ACTIONS STATES AND COMMUNITIES CAN TAKE TO CAPITALIZE ON SKILLED IMMIGRANT TALENT

## I. CONTEXT

### The Economic Dividends of Investing in Skilled Immigrants

As states and communities struggle to overcome budget constraints and recover from the recent economic downturn, they need to find creative, practical mechanisms to strengthen their economies. **One population that could contribute significantly to states' and localities' fiscal health has been largely overlooked:** the more than 2.7 million<sup>1</sup> immigrants in the United States who hold a bachelor's or graduate degree, but are currently un- or underemployed in low-level jobs that fail to draw on their talents. There are too many doctors working as parking lot attendants, accountants as cashiers, and engineers as baristas. This is a "brain waste" our economy cannot afford.



Ensuring that skilled immigrant workers have the tools to meet or exceed American standards of excellence in their professions is vital to a thriving economy. It is to our collective national benefit to encourage the upward labor market trajectory of these legally work-authorized individuals out of unemployment and "survival jobs." Ensuring that they are able to re-establish themselves as working professionals in the U.S. has significant positive economic impact on them as individuals, on their families, and on the states and localities in which they reside.

There is concrete data to support this contention: IMPRINT member organizations that provide direct services to work-authorized skilled immigrants see salary *increases* of between \$18,000 and \$37,500 annually per worker placed.<sup>2</sup> This number represents a significant addition to the tax base and also a powerful motor for ancillary job creation. The multiplier effect for the most highly educated (master's degree or higher) was quantified in a recent study that found that "an additional 100 immigrants with advanced degrees—regardless of field or where they obtained their degrees—is associated with an additional 44 jobs among U.S. natives." This number rises to 86 jobs for every 100 immigrants specializing in science, technology, engineering and math ("STEM") fields.<sup>3</sup> Immigrant talent has also helped to generate nearly 75% of the patents of the top ten patent-producing American universities,

1. Unpublished tabulations as update to the Migration Policy Institute 2008 report *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants*.
2. Program participant salary increases due to job placement as reported by The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, The Welcome Back Initiative, and Upwardly Global.
3. *Immigration and American Jobs*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research and Partnership for a New American Economy, Madeline Zavodny, 2011.

thus comprising “a disproportionate share of the creators and innovators that help America to remain competitive in an increasingly global, knowledge-driven economy.”<sup>4</sup>



Public policy discussions about the skills gap in the U.S. economy have tended to focus on longer-term potential fixes such as immigration reform or investment in the K-16 pipeline. Yet **underemployed skilled immigrants are an asset here now, ready to be mobilized** with only a modest investment in their workforce preparedness. Especially considering the already-significant investment in their education by sending countries, unlocking their value is a very high-leverage opportunity for public policy and American competitiveness today.

### ***Time to Grow: Practical Recommendations for Public Policy***

Field-tested interventions can help these skilled immigrants find higher-level jobs in fields where their talents are needed. Dr. Luisa Rodriguez’s story<sup>5</sup> illustrates both the challenge and the possibilities. A Colombian physician and hospital administrator who also holds an M.B.A., Dr. Rodriguez first attempted to pursue employment in the U.S. on her own. Unfortunately, her intuitions about the best approach actually worked against her. It wasn’t until she worked with a nonprofit specializing in skilled immigrant placement that she discovered why: much of the “common sense” she arrived with was in fact culturally-specific and ill-suited to the American job market.

“At [our] first meeting, they said, ‘These are the common mistakes [newcomers to the U.S.] make,’” recounts Dr. Rodriguez. “I thought to myself: ‘Check! Check!’ Every single thing I wasn’t supposed to do, I was doing.” For skilled immigrants, even minor mistakes like adding a photo to a resume or failing to spell out foreign abbreviations can jettison an application – even when an employer is actively looking for candidates with their skills.

While there are a variety of interventions that can spark economic vitality through skilled immigrant workforce integration, **the recommendations in this document emphasize goals that may be achieved in the short to medium term through public policy levers.** Intended audiences include policymakers, educators, advocates, and service providers such as refugee resettlement agencies.

These interventions also represent an additional avenue to help states and communities attract and retain businesses, the key engine driving economic recovery and future growth.<sup>6</sup> The recommendations reflect the most current knowledge in the field of skilled immigrant worker integration, and provide states with high-leverage solutions within current budget constraints. Some recommendations have the additional benefit of helping U.S.-trained workers as well.

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4. *Patent Pending: How Immigrants Are Reinventing The American Economy*. Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012.

5. Dr. Rodriguez’s name has been changed for privacy. Her story has a happy ending: after receiving targeted workforce services she initially re-entered her field as a medical interpreter in 2009. In 2012, she began an Internal Medicine residency at a Chicago hospital.

6. While businesses themselves play an important role in the workforce integration process, the recommendations in this document are focused on other audiences, as detailed above.



## Why Focus on the State and Community Levels?

States and communities are quite literally where the action is.

- Despite federal strictures on some major funding streams, states have significant latitude in how statewide workforce and economic development goals will be implemented and outcomes measured
- Community-college systems provide vital pathways to professional licensing and certification
- Funds for refugee resettlement services are distributed at the state level
- States oversee and provide resources for adult basic education and English language learning programs
- States govern the entry of new workers into regulated professions through occupational and professional licensing boards.

IMPRINT recognizes that while the bureaucratic landscape may vary across states and localities – for example, Illinois combines economic and workforce development in a single department, while Pennsylvania does not – states and localities overall have far more in common than not, even in regards to professional licensure. Accordingly, these recommendations are designed to build upon efforts already underway in several states and to make the case for increasing policy convergence based on best practices in this area.

IMPRINT's recommendations highlight the strong existing and potential approaches for states and communities to undertake, and provide practical guidance to all states and communities seeking to make the most of their skilled immigrant populations.

## II. STATE AND COMMUNITY RECCOMENDATIONS

IMPRINT recommends focusing policy efforts in three areas:

- A. The Leadership Gap.** Without visible support for strong policy in this area, even the most practical and sensible recommendations may fail to advance. **Policymakers and advocates need to fill the leadership gap by laying out a compelling and powerful agenda for change** that makes the economic and social case for skilled immigrant worker integration. Some states and localities are already making this case; their examples should be used to inspire a broader movement among their peers.
- B. The Information Gap.** Closing the information gap will ensure that skilled immigrants (and those who advise them) will have accurate and timely information to help them make wise decisions about their educational and professional options, including re-licensing if appropriate.
- C. The Access Gap.** Closing the access gap will ensure that skilled immigrants are able to draw on the education and workforce development services they need to apply their skills in a professional role.

## A. Fill the Leadership Gap

States and communities have several levers of change at their disposal to decrease the workforce barriers facing skilled immigrants:

- The “bully pulpit” – introducing the issue to public discourse
- Executive action – executive orders and policy direction-setting
- Administrative action – programmatic and process changes in and among state agencies
- Legislative action – increasing appropriations, regulatory change
- Convening powers – bringing together diverse stakeholder groups within and outside government

Six states have already taken significant steps to leverage the talents of their skilled immigrant residents: Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and Washington. Some of these state initiatives are described as examples in the recommendations below.

### 1

#### USE THE BULLY PULPIT TO CHANGE THE DISCOURSE AROUND SKILLED IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

*Desired outcome: The public and policymakers hold fewer misconceptions and have a stronger recognition of skilled immigrants as an asset worth developing.*

For states to successfully capitalize on the asset that skilled immigrants represent, **more decision-makers need to emerge as vocal champions** of this work. Here, the “bully pulpit” is one effective lever of change that policymakers can use to shift the public debate, much as Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has done in speeches emphasizing immigrants as critical resources in the state’s economic reinvention. Key to this shift are the following elements:

- *Counter misconceptions.* In some cases, skilled immigrants are mistakenly equated with temporary workers who require special sponsorship; in other cases, there is a misperception that this issue is about our national debate on undocumented workers. IMPRINT recommends communicating, time and again, that the target population is the ‘doctor driving a taxicab’ who is *already* in the United States, fully work authorized and with no need for visa sponsorship. These immigrants have come by permanent, legal immigration channels such as family reunification or refugee and asylee pathways, and have no obstacle to eventual citizenship.
- *Asset-based thinking.* Rebuilding the careers of skilled immigrants meets consumer and employer needs while advancing American competitiveness, all the while improving the outcomes of immigrant families and the larger communities of which they are members. Furthermore, this is a primed investment: these immigrants come to the U.S. already educated and trained – at no cost to U.S. taxpayers. The cost of their education has been financed elsewhere, leaving just a proportionally tiny investment gap to be filled in order to unlock their full potential. Immigrants also bring the kind of cultural and linguistic expertise to the U.S. workforce that helps hospitals serve all patients and businesses access lucrative foreign markets.

- *A concrete and immediate fix.* As the national debate over federal immigration reform drags on, state leaders can highlight skilled immigrant integration as a fresh opportunity to act strategically without awaiting federal action. The message is clear: smart policy choices can help states benefit economically from the talents of work-authorized individuals already present in their communities.

## 2

### PUT SKILLED IMMIGRANTS ON THE STATE AGENDA.

*Desired outcome: Explicit policy direction is a rallying point for projects leveraging the talents of skilled immigrants.*

State policymakers at both executive and legislative levels have levers of change including significant convening power to mobilize key state agencies and partners in minimizing the brain waste of resident immigrant professionals.

- *Executive Branch action.* **Executive Orders** are one tool governors can use to make the case for investment in skilled immigrant workers for the benefit of the state economy as a whole. To date, six states have enacted Executive Orders on immigrant integration, all convening cross-agency and subject matter expert working groups that created recommendations for action. Five of these states (Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, and Washington) explicitly mention skilled immigrants in their recommendations, and one, Illinois, has a specific budget line item for this population.<sup>7</sup>



Of course, Executive Orders aren't the only way to take action; a governor can also throw his or her weight publicly behind the issue via speeches and actions that **set an administration's policy direction** to accomplish similar goals.

- *Administrative action.* Programmatic and process changes among state agencies are valuable because they can create **lasting institutional change** and **leverage the political capital of the executive** who is championing the issue. Ideally, all state agencies with jurisdiction over economic development, professional licensing, workforce investment, education and human services come together under a governor's leadership to develop a common approach that is mutually reinforcing across the different agencies and allows for implementation of many of the recommendations in this paper. Examples include the creation of a dedicated staff position for immigrant workforce issues, as has been done in the state of Maryland (see

7. A statewide umbrella group, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, was integrally involved in advocating for this line item, which funds immigrant integration services ranging from citizenship preparation to ESL to community policing. Since 2009, the line item has also funded direct services for high-skilled immigrant job readiness, via IMPRINT member Upwardly Global.

Recommendation 5), or the institutionalization of an entity such as Massachusetts Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants. If executed well, this lever can establish an enduring improvement in a state's ability to facilitate skilled immigrant integration.

- *Legislative Branch action.* Encompassing both changes to the law and the exertion of political capital by elected officials, action by the legislative branch can be a broad-ranging and effective lever of change. An example of **legislative change** is the state of Illinois successfully repealing a redundant licensing requirement that had foreign-trained nurses taking two competency exams instead of just the NCLEX nurse licensing examination required of all U.S. graduates. Legislators can **request inquiries** into state agency administrative and regulatory procedures, and **advocate for implementation of accountability measures** that can help track the progress of skilled immigrants through state processes such as workforce services, education pathways, and licensing. For example, a legislator could request figures on licensure application and success rates of internationally-trained applicants in high-demand professions. Legislators can also use their considerable convening power to **hold hearings, introduce testimony, and encourage partnerships** among stakeholders as diverse as employers, community-based organizations, community colleges, and workforce investment boards.

# 3

## INCREASE APPROPRIATIONS FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION.

*Desired outcome: Increased numbers of skilled immigrants receive services that connect them to career-path employment, generating a clear return on investment.*

The U.S. is fortunate to be the destination of skilled immigrants whose education and experience has been subsidized by other countries. Making a modest additional investment to help these individuals fully utilize their talents and training is a small cost compared to providing an entire postsecondary education.<sup>8</sup>

Existing high-leverage, cost-effective programs providing targeted services to skilled immigrants are ripe for expansion. Such programs can generate outsized economic returns, as investment in job placements catapults workers and their families from poverty-level wages into the middle class, and bolsters government coffers thanks to increased tax revenue and reduced reliance on public benefits. Program outcomes are solidly documented: An \$8,000 investment can result in a pay jump of \$18,000 in annual salary.<sup>9</sup> Multiplied over a career, the rewards are obvious.

Policymakers can take a variety of actions to boost funding to proven program models. These include holding hearings to educate fellow policymakers about program outcomes, making direct appropriations, and working with state agencies, legislators or gubernatorial staff to designate discretionary funding. Of course, regardless of the specific approach taken, including a robust evaluation component in any funded project is critical to ensure accountability.

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8. IMPRINT member organizations that provide direct services note that it costs between \$5,000 and \$8,000 per person to provide a college-educated skilled immigrant with comprehensive services targeted to their educational and/or employment needs. Compare this to the \$51,216 average cost of a four-year public university degree in the U.S. today (Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=76>; includes tuition, room and board).
  9. IMPRINT member organizations that provide employment placement services have documented an annual salary increase of \$18,000 - \$37,000 among jobseekers served.

# 4

## FUND AND IMPLEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS.

*Desired outcomes: Direct services are scaled and measured; promising practices and a community of practice are established.*

As outlined in Recommendation 3 directly above, there are a variety of ways for states to make a modest additional investment that can trigger significant economic benefit. Demonstration projects are a practical tool for investment in skilled immigrant integration, given both the existence of promising practices<sup>10</sup> and the limited services currently available to skilled immigrants. A demonstration project should encompass, at a minimum:

- Direct services – educational case management and job search and preparedness training
- Informational tools – see Recommendation 18
- Data collection – establishing baseline and project completion data including participant demographics, employment outcomes, and economic impact
- Resource analysis – including recommendations for more systemic changes across relevant stakeholders

# 5

## CREATE A SPECIFIC STAFF POSITION WITHIN STATE GOVERNMENT TO OVERSEE INITIATIVES FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANT WORKERS.

*Desired outcome: An institutionalized response to skilled immigrant workforce is established and designed for longevity.*

Given the outsized impact that skilled immigrant job placements can have on the regional tax base and economic competitiveness, states are well-advised to focus targeted attention on this population. Designating a staff position to coordinate activities across agencies is one way to do that.

The staff member can be empowered to take a variety of actions, including:

- Convene employers, educators, regulators, and policymakers on the subject of skilled immigrant integration (see Recommendations 9 and 10)
- Determine relevant accountability measures for state agencies, including collecting data for internal evaluation (see Recommendation 14)
- Collect and analyze data from providers and from state agencies regarding skilled immigrant program access and effectiveness of service (See Recommendations 13 and 14)
- Develop and field pilot programs serving skilled immigrants
- Carry out other recommendations as prioritized by state government

Such staff could reside in any of the following entities: the state Workforce Investment Board, the departments of labor or workforce development, community or economic development, professional licensing, or human services.

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10. See IMPRINT's report, *Talent Is Ready* for an overview of direct service practices. Available at: [www.imprintproject.org/downloads](http://www.imprintproject.org/downloads).

# 6

## **BUILD CAPACITY OF THE STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD AS A RESOURCE FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANT ISSUES STATEWIDE.**

***Desired Outcome: Centralized, high-level coordination of state-wide, regional and municipal stakeholders and programs touching on skilled immigrant integration.***

State-level Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) increasingly serve as conveners across state agencies and with the private sector. WIB staff specialized in skilled immigrant talent attraction, retention and development could work with local WIBs, community colleges, and sectoral employers. There are existing models (for subpopulations such as veterans or ex-offenders) that can inform this work, which can include: researching the extent of the issue in a given state, standardizing data collection on the population, convening partners (employers, educators, regulators, policymakers, CBOs), managing contracts, facilitating professional development, and more.

# 7

## **ELIMINATE REDUNDANCIES IN PROFESSIONAL LICENSING REQUIREMENTS.**

***Desired outcome: Skilled immigrants are held to high standards of professional eligibility without being singled out for redundant additional requirements.***

High standards in professional licensure are vital to ensure the public health and welfare. In some states, however, some redundant practices remain which other states have eliminated from licensure processes.



For example, 33 states require a single national licensure exam for all nursing candidates, but 17 other states still require foreign-trained nurses to first pass the qualifying exam of the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) before taking the national exam. The CGFNS exam can be appropriate as a pre-screening mechanism for nurses *abroad* who are seeking occupational visas to come to the U.S. However, when the exam is used as a prerequisite for nurse licensure for individuals *already* present with valid immigration status in the U.S., it represents redundant and significant additional expense of time and money, placing an additional burden on the foreign-trained with respect to U.S.-trained nurses.

Eliminating this and other duplicative requirements through administrative, regulatory or legislative action is an important step in ensuring that high U.S. standards for licensure are preserved while also eliminating unnecessary hurdles for qualified immigrant candidates.

## B. Remedy the Information Gap

Lack of information can severely handicap a skilled immigrant's ability to find and pursue a professional career path. Knowing where and how to apply to a licensing board, what additional "bridge" coursework might be required for a specific profession, or even where to find a specialized English class are critical to eventual professional employment. Yet immigrants and the individuals and systems that serve them often lack this crucial information. States and communities can address the information gaps faced by both jobseekers and service providers.

**Jobseekers** face a variety of information challenges, including the following:

- *Credentialing pathways are often not transparent.* For example, there may be no accessible information about how an internationally-trained accountant can sit for a CPA exam.
- *Misinformation is common.* IMPRINT members have encountered numerous cases of skilled immigrants with university degrees being told to "Get a G.E.D." by well-intentioned service providers.
- *Career advice is hard to come by.* Educational case management is often unavailable for skilled immigrants. There are few resources to help a doctor who immigrated in her 50s weigh the costs of pursuing the years-long process of becoming an M.D. in the United States versus using her medical skills in a related profession.

Research by IMPRINT member organizations documents the pervasiveness of the information gap across geographic, ethnic, and gender lines. Upwardly Global finds that lack of accurate information was a top barrier cited by skilled immigrant jobseekers,<sup>11</sup> while World Education Services consistently finds that informational seminars on education and workforce options for skilled immigrants are viewed as "useful" or "very useful" by 93% of survey respondents.<sup>12</sup>

Among individuals who are not yet jobseekers, the Welcome Back Initiative has found that lack of access to high-quality vocational or other English classes is a significant barrier (see recommendations 15 and 19), and that this lack of *access* can often flow from the lack of *information* about available resources.

**Service providers** face different information challenges:

- *They are busy.* Whether they are English teachers, refugee resettlement workers, community college staff or workforce development professionals, they have many students and clients to serve, and limited time to research potential resources for skilled individuals. Locating and verifying the accuracy of information and referral sources can be difficult.
- *They too are stymied by the lack of transparency about career pathways.* Some service providers must make numerous phone calls to chase down information about whether an internationally-trained lawyer may sit for a bar exam, or whether a nurse from another

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11. *From Doctor to Dishwasher and Back Again*, unpublished national survey findings, Upwardly Global, 2009.

12. Unpublished workshop evaluations, World Education Services, 2010-2011.

country can take a stand-alone obstetrics course to fill in a gap in her education. This information is hard to find.

These challenges are even more frustrating for the many direct service providers who work both with skilled immigrants and with employers who have talent shortages, yet lack a roadmap for how bridge the two. Thus, lack of information about how to overcome barriers to immigrant workforce readiness limits service providers' ability to link skilled workers with interested employers.

## 8

### **PROVIDE TARGETED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AND RESOURCE MATERIALS TO ADULT EDUCATORS, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS, AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT STAFF.**

***Desired outcome: Existing infrastructures of community colleges, community-based adult education programs, career one-stops, and refugee resettlement agencies are better prepared to address skilled immigrants' specific needs.***

Both frontline professionals and program administrators have limited time and no mandate to independently research the needs of skilled immigrants and create responsive programming. Providing them with professional development training in proven or promising interventions can foster their ability to make changes within their institutions, while helping to ensure that information provided to skilled immigrants is accurate and consistent.

While training alone may be insufficient for systemic change – especially in cases where service providers have large caseloads – it is a vital precondition. The most valuable training will not only raise *awareness* of skilled immigrant issues but actively provide guidance counselors, refugee job developers, English teachers and others with useful *activities* (for example, mock interviews or networking exercises) they can incorporate into their existing services to build skills among their skilled immigrant clients and students.



This training can be coordinated by joint community college boards, state departments of education or labor, or local Workforce Investment Boards as part of existing professional development activities. Topics covered in the IMPRINT report *Talent Is Ready* (information and advising, skill building, and organizational capacity building) can form the basis of such training. In addition, the *Supporting Skilled Immigrants Toolkit* from World Education Services' Global Talent Bridge program is a potential model for direct training or train-the-trainer activities (see *Appendix* for links).



# 9

## CONVENE POLICYMAKERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS SERVING SKILLED IMMIGRANTS TO FACILITATE INFORMATION SHARING.

***Desired outcomes: Information about promising practices in the skilled immigrant integration field is shared both within and among states, and a community of practice is shaped and strengthened.***

Because the field of skilled immigrant workforce integration is new and emerging, those attempting to serve this population may be especially able to benefit from opportunities to discuss their efforts with each other. These opportunities could be convened by state officials within a single state, by multi-state partnerships, or by associations such as the National Governors Association. Through facilitated discussion, participants could share their experiences and lessons learned in areas such as credential evaluation, information provision, clarification of regulations, “refresher” or bridge training programs, and program design and implementation.

# 10

## CONVENE PERIODIC MEETINGS AMONG REGULATORY AGENCY STAFF AND ADVISORS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES OR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE WORKING WITH INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED LICENSING CANDIDATES.

***Desired outcome: Advisors have a more complete understanding of the processes and protocols of state-regulated professions, and are thus better able to provide accurate guidance to immigrant applicants; state officials have a systematic mechanism for obtaining feedback on potentially unnecessary barriers faced by applicants.***

Through regular meetings and discussion, front-line staff providing career guidance to immigrant professionals can become better able to act as intermediaries and advocates for immigrant professionals who are pursuing re-certification, and the administrative burden on state civil servants will be lightened as a result.

One strategy is the creation of an advisory commission tasked with identifying and moving systemic changes across stakeholders. Such a program was initiated in Rhode Island between Dorcas Place, a Welcome Back Initiative site serving foreign-trained healthcare professionals, and an Advisory Council of key state actors. These individuals act as ambassadors for the Initiative in the community, identifying strategies that will streamline the services that can be accessed by internationally educated professionals, ensuring a smoother and more comprehensive system of service delivery.<sup>13</sup>

Another strategy might involve establishing a new state-level position for a special liaison focusing on skilled immigrant licensing issues across professions.<sup>14</sup>

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13. After three years of advocacy and engagement by the RI WBC’s Advisory Council, the RI Board of Nursing recently approved a proposal to amend the regulations on the licensing process for internationally trained and educated nurses, making the path to licensing and employment for qualified nurses more attainable, comprehensive and less expensive in the state of Rhode Island.

14. In Canada, the provinces of Ontario and Manitoba have created a Fairness Commissioner role that works closely with regulatory agencies to ensure that performance standards are assured while providing expedient licensure to foreign-trained candidates.

# 11

**ENCOURAGE STATE PROFESSIONAL LICENSING BOARDS TO ADOPT A STANDARDIZED SET OF CRITERIA BY WHICH THEY SELECT CREDENTIAL EVALUATORS, AND PUBLICIZE THE LIST OF APPROVED EVALUATORS.**

*Desired outcome: Boards and the public maintain confidence that foreign-trained candidates are held to high U.S. standards; more transparent and thus more credible review processes ensure a level playing field; clear, publicly available guidelines prevent applicants from wasting time and money on unapproved evaluation services; fewer opportunities exist for deceptive, fraudulent and/or incompetent evaluation services to exploit uninformed immigrant clients.*

Licensure is one of several areas where internationally trained individuals may be asked to submit their university transcripts, licenses, and other documentation for review against U.S. standards. This is referred to as the credential evaluation process. Two issues can arise.



First, because credential evaluation is not a regulated service in the United States, there is wide variation in quality among providers. Unfortunately, some resort to outright fraudulent practices. As a result, an individual may inadvertently pay for an evaluation that will never be accepted by a licensing board, or by American universities or employers to which he or she may later apply. Second, because a profession's state licensing board typically chooses approved providers according to internal criteria, the criteria themselves can be a source of concern. These criteria vary substantially in stringency and can be based on limited or outdated information.

The state agency that manages the licensure of regulated professions and works closely with state professional boards can help to streamline and ensure the quality of this credential evaluator approval process. For example, the agency can develop a promising practices checklist or questionnaire for boards to use when renewing approved evaluators (e.g. membership in the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services; acceptance by other boards and reputable universities; clear and predictable fee schedules). By prominently featuring the list of approved evaluators on its websites, state licensing agencies can reduce the likelihood that licensure candidates will waste resources on redundant or unapproved evaluations.

# 12

**ENSURE THAT INFORMATION ABOUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES IS MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL ASPIRING ENTREPRENEURS, INCLUDING SKILLED IMMIGRANTS.**

*Desired outcome: Immigrant entrepreneurs are able to access programs and services designed to help local businesses succeed and create jobs.*

State agencies often provide a range of economic development services, ranging from trade-promotion activities and efforts to attract foreign direct investment to new business incubation. Yet skilled immigrants are often unaware of these services or have difficulty accessing them, despite when they have strong interest and even prior experience as entrepreneurs.



States can foster the immigrant public's awareness and utilization of such services in a variety of ways. These include: ensuring that ethnic and community media sources receive relevant press releases; affirming immigrant entrepreneurs' eligibility for existing programs and services through policy statements or marketing materials; holding information sessions and workshops in conjunction with community-based organizations; partnering with international consulates to host local informational events; and ensuring that immigrant service providers are included on the mailing list for Requests for Proposals.

## **13** ENSURE THAT DATA COLLECTION PROCESSES FOR EXISTING ADULT EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PROGRAMS CAPTURE RELEVANT DATA ON SKILLED IMMIGRANTS.

*Desired outcome: States have the data necessary to assess local needs and to measure the success of interventions, thus enabling evidence-based policymaking*

While state-funded adult education and workforce programs often gather significant data about their participants, such data do not always accurately capture participants' full range of experience and abilities. Without such data, it is impossible to know – for example – how many participants in a community-based ESOL program have graduate degrees from another country. Adding or clarifying fields in existing data collection forms or protocols can ensure that this information is collected. In addition to type of degree, major, and year of graduation, it would be useful to collect information on year of migration to the U.S., country of origin, and fluency in languages other than English.

Analyzing the data in turn will shed light on the existing human-capital assets and talent within a state or locality, while flagging fruitful areas for intervention, such as:

- Identify clusters of skills (such as a high number of internationally-trained nurses) within a given locality, indicating the potential demand for a bridge program to prepare for U.S. licensure
- Map licensed professionals' bilingual/bicultural skills to a state's demography (e.g. whether sufficient Spanish-speaking physicians are present to meet needs)
- Generate better understanding of variations in literacy and language skills among adult-education program participants, allowing for more targeted program development
- Learn if the number of immigrants served at a one-stop or community college is proportional to their presence in the community

# 14

## ASSESS STATE HUMAN RESOURCE PROCESSES TO COLLECT DATA AND TAKE ACTION ON SKILLED IMMIGRANT REPRESENTATION AS JOB CANDIDATES AND AS EMPLOYEES.

*Desired outcome: States can establish baseline data and track it over time to inform human resources decisions and policymaking.*

Examining the state as an employer has merit given its size and reach across employee skill areas. State human resource departments have the tools to examine the current state of skilled immigrant hiring within the civil service system, to identify any systemic barriers within the system, and potentially implement remedies. Conducting an internal assessment could:

- Establish a baseline number of skilled immigrants currently employed, and in what concentrations (e.g. by role or department)
- Examine communications and hiring policies for clarity, inclusiveness of foreign credentials, and compliance with applicable equal opportunity laws
- Determine capacity of HR staff in assessing skilled immigrant job candidates (degree evaluation, etc.)
- Recommend resources to improve capacity and take corrective measures where necessary
- Identify, value, and utilize bilingual skills among state employees.

Such a process allows states to assess their own ability to benefit from internationally educated talent and provide services to diverse constituents.

## C. Close the Access Gap in Education and Workforce Services

**Despite the fact that 32% of adult immigrants in the U.S. hold a B.A. degree or higher, only a handful of organizations nationwide specialize in helping skilled immigrants** overcome the unique barriers they face in workforce integration and advancement. Therefore, it is especially important that skilled immigrants be able to access appropriate services *within* existing adult-education and workforce systems – including community colleges, community-based adult education programs, federally funded one-stop career centers, and refugee resettlement agencies – all of which serve skilled immigrants, but may not currently be prepared or incentivized to meet their unique needs.

The recommendations in this section focus on closing this “access gap” and ensuring that skilled immigrants, as taxpaying residents of their states and localities, have full access to the services offered in their communities.

# 15

## AFFIRM SKILLED IMMIGRANTS’ ELIGIBILITY FOR EXISTING AND EXPANDED EDUCATIONAL AND WORKFORCE SERVICES.

*Desired outcome: Pathways for skilled immigrants to receive existing services are standardized and institutionalized; the assets and needs of skilled immigrants are considered when new programs or interventions are being developed.*

There are a variety of mechanisms by which states may affirm skilled immigrants’ eligibility and facilitate their access to *existing* services. These include **providing training** to managers and line staff

who work with the public to raise their awareness of the population (see Recommendation 8 above) and issuing a **formal policy guidance memo**, among others.

In cases where data collection has allowed states to identify specific areas where services can be expanded (see Recommendation 13 above), states may choose to exercise statutory or regulatory authority or even designate discretionary funding to address service gaps.

Potential avenues for service expansion include:

- Targeted industry-specific or advanced-level English classes
- Community college or state university-led bridge programs with a sector or licensing focus
- Employer and service provider industry partnerships to train incumbent workers and increase the pipeline of new workers in STEM or other high-demand fields

For greatest impact, states can incorporate these service adjustments through *industry partnerships* – employer-led workforce programs that provide training in specific fields or occupations where local employers have identified human-resources needs.

## **16** ENSURE THAT SECTOR-SPECIFIC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS DRAW ON THE TALENT POOL OF UNDERUTILIZED SKILLED IMMIGRANTS IN THOSE FIELDS.

*Desired outcome: State and local workforce development in targeted sectors capitalizes on existing regional talent to meet employer needs, while attracting new talent to the area.*



State governments increasingly recognize the economic potential of sector-specific workforce development initiatives.<sup>15</sup> By ensuring that these initiatives are equipped to identify skilled immigrant workers as potential participants, states can both capitalize on skilled workers already resident in the area, and create a magnet to attract new qualified workers to settle in the area.

As employers identify their specific workforce needs, states can draw on data collected via the Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, or their own programs (see Recommendation 13 above) to identify local talent that is potentially able to fill those needs. Community colleges can be important partners in developing bridge programs to facilitate qualified workers' re-entry into their professions.

15. Sectoral strategies are receiving attention at the federal level as well, most notably in the 2012 GAO report *Workforce Investment Act: Innovative Collaborations between Workforce Boards and Employers Helped Meet Local Needs*.

Examples include advanced manufacturing programs that prepare internationally trained electrical engineers for the U.S. factory environment, and healthcare programs that aid foreign-trained doctors or nurses in becoming licensed to practice in the U.S.

The MIRA Coalition, a Massachusetts immigrant advocacy organization, has formulated a set of recommendations for that state which are specific to STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and healthcare-trained skilled immigrants. MIRA's recommendations dovetail with many of the recommendations in this document, including alternative financing, online resources, and access to ESL.

## **17** ENCOURAGE CREATION OF ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF FINANCING FOR PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE.

***Desired outcome: More qualified professionals can earn licensure in a timely manner because financial burdens are eased.***

Professional licensure costs are not limited to the application for a license. Depending on the field, internationally-trained candidates seeking licensure may have to pay thousands of dollars for services to complete their process. These can include:

- Credential evaluation
- Courses required to close gaps assessed during credential evaluation
- Exams (can include travel costs and lab fees)
- Fingerprints and background checks
- Applications with state agencies
- Other administrative fees for processing paperwork

Applications for professional licensure can run in the hundreds of dollars. These costs can slow the progress of financially-strapped applicants who are working in survival jobs and supporting families. In addition, most of the above fees fall outside of traditional financial aid streams. Mechanisms such as revolving microloan fund or other needs-based assistance (grants, sliding scales, fee waivers) can ensure that qualified applicants are not unnecessarily delayed or even excluded from consideration.

## **18** PROVIDE CENTRALIZED ACCESS TO ONLINE RESOURCES THAT WILL FOSTER SKILLED IMMIGRANTS' ENTRY INTO THE U.S. PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE.

***Desired outcome: Skilled workers are equipped with timely and accurate information, allowing them to make wise decisions about career re-entry and reduce costs spent pursuing ill-suited pathways.***

While states already offer a multitude of online career resources, these sites typically do not include even basic information tailored to internationally-trained professionals, such as how to adapt to American workplace culture and interviewing style<sup>16</sup> or where a foreign-trained professional may apply to take a U.S. licensing exam in his profession.

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16. Because other countries often have very different expectations for resumes, interviewing, and networking, jobseekers benefit from having the "unwritten rules" of American practices spelled out in detail.

Ensuring that states' *existing* online resources include relevant content can powerfully support would-be jobseekers – especially in rural or exurban locations where they may be unable to obtain in-person educational or workforce services.

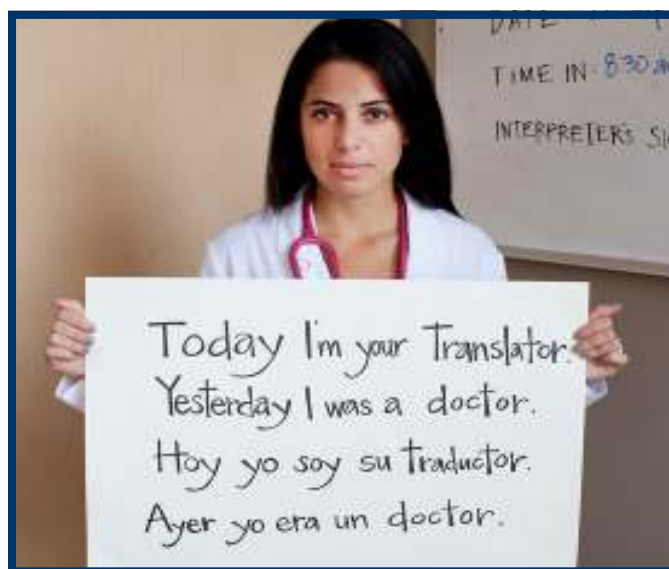
Examples of potential content include:

- *Clearinghouse for information on professional licensing and re-credentialing.* This would provide a central repository for existing information on state- and profession-specific credentialing processes, including licensing guides that have already been developed by other sources (see *Appendix* for examples)
- *On-demand training modules.* Modules with exercises and multimedia interactivity could focus on the American job search process (e.g., resume writing or interview preparation – especially important for candidates who are unaccustomed to American-style self-promotion and may feel uncomfortable “bragging”). Models include the Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates’ acculturation resources, and the do-it-yourself online training portal Khan Academy, which has attracted significant foundation investment.<sup>17</sup>
- *Regional labor market information and service directories.* Such databases should feature job openings, and links to community resources such as ESOL and job training courses. For example, the province of Alberta, Canada, hosts a site for skilled immigrants at AlbertaCanada.com.

## 19 PROVIDE SPECIALIZED ENGLISH COURSES FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANTS WHO HAVE MOVED BEYOND “SURVIVAL-LEVEL” ENGLISH.

***Desired outcomes: Skilled immigrants who need more advanced English skills in order to progress in the workforce have opportunities to obtain the training they need; employers who have qualified employees they are not able to promote due to language barriers have a resource to help those employees burnish their fluency.***

While community-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are often a vital step for new immigrants, most are aimed at a beginning level. Immigrants who seek to improve their English beyond basic skills often have limited options for further education, and may even be prohibited from participating in federally funded adult basic education classes once their skills reach a certain level. At the same time, employers who would like to promote incumbent workers into higher-level or managerial positions may be unable to do so if employees lack necessary technical English fluency to pass written safety tests or similar promotional requirements.



17. The ECFMG Certificate Holders Office, or ECHO, includes the IMG Advisors Network. The ECHO landing page is <http://www.ecfm.org/echo/resources.html>. The Khan Academy can be found at [www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org).

States can address these issues by working with community colleges or the federally funded workforce and adult education systems to identify program models and funding for higher-level and contextualized English courses. Examples include:

- The I-BEST English model, developed in Washington State and being replicated nationally. I-BEST combines ESOL instruction with occupational training for specific careers. It has demonstrated significant outcomes in educational and career advancement.<sup>18</sup>
- The English Health Train curriculum, which is deployed by the Welcome Back Initiative to interested educators, contextualizing advanced English in the vocabulary and practices of the healthcare workplace.
- Westchester Community College’s English training program, which increased the English language skills of immigrant scientists and researchers at a major pharmaceutical firm in Westchester County, New York, and helped them move into management roles.<sup>19</sup>

## 20

### ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY U.S. CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIFIC STATE JOBS.

*Desired outcome: Removal of an unnecessary barrier to employment in state government by qualified immigrants.*

While it is certainly necessary to require U.S. citizenship for some government positions, there may be other positions for which the job descriptions contain unnecessarily restrictive citizenship requirements. A state administration can issue policy guidance to state agencies’ human resources staff to affirm the eligibility of legal permanent residents (commonly known as “green card holders”) and other work-authorized immigrants for these jobs, and can recommend standardized language to that effect that can be incorporated to all such postings.

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18. Matthew Zeidenberg, Sung-Woo Cho, and Davis Jenkins, *Washington State’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST): New Evidence of Effectiveness (CCRC Working Paper No. 20)*, 2010, New York, N.Y.: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=805>

19. This yearlong training program was funded under a State University of New York Workforce Development grant. For more information see Jill Casner-Lotto, *Increasing Opportunities for Immigrant Students: Community College Strategies for Success*, 2011, Valhalla, NY. Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education [http://www.cccie.org/images/stories/Increasing\\_Opportunities\\_for\\_Immigrant\\_Students\\_2011.pdf](http://www.cccie.org/images/stories/Increasing_Opportunities_for_Immigrant_Students_2011.pdf)



### III. CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD

As states and localities seek to improve economic competitiveness and increase revenue, they should consider an under-utilized talent pool within their communities. Skilled immigrants have the capacity to make substantial economic, professional, and social contributions, if states and communities are able to facilitate the workforce integration of this rich human capital.

In the recommendations above, IMPRINT has identified clear, practical ways for states and communities to do just that. But these recommendations – though an important first step – are just the beginning. In the coming months, IMPRINT and its member organizations will engage with the key audiences cited in this paper to identify and pursue opportunities to implement these recommendations.

IMPRINT looks forward to further conversation with fellow stakeholders on this important issue. To share comments, questions, please contact IMPRINT Director Jennifer Brennan at [jennifer@imprintproject.org](mailto:jennifer@imprintproject.org) or 847-796-0076.

#### Selected Resources

**Talent is Ready** is a report that draws on IMPRINT member experience to recommend a range of promising practices for service providers interested in expanding their offerings to skilled immigrants. Available at <http://www.imprintproject.org/downloads/our-publications>

**Licensed Professions Guides** were developed by Upwardly Global and feature guides for New York, Illinois and California for high-demand regulated professions. Viewable at [www.upglo.org/job-seekers/american-licensed-professions](http://www.upglo.org/job-seekers/american-licensed-professions)

**Career Guides** for mechanical engineers, teachers, system analysts, and accountants and auditors, as well as a non-industry-specific “How to Succeed in the Workplace” guide for immigrant professionals developed by the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians. Viewable at <http://welcomingcenter.org/publications/publication-downloads>

World Education Services’ **Global Talent Bridge** initiative maintains an Immigrant Resources page at [www.globaltalentbridge.org/info](http://www.globaltalentbridge.org/info). WES’s *Supporting Skilled Immigrants Toolkit* is designed to assist service providers and can be found at [www.globaltalentbridge.org/toolkit](http://www.globaltalentbridge.org/toolkit).

The Welcome Back Initiative’s **English Health Train** is an innovative English-language curriculum for healthcare professionals. Sample viewable at <http://englishhealthtrain.welcomebackinitiative.org/>

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