

## Alternative Careers for Immigrant Professionals

Note: This is an overview of a 60-minute webinar. For details and additional resources, view the recording and slides available at [www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org).

### Helping Skilled Immigrants Navigate Career Choices

There are certain circumstances in which it is impractical for skilled immigrants to pursue their original profession from their home country.

This publication is intended to help **direct service providers** guide their skilled immigrant clients in making wise career decisions. It explains:

- When should an immigrant pursue a new career?
- What are some alternative options?
- How to research opportunities in your local job market



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Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

### Before Offering Advice...

**Gather the necessary information** about the client's education, professional experience and personal goals at intake. For ideas on how to gather this information, see our handout *Helping Immigrant Professionals Make Career Decisions*: <http://tinyurl.com/IMPRINTcareerdecisions>

**Keep in mind that when working with skilled immigrant clients:**

- Intermediate steps (such as taking professional-level English classes) may be needed before they can embark on their career in the US
- Individually-tailored advice and assistance are likely needed

**Make sure that you and the client fully understand the process** for getting back into his or her original profession before he or she begins investing time and money in trying to do so.

### When Do Alternatives Make Sense?

In determining when an alternative career is appropriate, take into account the client's personal situation and goals. *Is the client willing to undertake an expensive re-credentialing process that will take years? Is there an immediate need for income?*

**Most importantly, does the client want to continue in that profession?**

Additionally, consider the local economy and whether the client's education and professional experiences are relevant to the job market. Keep in mind that some careers do not transfer between countries (e.g. certain roles in government).

**Talk to actual HR professionals or hiring managers in the field about what they actually require.** It is important not to base career recommendations simply on perceptions about the job market.

### CAUTION!

Bad advice can be worse than no advice at all.

***It is worth investing in your ability to make wise referrals.***

*Sometimes, a person says she wants to return to her earlier profession, but really means that she wants to return to her earlier social status.*

## Tips for Helping Clients Set Realistic Goals

Since a person's professional identity may be closely linked to their overall identity, it may be hard for some to adjust to a new reality.

In having the difficult conversation, **emphasize that starting over does not necessarily mean starting from zero**, and that their first American job will not be their last. A new career may mean learning a new business culture or using existing skills in a new way.

**Walking a client through an employer's perspective** on the costs and benefits of hiring can also be an effective tactic for helping clients set realistic goals.

## What Are Some Alternatives?

Depending on the client's goals, alternatives can serve as stepping stones to getting back to one's original profession or they can manifest into new careers.

For licensed professions, **getting back into the same field** is an excellent way to use one's education and prior experience. For those pursuing re-credentialing, this can also provide relevant US work experience.

**Entrepreneurship** may be well-suited for some immigrant professionals. It allows for individuals to create their own opportunities and to set their own goals.

**Civil servant jobs** can be a good option for immigrant professionals because of the more objective hiring process. Some government agencies offer extra points for language skills. Note that the application process often takes 6-12 months and US citizenship may be required. Thus, these opportunities are generally not suited as a *first* American job.

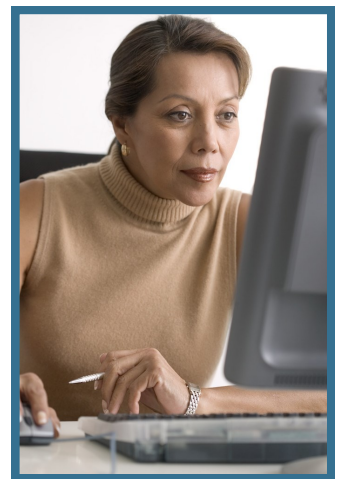
**Opportunities that utilize multicultural skills** can be a natural fit for immigrant professionals. In an increasingly global economy and society, many companies and organizations value cultural competency, language skills and professional or social connections from abroad.

## How to Research Opportunities in the Local Landscape

Regulation of professions vary by state, so **start by visiting your state licensing board's website**.

- Learn which professions require state licensing and which are unregulated.
- For licensed professions, get a sense of how long the credentialing process takes and what costs are associated with it. If a credential evaluation is needed, make sure to get it from the officially designated organization.
- If no regulation exists for a profession, gather data on what sort of qualifications employers or industries require. Certifications may be valued by employers even if they are not required by the state.

**For civil servant jobs**, state government, large cities and state universities are good places to look. Make sure that you are visiting a legitimate government website by checking the URL, which should end in `.gov` or `.us`.



In identifying **employers that value multicultural skills**, look for companies that are expanding globally or that have an ethnically diverse customer base.