

# BECOMING AN ADVOCATE: WHY PRACTITIONERS SHOULD BECOME INVOLVED



Note: This publication summarizes a 60-minute webinar. To view slides and a recording, visit [www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org).

When your skilled immigrant clients are consistently running into systemic barriers, engaging in advocacy can help change the environment and enable your clients to reach their goals.

This publication explains **how** doing advocacy can advance your organization's overall mission. It also illustrates **what** advocacy in a skilled immigrant context looks like.

## WHAT IS ADVOCACY AND WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE IN IT?

**Advocacy is engaging with the broader public in a way that advances your mission.**

Your audience can include state or federal legislators, members of the media, funders and the general public.

**Advocacy can help you to achieve longer-term goals:**

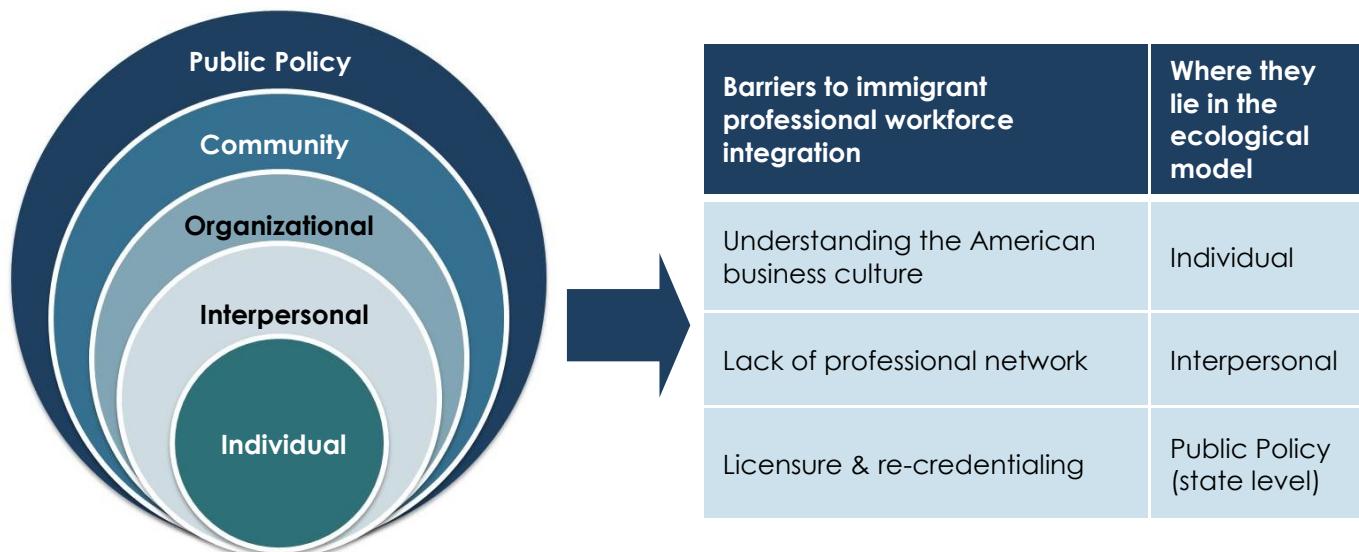
- It can build multipurpose working relationships (groups come together around one issue, but end up improving their collaboration on other issues).
- It can give you a forum to experiment with arguments for making your organization's case, and then refine those arguments for funders
- It can help the individuals you serve to participate more in the advancement of the field



## WHAT DOES ADVOCACY LOOK LIKE IN A SKILLED IMMIGRANT CONTEXT?

Understanding the barriers that skilled immigrants face is key in developing a plan to create change. Some barriers are **intrinsic** to individuals, while other barriers are **extrinsic**.

The **ecological model** (below left) is a useful tool in understanding and identifying in which realm the issue lies, and possible solutions for addressing it.



## WAYS TO ADVOCATE

Consider incorporating one or more of the following activities into your work:

### *Raising Awareness through Op-Eds*

Short opinion articles of 500-700 words can help to raise the visibility of skilled immigrant issues. Choose publications based on the readership you're trying to reach. Consider having the op-ed written in the first person by an immigrant.

### *Use Personal Stories to Frame the Debate*

For some people you are trying to reach, data is the only thing that matters. But for others, hearing a personal story can bring the issue alive. It's important to balance your efforts.

### *Briefing Journalists & Funders*

Hosting a briefing for journalists and funders can help your organization gain key allies for skilled immigrant issues. Consider having skilled immigrants present their stories.

### *Educating Policymakers*

Submitting written testimony to Congressional or state hearings is an important step in building awareness among legislators and their staff members, and may be a precursor to testifying in person.



## CASE EXAMPLE: ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN RHODE ISLAND

In Rhode Island, reducing duplicative testing requirements for internationally-trained nurses was a multi-year project.

The impetus for change came in 2006, when the Rhode Island Professional Latinos Association convened immigrant professionals and local leaders.

**Together, they identified the state's labor needs in healthcare, and a potential labor supply – skilled immigrants.**

A Welcome Back Center was launched in 2007 to provide career guidance for internationally-trained health professionals, but community leaders soon realized that more was needed.

In 2008, the RI Welcome Back Advisory Council was formed. **They began by gathering information about barriers to career integration, and soon identified that regulatory change was needed.**



Next, the Council worked to form critical relationships. The president of the RI Welcome Back Center joined the RI State Board of Nursing.

They presented a white paper on the desired platform to the board of nursing and repurposed the information into press releases, creating an education campaign.

Meanwhile, the RI Welcome Back Center consistently delivered strong program outcomes, helping build awareness of skilled immigrants' abilities.

**By 2012, the new language was approved in Rhode Island nursing regulation,** giving the board more control over choice of credentialing organizations and testing methods used in the state.

For more, see ***Strengthening Rhode Island: A Case Study in Economic Development through Skilled Immigrants***, available at [www.tinyurl.com/riwebinar](http://www.tinyurl.com/riwebinar).