

# IMPRINT

## What Journalists Need to Know About Immigration Reform & Skilled Workers

Note: This is an overview of a 60-minute webinar. To see a recording and the full slides, visit [www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org)

The immigration reform legislation currently pending in Congress proposes to make numerous changes to the US immigration system.

This publication provides journalists with:

- Crucial context for understanding and writing about these proposed changes
- Important background on the existing immigration system, and the issues at play in revamping it
- Tools for evaluating claims about skill shortages and labor market needs



Please note: Every aspect of the immigration system is **subject to exceptions**. For the purpose of this publication, skilled worker means a person with a bachelor's degree or higher.

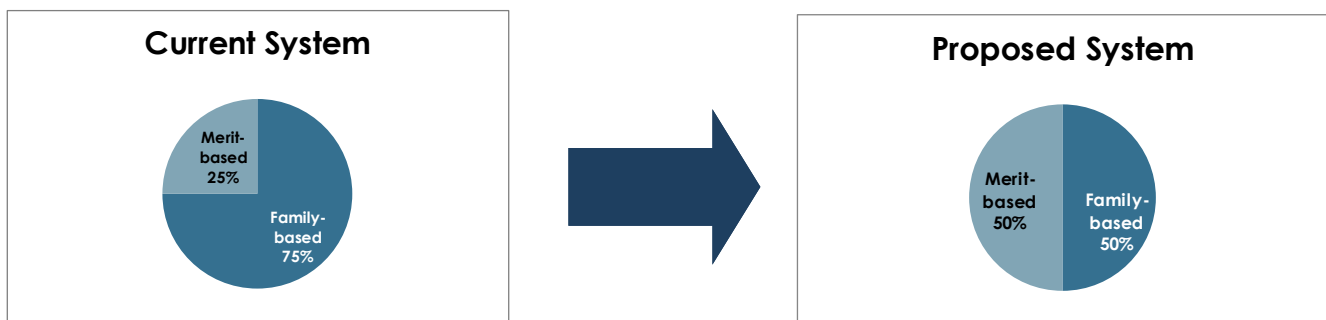
### What's Broken About the Current System?

**Existing backlogs:** Millions of immigrant applicants are stuck in years- or even decades-long lines.

**Cumbersome systems:** Employers, students, workers, and others frequently go through lengthy, contorted efforts to remain in compliance with immigration requirements.

**No options available:** For approximately 11 million immigrants in the US (and other potential migrants outside), there is no potential immigration pathway open to them.

### The Big Shift



Modeled after point-based immigration systems in Canada and Australia, **this overhaul would place greater emphasis on “merit-based” pathways** focusing on skills and credentials, rather than family ties.

# What the Proposed Shift Would Include

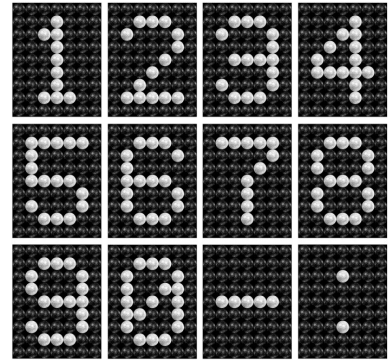
## An analysis of select components of Senate Bill 744

### ***New “merit-based” visas that are awarded based on a points system.***

The proposed new system would emphasize education, skills, and work experience. Fewer points would be granted for factors such as family ties and diversity of nationality.

Under the current system, international students studying at US universities have limited options if they wish to stay in the US after graduation.

Under the proposed new system, students who receive an advanced degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM) would have an easier path to employment-based visas and eventual permanent resident status.



### ***Changes in the existing visa programs for skilled workers to make it easier to change jobs.***

Under the current system, H1B visa holders are tightly tied to their employer. While they are permitted to change jobs, the process can be complex and can increase the danger that the worker will fall out of status and be subject to deportation.

Under the proposed new system, skilled worker visas would be more portable, making easier for a visa holder to move to a new job. Workers would thus have more discretion to change jobs at will, just as other workers in our economy already do.

### ***Removal of caps on certain visas to allow for more flexibility in granting admission to skilled workers and their families.***

Under the current system, skilled workers who have a job offer and an employer sponsor may qualify for H1B visas. There is a hard cap on the number of H1B visas that may be granted in a year.

Under the proposed new system, the number of skilled worker visas would expand or contract annually based on the US unemployment rate and other factors.

### ***Establishment of a new federal bureau to assess labor and immigration needs.***

The bureau would analyze the US labor market and make recommendations to policymakers on:

- Numerical limits for certain visas
- Shortage occupations
- Other aspects of the new employment-based visa system

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## Unintended Consequences?

While it seems plausible that distributing “merit-based” visas will result in immigrants who are more likely to find employment, a Canadian study found that social and community ties – the very ties that family-based migrants are more likely to have – have a notable effect on an immigrant’s economic success during the first 4 years in a new country.

Other potential consequences of a shift to so-called merit visas may be that there will be **less migration from certain countries** and **fewer migration opportunities for women**.

## Evaluating Claims About Skills

To fully assess local skills shortages, journalists may wish to gather:

- Perspectives from affected employers
- Data on local workforce projections
- Viewpoints from higher education administrators and/or state labor department officials
- Information about un- or under-employed workers already living in the local community who may have relevant skills

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## Locating Research & Data on Local Skill Gaps

The **US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA)**'s *Skimming for Skills* guide provides links to surveys, reports and customized data tools.

*Skimming for Skills* helps you locate relevant data sources that will allow you to shed light on labor or skill shortages, skill mismatches, and skill deficiencies.

See: [https://winwin.workforce3one.org/view/Skimming\\_for\\_Skills\\_Finding\\_Skills\\_Data/info](https://winwin.workforce3one.org/view/Skimming_for_Skills_Finding_Skills_Data/info)

ETA has also created a repository of studies and resources on skill deficiencies, shortages and mismatches.

See: <http://tinyurl.com/ETAskillresources>

Additionally, **each state has its own resources for labor-market and workforce information**. For example, the New York Department of Labor releases data on wages, projections and job figures for the state.

See: [www.labor.ny.gov/stats/](http://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/)

Another source for **state-level workforce projections** comes from the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University. *Recovery: Job Growth And Education Requirements Through 2020* provides labor market information such as which fields are expected to create the most jobs and the education requirements required to gain employment in the U.S.

See: <http://cew.georgetown.edu/recovery2020/>

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## Understanding the Existing Immigrant Workforce

In some cases, local communities may already be home to skilled workers who could fill key gaps. In addition to American-born workers, this pool includes **more than 2 million skilled immigrants already living in the US who hold a college degree but are currently un- or under-employed**.

The Migration Policy Institute report *Uneven Progress* documents both the challenges faced by skilled immigrants, and the opportunity that these workers represent.

Additional tools for gathering information on the existing immigrant workforce includes:

- US Census and American Community Survey : <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- US Census Bureau, Individual Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS): <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>
- US Department of Homeland Security's **Yearbook of Immigration**: [www.dhs.gov/yearbook-immigration-statistics](http://www.dhs.gov/yearbook-immigration-statistics)