

SKILLED IMMIGRANTS 101

MAKING THE CASE FOR GLOBAL TALENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

THIS BRIEF WILL HELP YOU:

- ◆ Understand the asset that skilled immigrants represent for the U.S.
- ◆ See the issues from both the employer and skilled immigrant standpoints
- ◆ Understand what policies and services best capitalize on skilled immigrant talent
- ◆ Be prepared to talk about this issue with policymakers, employers, educators, and funders
- ◆ Learn about national resources available through IMPRINT

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT ?

IMPRINT specializes in the issues facing those skilled immigrants who...

- ◆ Hold a bachelor's degree or higher
- ◆ Have immigrated permanently and through legal means to the U.S. (*primarily permanent residents, refugees, asylees, and naturalized citizens*)
- ◆ Have full work authorization (*no visa sponsorship needed!*)
- ◆ Are unemployed or working at jobs that do not draw on their in-demand skills

WHAT CAN YOU DO ?

EDUCATE...

Stakeholders about skilled immigrants as assets

ORGANIZE...

Outreach to employers, government, and immigrants

RECOMMEND...

IMPRINT ideas for state and local action

PARTNER...

With key players to join you with money or in-kind support

SERVE...

Immigrants via workshops, training and coaching

BRAIN WASTE

The Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan research organization, has labeled the phenomenon of underutilized skilled immigrants as "Brain Waste."



Engineer as parking attendant?



Nurse as waitress?



Marketer as makeup tech?

IMPRINT
Immigrant Professional Integration

LEARN MORE: www.imprintproject.org

WHY IS BRAIN WASTE A PROBLEM TODAY, ESPECIALLY IN THIS ECONOMY?

- ◆ Employers are disconnected from the untapped talent pool that skilled immigrants represent, even as they struggle to close skill gaps in sectors such as health and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)
- ◆ Foreign-educated professionals have already attained university degrees. A minimal investment can help this population become its most productive!¹
- ◆ The growing diversity among American consumers is creating greater demand for culturally and linguistically diverse workers in American businesses
- ◆ Overqualified immigrants working in entry-level jobs can crowd out lower-skilled workers
- ◆ Well-integrated skilled immigrants positively affect the employment of U.S.-born workers
- ◆ Connecting immigrant parents to professional jobs can also improve outcomes for their dependents

**UNTAPPED
COMMUNITY ASSETS
ARE A MISSED
OPPORTUNITY!**

These immigrants are skilled and have been invited to stay.

We need their skills and they need our opportunities.

Proven methods can help integrate them in the workforce.

¹ 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).

KEY STATISTICS

- ◆ 32% of all immigrants in the U.S. hold a bachelor's degree or higher²
- ◆ Over 2 million are underemployed, at higher rates than U.S.-born (22% versus 16%)³
- ◆ Immigrants working in shortage fields of health, STEM, and IT are on average better-educated than U.S.-born workers in those fields⁴

As for immigrants holding advanced degrees (masters or higher):

- ◆ They paid on average \$22,500 in taxes while using less than \$2,300 in benefits from government programs in 2009
- ◆ Each 100 immigrant workers with advanced degrees is associated with 44 new jobs for other workers (86 new jobs when only STEM fields are considered)⁵



^{2,3} Migration Policy Institute, *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States*, 2008.

⁴ Brookings Institution and Partnership for a New American Economy, *Immigrant Workers in the U.S. Labor Force*, 2012.

⁵ Partnership for a New American Economy and American Enterprise Institute, *Immigration and American Jobs*, 2011.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Employers can meet their talent needs locally

Families gain economic independence

FULL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Tax revenue increases for states and municipalities

Additional jobs are created

A WIN-WIN: TWO SIDES TO THE SAME SUCCESS STORY

THE EMPLOYER ANGLE—JOHN ROBAK Sought New American talent for business expansion

John C. Robak, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Greeley and Hansen, knows that achieving the growth plans for his company's water and wastewater engineering business depends heavily on hiring skilled workers.



"Greeley and Hansen already has a strong program for reaching the U.S. engineering education pipeline, but we still face an industry-wide talent shortage, so it can be difficult to fill positions with qualified people fast enough. We needed to maximize our candidate pool and continue to build a diverse staff," he says.

When approached by IMPRINT member organization Upwardly Global, John realized its candidates could be a great fit. The Global Engineers in Residence program, or GEIR, was built on Greeley and Hansen's acclaimed university internship model and led to two direct hires.

In 2012, Greeley and Hansen also sponsored a nationwide online training partnership, drawing internationally-trained candidates and the firm's employees together to help improve the interview skills of future job candidates.

THE JOB SEEKER ANGLE—MUSHTAQ From packing boxes to environmental engineer



With a bachelor's degree and background in mechanical engineering, Mushtaq worked as Senior Design Engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, helping rebuild his home country.

In 2008, the insurgency forced Mushtaq and his family to flee Iraq. They were resettled in Illinois in 2009.

Despite his experience and sterling recommendations, Mushtaq spent months packing boxes for \$8 an hour.

It wasn't until he was connected with IMPRINT member Upwardly Global that he was able to obtain the specialized services he needed to return to a professional role.

Through the innovative GEIR internship program with Greeley and Hansen, an employer partner in Upwardly Global's network, Mushtaq is now employed again in his field at more than triple his original salary, can support his family, and is working toward professional licensure.

MORE IMPRINT SUCCESS STORIES

FROM HOUSEKEEPER TO COUNSELOR

After working in Mexico as a psychologist, Anita* relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area but was unable to find advice about relicensing. Instead, she found her path to earning a living as an entrepreneur and ran a house cleaning business for 7 years.

However, after attending an informational meeting for immigrant psychologists at San Francisco's Welcome Back Center, an IMPRINT member organization, Anita joined San Francisco's program. With the Welcome Back Center's assistance, Anita navigated the complex relicensing path and reentered her career field as a counselor at a nonprofit in Oakland assisting domestic violence survivors.

FROM CAR WASH ATTENDANT TO DOCTOR

Jean* had worked as an obstetrician-gynecologist in Haiti, but when he arrived in the United States the only job he could find was as a car-wash attendant making minimum wage.

With three children to support, Jean focused on daily survival and had little time to research his career options, until he was referred to IMPRINT member the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians.

The Center placed him in a medical laboratory job and helped him start on the long journey back to medicine. Today he is a practicing physician in a Brooklyn hospital.

FROM GROCERY TO OFFICE

Carmela*, from the Philippines, immigrated to the United States thinking that her business management degree would give her solid professional employment options in her adopted home.

Carmela soon found, however, that her job search was complicated by employers not understanding the value of her foreign degree. To pay the bills, she became a grocery store cashier.

At the suggestion of a friend, Carmela used IMPRINT member World Education Services to evaluate her degree for U.S. equivalency. She credits the evaluation with helping her quickly land a mid-level role in a small business that drew directly on her skills.

FROM LAID OFF TO DREAM JOB

IMPRINT member the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) has its own network of colleges working to integrate immigrants.

Jorge*, a skilled immigrant residing in Falls Church, Virginia, entered the Northern Virginia Community College Adult Career Pathways Program after being laid off from his finance job.

Although he had previously worked in the U.S., he lacked the confidence needed to interview in today's competitive workplace.

Through the program, he improved both his resume and interview skills and ended the course with three job offers, ultimately choosing to work for an embassy at \$40 an hour.



**All names changed for privacy*

IN SUM:

Capitalizing on skilled immigrants...

- ◆ Is an economic development opportunity
- ◆ Is a non-partisan issue
- ◆ Keeps another country's prior investment from going to waste
- ◆ Connects to the global economy
- ◆ Catapults families out of poverty
- ◆ Increases tax revenues
- ◆ Helps business serve diverse customers

...and the strategies to help them advance already exist.

WHAT KIND OF STRATEGIES WORK FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION?

- ◆ Educational case management
- ◆ Thorough, high-quality credential evaluation
- ◆ Advising on professional licensing requirements
- ◆ Informational career guides (*in print or online*)
- ◆ Targeted soft skills development (*creating a US-style resume, honing American job interview skills, building networking and self-marketing skills, drawing on career mentors*)
- ◆ Employer engagement via:
 - Corporate Social Responsibility: donations, volunteering, and in-kind support
 - Providing internships to help job seekers build U.S. experience
 - Direct hiring of immigrant job seekers
- ◆ Professional development of individuals who serve skilled immigrant clients, such as:
 - Community college instructors, advisors, and administrators
 - Workforce "One Stop" center staff
 - Refugee resettlement agency staff

WHAT IS IMPRINT?

IMPRINT is a **national umbrella group** of nonprofits supporting professional re-entry of **underemployed skilled immigrants**.

IMPRINT:

- ◆ Creates and disseminates resources
- ◆ Advocates for effective policies
- ◆ Broadcasts best practices

You can **engage with IMPRINT** through:

- ◆ Technical assistance
- ◆ Partnering
- ◆ Referring immigrant professionals to our member organizations
- ◆ Advocating for skilled immigrants
- ◆ Helping set the agenda

IMPRINT is *not* a direct service provider, although some of our member organizations provide direct services. We are a clearinghouse for information and resources.

Our work is:

- ◆ National in scope
- ◆ Specialized in career pathways and employment outcomes
- ◆ Research and data-driven

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:
www.imprintproject.org



WHEN IN FRONT OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS:

WHAT TO EXPLAIN

- ◆ There are more skilled, work-authorized immigrants in your community than you realize
- ◆ Having these skilled immigrants makes your region more attractive to employers who want an educated workforce capable of succeeding in a global environment
- ◆ Many skilled immigrants are U.S. citizens and therefore eligible to vote – they *are* your constituents
- ◆ Immigrant business owners are creating jobs in your community today. Steps you take to support immigrant professionals pay off in increased economic activity in your region
- ◆ Modest adjustments to existing infrastructure and policies can permit appropriate services leading to strong fiscal and social returns
- ◆ You have the power to elevate this issue and help it gain greater traction
- ◆ For regulated professions like nursing, engineering or teaching, any attempts to streamline licensing or administrative processes will maintain the highest professional standards

WHAT TO ASK THEM TO DO

- ◆ Use the power of your position to raise awareness of this untapped asset when attending Chamber of Commerce events, home-district town halls, etc.
- ◆ Be a guest speaker at a business lunch, professional association meeting, or other event serving immigrant professionals
- ◆ Assign a staff member to specialize in this issue – perhaps one who handles workforce or economic development
- ◆ Lend your name to an op-ed on this issue
- ◆ Call on IMPRINT for informed comment as a witness or in written testimony for relevant hearings



WHEN IN FRONT OF EMPLOYERS:

WHAT TO EXPLAIN

- ◆ Government is very responsive to employer needs and will listen if you say that skilled immigrants are a resource in your community that needs investment to meet your businesses needs
- ◆ There are many highly qualified immigrants in your area who do not need visa sponsorship for employment
- ◆ Hiring bilingual and bicultural workers can open new consumer markets locally and abroad



WHAT TO ASK THEM TO DO

- ◆ Offer your space or your staff for volunteer events that help skilled immigrants improve their job search and interview skills, and build local professional networks
- ◆ Use your company's membership in a local Chamber of Commerce or other business group to elevate this issue and find fellow employer champions
- ◆ Stress your interest in hiring local internationally-trained candidates to your HR department.
- ◆ Identify incumbent workers who have foreign earned credentials and continue to invest in these assets!

WHEN IN FRONT OF FOUNDATIONS OR PHILANTHROPISTS:

WHAT TO EXPLAIN

- ◆ Without intervention, many skilled immigrant professionals are in danger of facing the same low-level employment outcomes as unskilled workers, but with targeted intervention, they can succeed
- ◆ The success of individual skilled immigrants can have a broader cumulative impact by relieving crowding in entry-level jobs, generating new jobs, and fostering new advocates for workforce issues
- ◆ Skilled workers are a good return on investment through increased tax revenues, elevated consumer power (e.g. education, housing, purchasing) and civic engagement
- ◆ There are established practices in skilled immigrant workforce integration with reliable placement outcomes that can be replicated and scaled
- ◆ Investing in skilled immigrants can support a foundation's funding priorities in poverty alleviation, social justice, economic development, and more

WHAT TO ASK THEM TO DO

- ◆ Share IMPRINT publications and resources with your colleagues in philanthropy
- ◆ Co-host a convening with business and civic leaders in your community to discuss win-win outcomes of recognizing and serving the immigrant professionals in your community
- ◆ Suggest a Skilled Immigrants panel at an upcoming Regional Association of Grantmakers convening or conference. IMPRINT may be available to provide a guest speaker
- ◆ Urge current grantees serving skilled immigrants to identify these individuals, document the data they gather, make appropriate referrals, or develop new services
- ◆ Fund increased services to immigrant professionals



WHEN IN FRONT OF WORKFORCE SERVICE PROVIDERS:

WHAT TO EXPLAIN

- ◆ With existing resources, workforce practitioners can help their skilled immigrant clients with targeted career advice and guidance toward economic and professional success
- ◆ Despite the diversity of national origin, all skilled immigrants share similar and unique workforce service needs that can be addressed as a class
- ◆ Skilled immigrants as a group have the potential for outsized results



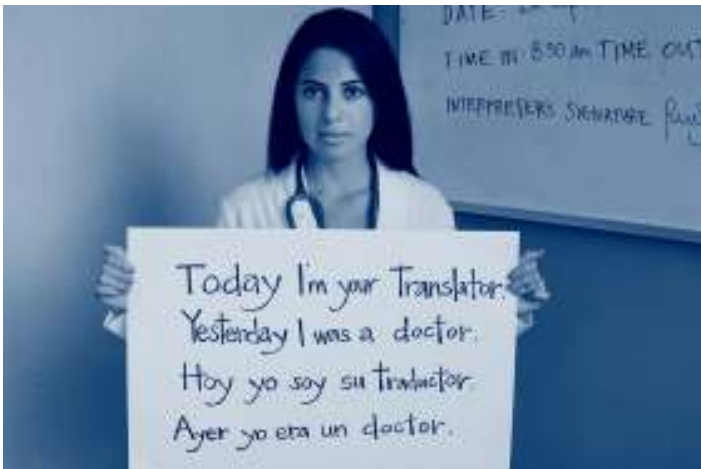
WHAT TO ASK THEM TO DO

- ◆ Educate others on immigrant professional issues and become active in transmitting the message to elected officials and funders
- ◆ Consider offering a professional development session (or sharing information about IMPRINT's webinars) to help busy workforce development staff learn what they need to know to effectively serve this special population
- ◆ Share and distribute IMPRINT's resources with your clients and co-workers
- ◆ Consider offering a workshop or other one-time event to your immigrant professional clients independently or in partnership with other local organizations – libraries, workforce centers, employers, ethnic associations, professional groups

WHEN IN FRONT OF ADULT EDUCATION PROVIDERS:

WHAT TO EXPLAIN

- ◆ Adult education and community college practitioners (instructors, course advisors, career center personnel, program administrators) are often the first resource a skilled immigrant will turn to after arriving in the U.S.
- ◆ Free resources are available through IMPRINT to help educators address learners' questions about transferring their international degrees or credentials to the U.S., obtaining employment in their professional fields, and more
- ◆ Skilled immigrants have much in common with each other in spite of their diverse personal and professional backgrounds



WHAT TO ASK THEM TO DO

- ◆ Reinforce with your students that their foreign credentials *can count* in the U.S. when they are presented in the proper context
- ◆ Assess your institution's ability to provide accelerated learning to skilled immigrants in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- ◆ Consider establishing mechanisms for advanced standing in certain credential pathways (*granting substantial credit to immigrants' existing education*)
- ◆ Introduce or further develop elements of curricula which help students with the professional job search (resume and interview preparation, networking, using the internet to research jobs)
- ◆ Share and distribute IMPRINT's resources with your students and co-workers
- ◆ Engage with IMPRINT to conduct professional development across departments