



IMPROVING IMMIGRANT ACCESS TO WORKFORCE SERVICES: PARTNERSHIPS, PRACTICES & POLICIES

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I. Introduction

Immigrants and their families are an increasingly important part of our country's economic well-being.¹ In 2014, about 42.2 million immigrants lived in the United States—approximately 13 percent of the total population, compared to 5.4 percent of the population in 1960.² It is estimated that 11.3 million immigrants, or about a quarter of the total, are unauthorized (also termed “undocumented”), and just under a quarter of all immigrants living in the United States are permanent residents and eligible for naturalization (8.8 million in 2012).³ Of the total number of unauthorized immigrants, about 62 percent have lived in the United States for more than a decade, and about 38 percent live with their US born children.⁴

Immigrants and their families also make up a large proportion of some states' total population. In California, immigrants comprise 27 percent of the state population, while the foreign-born proportion of the population of New York and New Jersey is 22 percent.⁵ Furthermore, a number of states have experienced very high growth rates of their immigrant populations in recent years. For instance, between 2000 and 2013, the immigrant population of Arkansas grew 82 percent, while in Tennessee it grew 92 percent.⁶

Immigrants make up a sizable portion of the US labor force, even greater than their share of the overall population: 16 percent, compared with 13 percent of the US population as a whole.⁷ The number of foreign-born workers in the United States is projected to increase by 9.9 million between 2010 and 2030.⁸ They will become even more important to our workforce and economy as baby boomers retire, among other decreases in labor market participation.

Immigrants are a key segment of our workforce, and yet they are much more likely than the native population to be poor. Forty-two percent of foreign-born residents fall below 200 percent of the poverty threshold versus 30 percent of the native-born population.⁹ Other research shows that they are in need of more stable jobs with better wages and stronger connections to skills training and career advancement opportunities.¹⁰

The challenges of poverty, unstable employment, and low wages affect not just the adult family members, but also their children. The number of children in immigrant families has grown substantially over the last two decades—by 51 percent between 1995 and 2014, to 18.7 million first-

¹ We use the terms “immigrant,” “foreign-born,” and “new Americans” interchangeably.

² Brown, Anna, and Renee Stepler, “Statistical Portrait of the Foreign Born Population in the United States,” Pew Research Center, last modified April 19, 2016,

³ Auclair, Gregory, and Jeanne Batalova, “Naturalization Trends in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, last modified October 24, 2013,

⁴ Passel, Jeffrey S., and D’Vera Cohn, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population Stable for Half a Decade,” Pew Research Center, last modified July 22, 2015,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Singer, Audrey, *Immigrant Workers in the U.S. Labor Force*:

⁸ Myers, Dowell, Stephen Levy, and John Pitkin, “The Contributions of Immigrants and Their Children to the American Workforce and Jobs of the Future,” Center for American Progress, last modified June 19, 2013,

⁹ McHugh, Margie, and Madeleine Morawski, “Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, last modified April 2016,

¹⁰ Singer, Audrey, *Immigrant Workers in the U.S. Labor Force*:

; Spence, Robin, “Sound Investments: Building Immigrants' Skills to Fuel Economic Growth,” Economic Mobility Corporation, 2010; Lee, Helly, Christina Walker, and Olivia Golden, “Two Generational Strategies to Improve Immigrant Family and Child Outcomes,” CLASP, last modified December 2015,

and second-generation immigrant children. They now represent one-quarter of all US children.¹¹ With tens of millions of immigrant workers in poverty, this translates into a disproportionately high number of children of immigrants growing up in poverty.¹² As an abundance of research has demonstrated, poverty negatively affects children’s development, cognitive skills, academic performance, behavior, and overall chances for a healthy, successful life.¹³ Children of immigrants also face additional risk factors. These include, among other factors, having parents with low educational levels, living in households in which adults do not speak English, living in unstable households due to current immigrant policies, and experiencing high rates of family stress.¹⁴

Although immigrant workers are a sizable percentage of our workforce and demonstrate significant need for employment and skill-building services, our public workforce development system appears to serve very few immigrants. Research for this paper revealed that this system serves a very small percentage of Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakers¹⁵ (the closest proxy for immigrants in workforce system data). Moreover, we found limited connections and coordination between immigrant-serving organizations (e.g., immigration legal service providers, community-based organizations, and worker centers) and workforce organizations (e.g., one-stop career centers, nonprofit training centers, and community colleges and other postsecondary education institutions).

Nevertheless, some recent federal policy developments offer opportunities for states and localities to develop concrete strategies to expand and improve workforce development services for immigrants and LEPs, as well as to strengthen partnerships across the different types of organizations that, together, could serve them better. At the federal level, opportunities include the passage of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive action. By making workforce and immigration policies, systems, and programs work better for new Americans, improved workforce development strategies could pave the way for states and localities to better help those covered by DACA to access services, including those offered through WIOA. More generally, such strategies could build a foundation for stronger, accelerated integration of immigrants into our workforces and society.

In fall 2015, the Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI), with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, engaged in a modest research project to learn more about partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and workforce organizations, practices and strategies adopted by these partnerships, and state and local policy ideas for improvements. This paper summarizes the key findings from our interviews. Because only limited efforts have been made to document these types of partnerships, their joint practices, and policy barriers and enablers, we present these findings to contribute to building a more robust field of knowledge and practice in this space.¹⁶ This paper is designed to *encourage dialogue among interested stakeholders*. We look forward to discussing the findings with others in both the immigrant-serving and workforce development worlds.

¹¹ “Immigrant Children,” Child Trends, last modified October 2014,

¹² Hernandez, Donald J., and Jeffrey S. Napierala, “Children in Immigrant Families: Essential to America’s Future,” Foundation for Child Development, last modified June 2012,

¹³ For example, see “The Consequences of Poverty for Children and the Nation,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, last modified March 11, 2014,

¹⁴ Lee, Helly, Christina Walker, and Olivia Golden, “Two Generational Strategies to Improve Immigrant Family and Child Outcomes,” CLASP, last modified December 2015,

¹⁵ “Comments on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRMs) Relating to Immigrants and Limited English Proficient Individuals,” National Immigration Law Center and National Skills Coalition, last modified June 2015,

¹⁶ For earlier research efforts documenting how immigrants access skill building services see: Benner, Chris, et al., “Immigrant Workers Empowerment and Community Building: A Review of Issues and Strategies for Increasing Workforce and Economic Opportunity for Immigrant Workers,” Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community: University of California Santa Cruz, 2005; Spence, Robin, “Sound Investments: Building Immigrants’ Skills to Fuel Economic Growth,” Economic Mobility Corporation, 2010

; Cordero-Guzman, Hector, “Community-Based Organizations, Immigrant Low-wage Workers, and the Workforce Development System in the United States,” Baruch College and the City University of New York, last modified 2014.

II. Methodology

The AspenWSI research, which began in September 2015, involved a literature scan and a series of telephone interviews with representatives of organizations providing workforce development services and organizations providing services to immigrants (including integration, legal, education, workforce and employment services). We interviewed both grassroots organizations providing services in local communities and national organizations engaging in research, policy advocacy, and technical assistance. The interviews focused on perspectives on building and improving practice and how to work with different stakeholders across institutional boundaries for greater impact on policy. We also asked about state and local policy barriers and enablers.

We conducted interviews with thought leaders and practitioners representing 16 organizations. Recognizing that immigrants interact with diverse systems and policies, we intentionally selected a wide range of both national and grassroots organizations. When selecting informants, our goal was breadth. Organizations included immigrant- and worker-rights organizations, immigrant-integration organizations, workforce organizations (community colleges, community-based organizations), and national research, advocacy, and intermediary organizations and associations.

We targeted organizations and informants who are recognized nationally for their innovative approaches in the fields of workforce or immigration. Taking into account that collaboration between the workforce and immigration fields is an emerging area of practice, we focused on local/state organizations in states with large immigrant populations and those that have a long history of working with immigrants. The research further focused on services and policies targeted to immigrants with lower levels of education, English, and skills.

Our main research questions were:

- How are workforce organizations and immigrant-serving organizations partnering to expand immigrants' access to workforce services?
- What are the practices and strategies of these partnerships for connecting immigrants to workforce services?
- What are the non-policy barriers and enabling factors to these partnerships and services?
- What are enabling policies and policy barriers to these partnerships and services?

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

National Organizations

Amanda Bergson Shilcock, National Skills Coalition

Ana Avendano, United Way

Surabhi Jain, National Council of La Raza

Darlene G. Miller, National Council for Workforce Education

Josh Stehlik and Jesse Hahn, National Immigration Law Center

Teresita Wisell, Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education

Kathleen Nelson, Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs

Saket Soni, National Guest Workers Alliance

Tara Raghuvver and Joshua Hoyt, National Partnership for New Americans

Ron Painter and Josh Copus, National Association of Workforce Boards

State and Local Organizations

Cristina Tzintzun, Worker's Defense Project

Alma Couverthie, Casa de Maryland

Roxana Tynan, LAANE

Roxana Norouzi, One America

Daniel Loftus, PODER Works

Aida Barragan, Building Skills Partnership

III. Immigrants and the Workforce Development System: Context and Background

As a growing and diversifying element of the US workforce, foreign-born workers are essential to our nation's health and vibrancy. Foreign-born individuals contribute to the economy's stability and growth, and addressing their needs for education, training, skill development, credentialing and career advancement is a national imperative.

However, as currently funded and administered, our public workforce system is challenged to serve new Americans and individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEPs). No federal public funding streams directly address the workforce-development and skill-building needs of immigrants, other than funding for refugee services, which are very short term and limited (e.g., case management, limited cash assistance, English as Second Language classes and job readiness assistance).¹⁷ As part of the general population, immigrant workers can access skill-building and workforce services at community-based organizations, community colleges, and other postsecondary education institutions, as well as through worker centers and unions in some instances. These services are typically funded through a combination of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other federal funds, state and local funds, and philanthropic investments.¹⁸

Title II under WIOA, which covers Adult Education and English Acquisition Services, is one of the main avenues through which LEPs can access education and language services. WIOA Title II is silent on the question of participants' immigration status and does not require that participants be legally work-authorized. Approximately 19 million working-age adults in this country (16-65 years old) are considered Limited English Proficient.¹⁹ However, only 668,226 adults were enrolled in Title II English as a second language services in 2013-2014.²⁰ Clearly, the public system serves just a fraction of those who could benefit from these English language skill building services.²¹

BOX 1: EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION LEVELS OF IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants in the Workforce

Immigrants are represented in jobs at all wage and skill levels. However, they are overrepresented in industries with low or high education requirements. For example, although immigrants comprise 16 percent of our workforce overall, they are almost 50 percent of workers in the service of private households, and over 30 percent of workers in the accommodation or lodging sector. Immigrants are 20 to 25 percent of workers in the construction, agriculture, food services, and warehousing industries. And 23 percent of immigrant workers are in the IT and high-tech manufacturing industries.

Educational Levels

Immigrants are concentrated at the higher and lower ends of the education spectrum. Nearly one-third of U.S. immigrants age 25 and older lacked a high school diploma or equivalent, about 19 percent had some college or a two-year degree, and about 29 percent had a college degree or higher.

Sources: "State Immigration Data Profiles: Review of U.S. Census data on U.S. immigrants and the native born", Migration Policy Institute, last accessed August 2017,

Singer, Audrey, "Immigrant Workers in the U.S. Labor Force," Brookings Institution, last modified March 15, 2012,

¹⁷ "Refugees," Office of Refugee Resettlement, last modified January 28, 2016,

¹⁸ The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, enacted on July 22, 2014, replaced the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. WIOA coordinates efforts between Department of Labor and Department of Education workforce and training programs to create more unified and streamlined offerings for job seekers. See:

¹⁹ Wilson, Jill H., "Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas," Brookings Institution, last modified September 2014,

²⁰ "English Literacy/English as a Second Language (ESL) Education in the Adult Basic Grant Program," U.S. Department of Education, last modified August 2015,

²¹ McHugh and Morawski (2016).

Furthermore, about 10 million foreign-born individuals lack a high school diploma, indicating that significant numbers of foreign-born individuals could benefit from Adult Basic Education services as well.²²

Title I of WIOA provides funding to support employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. Immigrants who are work-authorized are eligible for Title I services. The shortage of data on immigrants in the public workforce system makes it difficult to know how many immigrants this system actually serves. However, we do know that a tiny percentage (1.6 percent) of Title I participants are Limited English Proficient individuals, which is the closest indicator in the data for flagging immigrants.²³

The small percentage of LEP individuals served by the federal workforce system may be due in part to the system's severe and chronic underfunding. Lack of funding has, in turn, affected the system's capacity to meet the language, education, and training needs of many individuals, including lower-skilled immigrants and LEP individuals. Under WIOA, there are opportunities to better integrate Title I workforce development services with Title II Adult Education and Literacy programs, potentially increasing services to immigrants.

Another challenge is that the workforce development system is not equipped to address the needs of highly skilled immigrants in low-paying jobs, which can include foreign-born individuals with secondary and post-secondary degrees earned abroad and who could be Limited English Proficient or not. According to a 2014 Migration Policy Institute report, about 20 percent of foreign-born adults who had a post-secondary degree from abroad were working in low-skilled jobs compared with only 12 percent of the U.S. native-born population.²⁴ To find employment that meets their education and skill levels, they have to navigate complicated systems to validate their foreign credentials, find alternative pathways if the licensing and certification obstacles are too great, and incur significant expenses.

The limited ability of the current federal workforce system to serve the needs of a sizable and growing foreign-born population facing language-acquisition and other training challenges underscores the importance of partnerships between immigrant-focused and workforce-focused organizations. Furthermore, the significant momentum of the 2013 efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform and the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans shed light on the need to address the challenge.

Federal comprehensive immigration reform would increase significantly the number of participants who are eligible for workforce services under both WIOA Title I and II, particularly lower-income workers with lower education and skill levels. For instance, the first round of the DACA

The limited ability of the current federal workforce system to serve the needs of a sizable and growing foreign-born population facing language-acquisition and other training challenges underscores the importance of partnerships between immigrant-focused and workforce-focused organizations.



²² Recent Analysis from the Pew Research Center indicates that educational-attainment levels tend to be higher among Asian, European, and Middle Eastern immigrants compared with immigrants from Central America and Mexico. See: "Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States," Pew Research Center, last modified July 6, 2015,

²³ "Comments on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRMs) Relating to Immigrants and Limited English Proficient Individuals," National Immigration Law Center and National Skills Coalition, last modified June 2015,

²⁴ McHugh, Margie, Jeanne Batalova, and Madeleine Morawski, "Brain Waste in the U.S. Workforce: Select Labor Force Characteristics of College Educated Native-Born and Foreign Born Adults," Migration Policy Institute, last modified May 2014,

program launched in 2012 granted temporary work authorization to more than 700,000 undocumented youth, making them eligible for WIOA Title I training services among other educational and skill building opportunities.²⁵ A 2015 survey of DACA recipients indicates that 92 percent of those surveyed were able to access educational opportunities not previously available to them.²⁶

BOX 2: DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA)

WHAT IT IS: Executive action announced by President Obama in 2012. Allows undocumented individuals who came to the United States as children and who meet certain conditions to apply to obtain work authorization and have removal from the United States deferred for two years. Can be renewed.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION: To qualify, a participant must be under the age of 31 as of June 25, 2012; have arrived in the United States before turning 16 years old; have maintained continuous presence in the United States since June 15, 2007; currently be in school, graduated from high school, have a high school equivalent, or was honorably discharged from the Coast Guard or the Armed Forces; have not been convicted of a felony, a significant misdemeanor, or had three or more misdemeanors.

*In 2014, the Obama Administration proposed an expansion of DACA that would lift the age cap and otherwise adjust requirements to allow more individuals to apply. The proposed expansion of DACA is currently on hold; however, the original program is still in effect.

DEFERRED ACTION FOR PARENTS OF AMERICANS (DAPA)

WHAT IT IS: Executive action announced by President Obama in 2014. Allows undocumented parents of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents to apply to obtain work authorization and delayed removal from the United States. The proposal has not been implemented.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION: To qualify, a participant must have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 2010; have a child who was a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident on November 20, 2014; and is not an enforcement priority for removal from the United States.

* The DAPA proposal and the proposed expansion of DACA would have qualified approximately four million people for work permits and, by extension, WIOA Title I services. However, in early 2015 a federal judge issued an injunction preventing the proposals from going into effect. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the injunction against the Obama Administration which led the Administration to take the case to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court heard the case (*United States v. Texas*) in the spring of 2016, but the vote was deadlocked 4-4, which upholds the lower court's injunction. (The death of Justice Antonin Scalia in early 2016 leaves just eight justices on the Supreme Court.)

²⁵ "Number of I-821D, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals by Fiscal Year, Quarter, Intake, Biometrics and Case Status: 2012-2015 (March 31)," United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed June 2, 2016,

²⁶ Wong, Tom K., "Results from a Nationwide Survey of DACA Recipients Illustrate the Program's Impact," National Immigration Law Center, Center for American Progress, last modified July 2015,

IV. Key Findings on Partnerships, Practices, and Policy Barriers

Our qualitative primary research yielded several findings about the partnerships between workforce and immigrant-serving organizations, their joint practices, and the policy barriers that may impede their partnership and work.

One overarching finding is that, while policy barriers are indeed stumbling blocks for these partnerships, there are other significant challenges to workforce organizations and immigrant-serving organizations partnering or working together to connect immigrants to workforce services more effectively. The assumption with which we began this research was that, given the stalled state of comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level, it was worth exploring how state and local and other federal policies may be barriers to or opportunities for partnership between workforce and immigrant-serving organizations. The goal was to understand how immigrant-focused and workforce-focused organizations can partner and then identify policy barriers—as well as policy opportunities—that could inform a policy agenda.

Indeed, our research revealed policy barriers, particularly concerning immigration and workforce policies affecting the one-quarter of immigrants who are not authorized to live and work in this country. For example, undocumented legal status at the federal level severely limits eligibility for services; overcoming this policy barrier requires comprehensive immigration reform. Furthermore, our interviewees reported that partnership and policy work at the state and local level is more easily conducted in states such as New York and California where the policy context has been historically more amenable to reform policies affecting immigrants, versus states like Texas and Arizona where the political environment is more difficult.

Other policies hamper the provision of services to authorized immigrants. For example, limited, piecemeal, and uncoordinated funding presents stumbling blocks to providing immigrants with workforce services. While none of these funding challenges directly prevent organizations from partnering, they hamper partnership because the costs of braiding together a joint effort can be costly, which creates a disincentive for organizations to partner.

Our research also revealed several non-policy barriers to partnership between workforce and immigrant-serving organizations. Significant constraints are due to more fundamental barriers—such as lack of knowledge and understanding about each other’s types of organization and work; lack of leadership, information and support to wade into new partnership territory; and lack of time and resources to engage in the time-consuming and sensitive work of building partnerships. Policy and system reforms can help to address these barriers. Additional approaches are needed as well, such as leadership development, capacity building, peer learning, technical assistance, and documentation/dissemination of good practices and models.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS AND CHALLENGES FACED

With the growing focus on the need to improve skill-building and career-advancement services for immigrants, interest is also increasing in the role of partnerships between workforce-focused and immigrant-focused organizations. For example, in 2014, the White House Task Force on New Americans formalized a federal immigration integration agenda that emphasizes the importance of intentional collaboration among the different federal agencies that serve immigrants in order

to improve services that integrate immigrants linguistically, economically, and politically.²⁷ In early 2016, the taskforce announced the National Skills and Credential Institute, which will bring together state networks of stakeholders seeking to improve outcomes for credentialing higher educated and skilled immigrants and refugees.²⁸

Additionally, a number of federal agencies and philanthropies have made modest investments in networks and pilot programs that bring together stakeholders working to help immigrants access skill-building services. For instance, the Ford and Annie E. Casey foundations have funded the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE) to facilitate Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers, a pilot program to expand and replicate community college/worker center/community-based organization partnerships to address the workforce development needs of immigrants and immigrant workers.²⁹

Another notable example includes the efforts of the US Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education through the Network for Integrating New Americans.³⁰ Through this work, the Department of Education is providing technical assistance to a variety of education institutions serving immigrants and creating a community of practice among these providers.

Our interviews revealed several major themes on how immigrant and workforce organizations are approaching partnerships.

1. Partnerships between grassroots immigrant-serving and workforce organizations can be very valuable, but barriers to creating and maintaining them include lack of time, resources, and committed partners willing to work through organizational and cultural differences.

Interviewees described the potential value of immigrant-serving organizations and workforce organizations partnering to expand workforce services to immigrants. The value to immigrant-serving organizations is the ability to provide critical services that help their constituents

Immigrant-serving and workforce organizations can be positioned to provide a pipeline of skills and economic opportunity for immigrants and a well-rounded package of education, training, supports, employment, and empowerment.

access better jobs, higher wages, and family economic sustainability. The value to workforce organizations, interviewees reported, is the ability to serve community members who are eager, hard-working, and have supportive communities and organizations behind them. These two types of organizations need not be competitors; rather, they can be positioned to provide a pipeline of skills and economic opportunity for immigrants and a well-rounded package of education, training, supports, employment, and empowerment.

Despite this latent value, interviewees identified a general lack of understanding of potential partner organizations. The language, culture, norms, policies, and funding structures differ significantly. Information gaps between workforce and immigrant-serving organizations include abstract qualities such as language and culture, as well as

²⁷ "Strengthening Communities by Welcoming All Residents: A Federal Strategic Plan on Immigrant and Refugee Integration," The White House Task Force on New Americans, last modified April 2015,

²⁸ "Participate in the Task Force on New Americans' National Skills and Credential Institute," The White House, last modified March 30, 2016,

²⁹ See "Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers," National Council for Workforce Education, accessed June 2, 2016,

³⁰ See Kallenbach, Silja, Kien S. Lee, Susan Downs-Karkos, and Madeleine Beaubien Taylor, "Adult Education and Immigrant Integration: Networks for Integrating New Americans," World Education, last modified September 30, 2013,

more concrete elements such as funding—availability, eligibility, restrictions, and how it could be braided together—and knowledge about data collection and performance measures. For example, with the implementation of DACA, many workforce service providers do not understand exactly what services they can offer to those who are eligible.³¹

Further, informants indicated that there is a lack of leadership encouraging partnership. Without leadership and commitment from the heads of organizations, these types of partnership usually do not even get off the ground; if they do, they have little chance of success. This type of partnership is new and different from the norm. Organizational leaders can find it difficult to place a high priority on this type of partnership, or they may be unwilling to risk going outside the status quo, especially if funding is limited.

It should be noted that several national organizations, including many of our interviewees, are engaged in efforts to support these types of partnerships to improve practice and policy at the state and local level.

2. Partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and entities in the WIOA system (e.g., public one-stop job centers, Workforce Investment Boards) are uncommon. Partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and community colleges appear to be more common.

In many communities, informants identified a general lack of knowledge among WIOA-funded entities (particularly WIOA Title I service providers) of the existence of immigrant-serving organizations, and vice versa. This lack of engagement is evidenced by the very low numbers of LEPs accessing Title I services. Immigrant and Title I workforce-focused organizations tend to operate—or at least perceive they operate—in different spaces and may not believe they have much to offer the other type of organization or its clients. As a result, many do not even know that the other type of organization exists.

We also learned that many immigrant-serving organizations perceive the workforce system as underfunded and overtaxed with serving too many special populations. Therefore, immigrant-serving organizations tend not to even reach out to engage with the workforce system, believing that it likely would be a fruitless effort.

On the other hand, interviewees reported several examples of immigrant-serving organizations that partner successfully with community colleges to offer immigrants access to training and credentials. This connection may be the result of the WIOA funding structure. WIOA Title I funding flows to local Workforce Investment Boards and jobs centers, which have little natural connection to immigrant-serving organizations. On the other hand, WIOA Title II funding is distributed competitively to local entities, including local educational entities (LEAs or K-12 institutions), community-based organizations, community colleges, and other postsecondary education institutions. Given this funding structure, community colleges receiving WIOA Title II funds have a more natural connection to organizations serving immigrants with lower English and educational levels. The fact that community colleges also provide English language education under other funding sources reinforces this connection.

Local immigrant-integration organizations that have participated in this type of partnership with community colleges felt it gives their constituents access to credentials valued in the labor market. Interviewees also discussed how these partnerships enabled community colleges to expand their student base and leverage the expertise of immigrant-integration organizations in providing services to these students.

³¹ Immigrant-advocacy organizations, including the National Immigration Law Center and United We Dream, partnered with the National Skills Coalition to advocate for the U.S. Department of Labor to clarify eligibility of DACA recipients for WIOA Title I Services. As a result, the department issued a Training and Employment Guidance Letter around the issue. See:

3. Interest in partnership and partnership “fit” vary, depending on the type of organization.

We interviewed different types of immigrant-serving organizations, including worker centers assisting members with employment and other services (such as assistance with wage and employment rights violations), local immigrant-integration organizations, local organizations educating and assisting immigrants on their rights, and national immigrant-rights organizations and immigrant-integration organizations.³²

At the *local* level, we found that local worker centers and immigrant-integration organizations seem to focus more on increasing access to workforce development services than do immigrant rights groups. Within immigrant-serving organizations, those with an integration mission had a longer track record of partnering with those outside their field, while legal and rights organizations that are more accustomed to protecting their clients from abuses may be less likely to take the lead on reaching out to develop workforce-focused partnerships with other organizations and employers. For legal- and immigrant-rights organizations, the need to make their mission a priority in an environment of limited funding is also an important consideration. At the *national* level, both immigrant-rights organizations and immigrant-integration organizations that we interviewed were very interested in efforts to expand access to workforce development services and resources.

It is important to pay attention to the specific partners, the specific types of partners, and organizational context and characteristics when assessing potential and support for partnership.

Given these differences, it is crucial to not lump together all immigrant-serving organizations into one category when considering encouraging partnership with workforce organizations. In fact, the same is true for workforce organizations, which vary significantly from Workforce Investment Boards that set policy and funding, to job centers that provide services, to community colleges that provide education, to community-based organizations that provide a variety of services and beyond. It is important to pay attention to the specific partners, the specific types of partners, and organizational context and characteristics when assessing potential and support for partnership.

4. Including worker centers and unions as partners with community colleges or immigrant-integration organizations is a promising approach to serving immigrants better.

Interviewees indicated that unions and worker centers can be helpful partners to organizations providing education and training services to immigrants. Specifically mentioned were partnerships in the construction industry, where immigrant workers are overrepresented and often face violations of their rights. Informants discussed how partnerships could help working immigrants connect to and succeed in work and training. For example, “earn and learn” models and union apprenticeship programs could be good options for immigrant workers, offering employment during training and often a guaranteed job at the end.

DACA and DAPA executive actions and proposals have encouraged some worker centers to think more deeply about the need to connect workers to skill-building services. In some instances, like the Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers pilot project, worker centers are partnering with community colleges. In Austin, Texas, the Workers Defense Project is planning a partnership with a construction union to run a pre-apprenticeship program.

³² No “bright line” distinguishes between these types of organization. Some provide a combination of services.

5. Service providers in both fields identified the value of cultivating strong employer partnerships.

Interviewees discussed the importance of working with employers and making the case to them for investing in immigrant workers, whether through training or by improving standards for job quality. On-site vocational and English language education surfaced as examples of strategies that employers can implement to support immigrant workers. Additionally, interviewees noted that implementing these types of strategies can help employers retain immigrant workers.

Given the types of industries in which immigrants with lower educational and skill levels are employed (e.g., construction, personal services, hospitality), job-quality issues surfaced multiple times in our interviews. Clearly, employers are important stakeholders in efforts to improve job quality—either as partners making improvements or as the focus of advocacy efforts. Interviewees also noted that job-quality standards and efforts vary significantly by industry. Finally, many interviewees mentioned employers in the context of the role of unions and alternative labor organizations that negotiate on behalf of workers. This underscores the important role that immigrant-rights and labor organizations could play in expanding and improving workforce services for immigrants.

6. Building and strengthening partnerships between organizations in the two fields requires capacity building, peer learning, leadership development, and research and documentation of good practices.

We interviewed service providers in the immigrant-serving and workforce fields who have participated in initiatives like the Network for Integrating New Americans and Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers. They discussed the benefits of these projects, including providing a space to bridge the knowledge gap between the two fields, creating opportunities for representatives from both fields to plan and strategize together, and nurturing leadership for partnership, which has helped to increase the potential to spark creative partnership. Many of these informants reported that the limited resources supporting these initiatives, their small scale, and the lack of additional similar opportunities, often result in a vacuum in which partnerships are not developed further or might be seeded but not sustained.

Interviewees in both fields also pointed to the limited research and documentation of partnerships between immigrant-serving and workforce organizations, which limits knowledge on the possibilities of partnership. In particular, national leaders were interested in support to develop tools to provide technical assistance to those who want to partner at the local level. Grassroots leaders sought documentation and materials that would yield lessons learned on partnership development and implementation.

COMMON PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE SKILL AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT NEEDS OF IMMIGRANTS

Throughout the interviews, interviewees agreed that service providers in both the workforce and immigrant-serving fields have developed innovative approaches to connecting immigrants to skill-building and career-advancement services. However, many also noted a need to document these efforts better and take them to scale. Interviewees provided examples of what they considered effective practices for training and education that partnerships can engage in together. These included integrated and contextualized instructional approaches, popular education methods, and work-based learning. Text Box 3 provides examples of effective practices highlighted by interviewees.

Three major themes emerged from our interviews regarding strategies organizations use and consider effective in providing workforce services to immigrants.

1. Intentionality was one of the most critical factors to consider when serving immigrants.

Many interviewees felt that organizations that intentionally set out to address the needs of immigrants, whether through strategic planning and/or partnership, were more successful in helping immigrants connect to training and jobs than were organizations that serve immigrants the same as other populations. This focus on intentionality means reviewing how organizations recruit and serve clients who are not born in the United States and may have language, networking, cultural awareness, and status issues. Additionally, it requires service providers to consider that immigrants are a diverse group culturally and linguistically. Finally, program designs will most likely differ depending on whether immigrants live and work in rural areas, suburbs, or cities. These types of considerations for program design could help surface corrective “do no harm” solutions as well as more systemic approaches to design and recruiting. For example, requirements to provide legal identification to enter a building where services are provided hinder access for immigrants without legal identification; service providers may want to ensure that services are located in accessible locations.

Intentionality could also apply to program outreach methods. For example, some programs cited specific outreach strategies targeted to immigrant groups, such as holding recruitment sessions at day labor locations or centers, churches, or community schools.

2. Language services and proper assessments of language levels are critical components of training programs designed for immigrants.

Immigrant workers enter programs at differing language and literacy levels, which significantly widens the scope of education services needed to effectively serve such clients. Interviewees discussed the challenge of properly assessing the language levels and skill-development needs of immigrant students and the difficulties with providing the wide range of language services their constituents require. Additionally, learning or improving language skills is a time-intensive process, one that can take years. Often, immigrant workers can enroll in English language courses but languish in them without ever having an opportunity to access career-training courses. Interviewees pointed to bridge programs and integrated instruction (e.g., integrating English language instruction with vocational education) as potential solutions to offer immigrants the opportunity to improve language skills while obtaining useful career and technical skills, as well as accessing job-readiness supports.

3. The ability to provide wraparound support services is crucial to the success of immigrants in training and education.

In particular, services such as child care and transportation came up as critical needs. Some interviewees mentioned two-generational or multigenerational strategies as an important approach to addressing the needs of immigrant families. Offering support services was particularly important for immigrant workers juggling one or more jobs or unstable working conditions (e.g., day laborers). Many service providers indicated that it can be difficult for immigrant workers to commit to training for two main reasons: a lack of time/competing obligations; and a difficult trade-off between much-needed money now versus potentially higher earnings, access to benefits, and more stable work in the future.

Offering support services was particularly important for immigrant workers juggling one or more jobs or unstable working conditions.



BOX 3: EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Our interviews with representatives from immigrant-serving and workforce organizations pointed to a number of effective practices.

Integrated education and training combines language or basic skills education with technical education programs such as welding or carpentry. Students build technical skills while strengthening basic skills in English and math. Many immigrants juggle more than one job and have language acquisition needs or low basic skills. Sequential programs could prevent them from quickly acquiring the skills and credentials they need to obtain jobs or advance in their careers. The most notable example of this approach is the I-BEST model (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training). Developed in Washington State, it is being expanded and replicated in a variety of states, including Maryland, Georgia, and Kentucky.

Popular education methods enable adult learners to actively collaborate in their own learning by connecting curricula and instruction to their life experiences. Respondents noted that this strategy, commonly leveraged by community organizations and worker centers, can be particularly useful for helping immigrant workers build awareness around their rights and economic and social issues that can affect their livelihood. This methodology makes education and language acquisition more approachable for low-income and immigrant workers with lower levels of education.

Work-based training is helpful for both English acquisition and up-skilling. For example, the Building Skills Partnership in California partners with janitorial companies to offer on-site vocational ESL classes. PODER Works in Illinois has taken the on-site training concept one step further, creating a social enterprise in the form of a call center. Participants with higher-level English skills can strengthen their language skills and train to be call center operators for PODER Works and its clients.

Occupational and safety training emerged as important for immigrant success in the labor market. Occupational and safety training is especially key to addressing job retention and other job-quality issues for immigrants in lower-wage and lower-skilled jobs.

STATE AND LOCAL POLICY BARRIERS TO PARTNERSHIP AND EXPANDED WORKFORCE SERVICES

Throughout our interviews, respondents discussed state and local policy barriers. These can be categorized into four main areas: funding; eligibility and performance measures in the public workforce development system; the need to work on the demand side of the labor market; and licensure. Several main themes emerged on how local and state policy barriers affect immigrant-focused and workforce-focused organizations, either in partnership or individually.

1. Funding for workforce development services for immigrants is limited and piecemeal.

Public funding for education and workforce services for immigrants is largely embodied in the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. WIOA Title I provides workforce services to eligible customers and Title II provides English language and adult education services. However, interviewees reported that the WIOA system is significantly underfunded, and data from national organizations, such as the Center for Law and Social Policy, National Skills Coalition, and others,

Various interviewees indicated that it takes significant time and knowledge for service providers to knit together different sources of funding and effectively meet the needs of immigrant workers, especially when trying to partner with other organizations.

confirm this assertion.³³ According to interviewees, the lack of funding is a disincentive for local public workforce systems to place a high priority on serving immigrants.

Several representatives of immigrant-serving organizations articulated a perception that the public workforce system is not interested in serving immigrants, and that has long been a disincentive even to reaching out to workforce development agencies as potential partners. While it was widely acknowledged that economic circumstances are worse in some communities than others, interviewees agreed that communities with more immigrants should be especially concerned about providing more and better services to these community members. For these respondents, targeted public funding to improve the English language, basic academic, and vocational skills for this population is a national, state, and local economic imperative.

Additionally, the piecemeal nature of funding for workforce services for immigrants was cited as a significant limitation.

Beyond WIOA funds, interviewees who provide workforce services to immigrants described tapping into state or county funds, philanthropic funds, and other sources of education and training dollars. However, it was mentioned that this approach often ends up being piecemeal, with staff forced to weave together small grants with varying eligibility criteria, reporting requirements, and funding periods. Various interviewees indicated that it takes significant time and knowledge for service providers to knit together different sources of funding and effectively meet the needs of immigrant workers, especially when trying to partner with other organizations.

2. Federal workforce eligibility requirements and performance measures may pose significant barriers—real and perceived—to serving immigrants.

Many interviewees viewed the public workforce system under WIOA as an opportunity to better serve immigrants, but emphasized that eligibility issues may still be problematic. Although immigrants without work authorization have typically been able to access WIOA Title II services (basic and English language education), the new law's focus on promoting coordination between titles may squeeze out unauthorized workers. First, the law has established common performance measures that apply to each title in WIOA. Many of these measures focus on employment, and usually states report on them by "matching" WIOA participants' enrollment information with the wage-record data collected through Unemployment Insurance systems. Social Security numbers are the identifier in these state systems, so a person without a number does not show up in the system and employment cannot be verified.³⁴ Thus, even though participants do not need to be work-authorized to receive Title II services, services to unauthorized individuals may be in jeopardy because service providers usually would need to be able to verify employment through a state database that uses Social Security numbers as the identifier.

³³ See Unruh, Rachel, and Amanda Bergson-Schilcock, "Missing in Action: Job-Driven Educational Pathways for Unauthorized Youth and Adults," National Skills Coalition, last modified February 2015,

; Lee, Walker, and Golden (2015); "Comments on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRMs) Relating to Immigrants and Limited English Proficient Individuals," National Immigration Law Center and National Skills Coalition, last modified June 2015,

³⁴ Many WIOA participants may not "match" in the wage-record system, including individuals who work across state lines, work for the federal government, are independent contractors, or are undocumented.

Several immigrant-serving organizations have called upon the federal government to add more specific language that allows for a supplementary option to WIOA regulations for states to report on outcomes for WIOA participants who may not show up in the wage-record system. However, even if this option is allowed, many questions would remain on how state and public workforce systems would implement alternative verification methods.

Further, the new law's tightened focus on service alignment between the titles could create a disincentive to serve immigrants. Although participants do not need to be work-authorized to receive Title II services, they do need to be work-authorized to receive Title I services. Given the severely limited resources in the public workforce system, some states and localities may default to limiting most services to those who meet Title I eligibility requirements.

Interviewees also discussed that many work-authorized immigrants who are eligible for Title I public workforce services are nevertheless unaware of the availability of these services or even the existence of public job centers. And some interviewees from immigrant-serving organizations hypothesized that the stronger focus on employment outcomes under the new law may be a disincentive for workforce agencies to serve immigrants with limited English language skills, who may need additional time and resources to meet employment outcomes compared to other clients.

Another big takeaway on this theme was the lack of a clear, candid conversation on how WIOA performance measures will affect service provision for immigrants. This underscores the importance of emerging partnerships between the two types of organizations at the national and grassroots levels. At the national level, workforce organizations such as the National Skills Coalition and immigration-focused organizations like the National Immigration Law Center have started to collaborate in order to advocate for these issues across the country. As the organizations figure out how to implement WIOA and interpret performance measures, they are also collaborating to support their constituents.

3. The low-quality jobs in which many immigrants work can undermine workforce development efforts.

Interviewees noted that many immigrant workers—especially undocumented immigrants—often work in difficult, dangerous, low-paid jobs. Immigrants who work as day laborers and in many other occupations lack access to stable employment and earnings, much less benefits. This harsh reality induces organizations serving immigrant workers to focus on more immediate issues of stable employment, safety, and fair labor practices, making it harder, given limited resources, to place a high priority on education and training opportunities.

Interviewees viewed poor working conditions as in part the result of weak state and federal employment policies. They mentioned a variety of employment policies that could improve working conditions and enable workers and organizations to focus more on education and training. These include job-scheduling policies to provide adequate and predictable hours for workers, work-based learning policies to improve access to training on the job, and regulations to educate employers on the appropriate uses of e-verify³⁵ so that they are not screening out immigrant workers for employment at higher rates than necessary. Worker-rights and immigrant-rights interviewees emphasized that policies to improve job quality improve retention among immigrant workers—in employment and in education and training programs—and may also encourage immigrants to seek advancement opportunities in the industries where they work. Interviewees pointed to employers and industry representatives

³⁵ E-Verify is an Internet-based system that compares information from an employee's Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, to data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Social Security Administration records to confirm employment eligibility. See: accessed May 2016.

in industries that hire a large number of immigrants (construction, retail) as key potential partners in this.

4. State legislatures and, in some cases, state professional licensing boards have the potential to institute reforms to expand access to credentialed employment for unauthorized immigrants or for certain lawfully present immigrants who may be excluded by federal law.

According to a few interviewees, state requirements to provide a Social Security number to obtain a professional license potentially limit the ability of unauthorized immigrants to work and advance in certain key fields such as landscaping and construction. With proper training, immigrant workers could be safe, successful licensed professionals or certified workers regardless of their legal status. One informant pointed to successful state advocacy campaigns to allow unauthorized immigrants to obtain drivers' licenses as a model for reforming requirements for state professional and occupational licensing. Another noted that California's 2014 legislation expanded access to state professional and occupational licenses to undocumented immigrants by allowing licensing boards to accept Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers in lieu of Social Security numbers. This regulation, being implemented in 2016, is likely to provide valuable lessons for licensing boards in other states interested in pursuing policy change in this area.

V. Ideas for Action to Facilitate Partnerships between Immigrant-serving and Workforce Organizations

Most interviewees provided good suggestions for how their organizations and others can better support the development of partnerships between immigrant-serving and workforce organizations and expand workforce services to immigrants. Most of the ideas outlined below are from informants, supplemented with a few developed by the authors based on our knowledge of these fields and information from conversations with interviewees. A number of these ideas focus on policy, which was a primary focus of our original research questions. However, interviewees reported challenges outside policy that stymie partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and workforce organizations; hence, we include such ideas for action as well.

We present these as “ideas for action” and not recommendations due to the limited scope of our interview pool and the need for more research and discussion.

A. IDEAS FOR ACTION BY IMMIGRANT-SERVING AND WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS

1. *Improving practice and promoting partnerships between workforce and immigrant-serving organizations*

Immigrants are a growing segment of the labor force, and our research points to a critical need for workforce and immigrant-serving organizations to develop concrete outreach and partnership building strategies with each other.

Specifically, workforce organizations should focus on better understanding the size and characteristics of their regions’ immigrant population in order to obtain a better grasp on how well the organization is providing workforce services to this population and specific sub-populations (i.e., authorized and unauthorized, English-speaking, and LEP populations and those varying by education and skill levels). WIOA’s disaggregated data requirement could be a nudge in this direction—if data-collection methods to identify foreign-born individuals are improved. Currently, the only way to know if someone is foreign born is if she or he is flagged as Limited English Proficient, which is a narrow indicator. Working toward more effective indicators to track how the WIOA system serves those who are foreign born is the type of activity that could be undertaken by both immigrant-serving and workforce organizations.

Immigrant-focused organizations need to find ways to actively participate in local and state workforce decision-making processes and conversations. For example, an immigrant-serving organization can forge a partnership with the local public workforce system by helping recruit and support immigrant clients, offering coordinated services, or even co-locating services at a job center. One interviewee suggested that immigrant-serving organizations could seek to join state or local Workforce Investment Boards to better link to the workforce development system. Immigrant-serving organizations would be wise to become much more knowledgeable about workforce issues in order to advocate more effectively for more and better workforce services for immigrant populations.

Deeper engagement between the two fields of practice will take time and resources, but it is a necessity in order to improve and expand workforce services for immigrants and LEPs. Although our interviews demonstrated that partnerships between workforce- and immigrant-focused

organizations do exist, most tend to focus on transactional activities, such as recruitment or referrals. Partnership activities between the two fields should focus on more systemic efforts such as establishing integrated career pathways at community colleges or collaborating to influence and change attitudes among employers who might hesitate to hire immigrant workers due to a lack of knowledge of immigration laws or concerns with language proficiency.

Forging stronger connections with state and local economic development agencies also could be a promising strategy for partnerships. A more robust relationship with a region's economic development organizations could integrate a potential workforce-immigrant partnership into decision-making around attracting businesses to the community and improving job-quality standards for workers. For example, one interviewee in southern California successfully advocated for new public infrastructure projects to utilize union labor—including significant numbers of immigrant workers—and this promises to provide safer, better-paying jobs with more career-advancement opportunities.

2. Leveraging the implementation of existing policies at the state and local levels

Interviewees at both workforce and immigrant-serving organizations pointed to the need to better leverage opportunities within existing policies affecting the provision of workforce services to immigrants and LEPs. Comments and ideas for action focused on the implementation of WIOA.

For instance, the newly codified English Language/Civics (EL/Civics) program in WIOA emerged in our research as a promising avenue for collaboration. Under prior federal workforce policy, set-aside funds from annual appropriations supported this program. WIOA codifies the EL/Civics program into the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) program, which is designated to provide “education services to Adult English Language learners including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries.”³⁶ The IEL/CE program includes “instruction in literacy and English Language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.”³⁷ The possibility of including workforce training through the IEL/CE program offers an opportunity for workforce providers to work closely with immigrant-integration organizations to build in career-building components. However, some of our interviewees noted that WIOA's common accountability measures across titles and programs, which place a priority on employment and post-secondary outcomes, might discourage providers from offering robust citizenship and civic-education services or disadvantage current programs providing EL/Civics training.

WIOA's increased support for work-based learning is an opportunity for workforce and immigrant-focused organizations to partner with employers in industries that have large immigrant workforces. Another federal funding opportunity mentioned was the Susan Harwood Training Grant Program, which focuses on worker safety. It could be helpful if state governments provided assistance to help nonprofit and higher education institutions apply for these grants. States also may want to consider following the example of Massachusetts, which has its own state-level program, the Massachusetts Safety Grant Program.

3. Policy changes and new policies at the state and local levels

Interviewees mentioned several ideas for policy changes or new policies that could help immigrants access workforce services.

One idea was to improve policies focused on job quality, such as wages, benefits, scheduling, worker protection, and worker organizing, among other job characteristics. Efforts around job

³⁶ *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*, Public Law 113-128, *US Statutes at Large* 128 (2014): 1425-1722, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-113publ128/pdf/PLAW-113publ128.pdf>. See especially section 203 “Definitions,” item 12 “Integrated English Literacy and Civics,” on page 1611.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

quality are particularly important when serving immigrant workers because a large proportion of this population is overrepresented in industries that pay low wages and have low job quality standards. Improving job security would enable workers to engage in efforts to improve economic mobility. For organizations that do not typically focus on job quality, interviewees suggested accompanying such a strategic shift by internal policy changes regarding which employers to engage, how to engage them, and the allocation of staff time and capacity to focus more on employer-engagement activities.

Job-scheduling policies, which are gaining momentum in many states, are particularly important for enhancing workers' ability to access workforce services. Changing policy around job scheduling to make it easier for workers to combine and balance work with education and training could be a high-priority for advocacy efforts. For example, Vermont's "right to request" law gives workers the right to request a flexible and/or predictable and/or stable schedule without fear of retaliation. Similarly, provisions for more predictable and stable hours are in place in Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, and other states.

A second policy change mentioned by interviewees was to remove unnecessary barriers that make it harder for unauthorized workers to obtain state professional and occupational licenses. The example from California, in which the state expanded the types of federal identification that could be provided to apply for certain state licenses, could be instructive for other states. Likewise, the efforts in several states to allow individuals to obtain drivers' licenses regardless of their legal status might also be instructive.³⁸

Efforts around job quality are particularly important when serving immigrant workers because a large proportion of this population is overrepresented in industries that pay low wages and have low job quality standards.



B. IDEAS FOR ACTION BY PUBLIC AND PHILANTHROPIC INVESTORS

Public and philanthropic investors have a significant role to play, given the value-add of partnerships between immigrant-serving and workforce organizations as well as fundamental challenges to incubating and strengthening this type of partnership (e.g., the basic lack of knowledge about each type of organization). The ideas here combine those shared in the interviews with those extrapolated by the authors from analyzing the interviews.

1. Increase investments in peer learning and the documentation of promising practices.

Our interviews with different types of workforce and immigrant stakeholders demonstrated the need to document and share examples of partnerships between such organizations. Additionally, given the nascent state of understanding between these two types of organizations, many more opportunities are needed for them to interact and begin to see how they could collaborate. Interviewees suggested that both peer learning, such as NCWE's Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers, and documentation would be helpful. Peer learning not only brings different types of stakeholders together, but it can also nurture leadership and increase the potential to spark creative partnership models.

Building evidence to demonstrate the value of a partnership approach between workforce entities and immigrant-serving organizations will also be critical. Both fields would benefit from more research that maps the organizational assets of each type of organization (and the different types

³⁸ States include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Vermont, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia.

of organizations within the immigrant-serving and workforce fields), how those assets can be leveraged to better serve immigrants and LEP individuals, and how partnerships can help each organization meet its goals.

2. Increase investments in capacity building to improve data systems for tracking workforce development services to foreign-born individuals and LEPs.

Through our interviews, we learned that methods to track how foreign-born individuals move through federally funded workforce services could be improved. Targeted efforts that encourage cross-agency collaboration among agencies serving immigrants to identify common data measures and indicators would be a major contribution toward improving workforce services for immigrants.³⁹ In particular, having more accurate information on the number of immigrants and their characteristics in a community would help immigrant and workforce organizations devise more targeted efforts and strategies for collaboration. This would also support “intentionality” in serving this population, which several interviewees mentioned as a good practice.

3. Increase investments in disseminating lessons learned and providing technical assistance on practices and policies considered to be effective for addressing the workforce needs of immigrants and LEPs.

Interviewees discussed a variety of practices they consider effective for connecting immigrants and LEPs to workforce services. However, most interviewees also pointed to the need for more documentation on lessons learned about these practices. For instance, worker centers and immigrant-integration organizations have long used popular education methods to provide education for their constituents. This could be a promising approach from which workforce providers could learn, but is hindered by the lack of documentation of this method in the mainstream basic education and workforce literature.

Integrated-instruction methods such as I-BEST and bridge programming also surfaced during our interviews either as practices that service providers have adopted or as a practice that they want to learn more about. The new WIOA law strongly encourages workforce providers to use integrated instruction. However, it is a relatively involved method of education and training and requires staff training, planning and implementation time, and additional resources to cover the provision of more intensive education in one setting. More technical assistance on integrated instruction and documentation of practice and lessons learned would be helpful, particularly examples of immigrant-serving and workforce organization partnering to provide it.

Finally, funders could provide the space for discussion and problem solving around more complex policy issues, including WIOA eligibility and performance measures and the implementation of the IEL/CE program. Many interviewees noted the importance of building each field’s knowledge of the other, so that both can better advocate for the workforce development needs of immigrants.

Given the nascent state of understanding between these two types of organizations, many more opportunities are needed for them to interact and begin to see how they could collaborate.



³⁹ For more recommendations, see “Workforce Data & Immigrants FAQ,” National Skills Coalition and Workforce Data Quality Campaign, accessed June 2, 2016,

VI. Conclusion

Our research demonstrated how early we are in the movement toward forming robust partnerships between workforce and immigrant-serving organizations to improve training services for immigrants. There are a few strong examples of such partnerships and more are emerging with various modest investments. However, on the whole, workforce and immigrant-serving organizations know very little about each other, vary in terms of seeing value in partnership, and have few natural opportunities to come together.

Yet access to workforce development services is more important than ever for this population and our economy. It is important to help immigrants and their families access more stable and adequate income, especially because they and their children represent future community members and workers, but many struggle in poverty and unstable employment. Building better systems for immigrants and their families is not only important for our labor force but also critical for the social cohesion of our communities.

Policy changes at all levels of government and greater leveraging of existing policies can help to improve access to workforce services and smooth a path to partnership for workforce and immigrant-serving organizations. However, current policy is not the only barrier, and other significant and fundamental barriers must be addressed, as outlined in this paper.

The findings and ideas for action presented here are meant to advance the conversation that is beginning between the fields of immigrant-serving and workforce organizations. We hope readers find them useful for better understanding the importance, value, and implementation of partnerships between these two types of organizations to better serve a critical population in our country.

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