

# TALENT IS READY

Promising Practices for Helping Immigrant  
Professionals Establish Their American Careers

# IMPRINT

[www.IMPRINTPROJECT.org](http://www.IMPRINTPROJECT.org)



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# Talent Is READY

*Promising Practices for Helping Immigrant Professionals Establish Their American Careers.*



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## Executive Summary

It is a harsh reality that highly skilled immigrant doctors and engineers often end up working as dishwashers or janitors in the U.S. today. Yet despite the heavy human and economic costs of this under-utilization, to date there has been no large-scale, coordinated effort to transform this story into one of professional growth and positive economic impact by helping immigrant professionals navigate the unique barriers they face in entering the U.S. professional workforce.

IMPRINT's *Talent Is Ready* provides a snapshot of the current landscape of skilled immigrant workforce integration in the U.S. and opportunities for action. It details promising practices and offers practical advice and tested wisdom for those who seek to better serve the immigrant professionals who reside in their communities.

The goal of the brief is to inform the next wave of nonprofit practitioners, philanthropists, and policymakers and inspire them to undertake and champion this important but underfunded work.

Some may ask why services to immigrants should be provided as the American economy struggles to recover from a severe recession. The answer is straightforward: because their talents are needed for the U.S. to remain competitive in the global economy, and because they're members of our communities. Without targeted interventions, many will continue to languish in low-level jobs even as U.S. employers contend with a growing mismatch between worker skills and business needs.

## About IMPRINT

*Talent Is Ready* draws on the deep knowledge of IMPRINT, a national coalition launched in 2011 by five nonprofit organizations with decades of collective expertise in immigrant professional integration:

### **Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education**

[www.cccie.org](http://www.cccie.org)

### **Upwardly Global**

[www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org)

### **Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians**

[www.welcomingcenter.org](http://www.welcomingcenter.org)

### **Welcome Back Initiative**

[www.welcomebackinitiative.org](http://www.welcomebackinitiative.org)

### **World Education Services**

[www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)

**As a clearinghouse for information** and resources on working with this highly skilled population, IMPRINT informs service providers, advocates for effective policies and practices, and supports the efficient labor-market integration of the estimated 2.7 million college-educated immigrants who are un- or under-employed.<sup>1</sup>

1- Source: Unpublished tabulations as update to the Migration Policy Institute 2008 report *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants*, available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/BrainWasteOct08.pdf>.

Want to learn more?

See next page for current opportunities and issues in this emerging field.

# Opportunities for Effective Service Delivery: Examples from the Field

## Information and Advising

- Promote English language learning through real-world volunteering and interactions
- Provide context on resumes to explain foreign education and experience to U.S. employers
- Research technical skill requirements for jobseeker's profession in the U.S., then help jobseeker find "bridge" training if necessary
- Organize industry roundtables and peer groups by field to create opportunities for informal networking

*Seek technical assistance from IMPRINT to partner for training, service delivery, and advocacy.*

## Skill Building

- Conduct a comprehensive individual assessment covering education, experience, skills, knowledge base, disabilities and health concerns, current responsibilities, goals and opportunities
- Encourage jobseekers to consider their transferable skills when applying for jobs
- Determine need for credential evaluation by jobseeker's purpose for obtaining it, then by requirements of U.S. college or licensing body, then by reputation of evaluation service

## Organizational Capacity Building

- Cultivate H.R. professionals as volunteers for resume workshops, mock interviews – then ask to refer jobseekers
- Approach employers for placements, internships, donations (in-kind and financial), Corporate Social Responsibility activities, and pilot programs
- Collect data on participant demographics, employment outcomes, and economic impact
- Hire highly qualified, business-savvy staff; specialize by industry
- Develop partnerships with educational and licensing bodies

## Challenges in Service Delivery to Immigrant Professionals

- **Limited funding with tight restrictions** – Service providers are often mandated to pursue high volume and speedy placement, capped at a very low cost per participant. They quite literally cannot afford the time necessary to invest in higher-quality, longer-term employment services capable of yielding professional-level placements at salaries of \$30-\$50,000.
- **Staff capacity** – Service providers may have limited knowledge of how to 'translate' international credentials and work experience for American employers and high-skilled positions and of how to advise on complex licensing requirements.
- **Multifaceted jobseeker needs** – Because skilled immigrants' needs vary significantly, service providers may struggle to address the full range of social, economic, academic, or personal barriers to career advancement.

## Take Action

Are you inspired by the opportunities above? Does your organization face similar challenges? Voice your support for bringing underemployed skilled immigrants out of poverty and back to contributing at their fullest potential. Join IMPRINT in educating government, foundations, businesses, and higher education partners about a shared high-skilled workforce agenda!

Contact us at [www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org) to share your organization's accomplishments and ideas and to join our mailing list.



# INTRODUCTION



## ***An American Opportunity: Leveraging the Assets of an Untapped Talent Pool***

As the United States faces the rockiest world economy in a generation, we need all of the talent we can muster. Yet our country is failing to capitalize on the assets of skilled workers who are here today. The harsh reality is that highly skilled immigrant doctors and engineers often end up working as dishwashers or janitors.

Despite the heavy human and economic costs of this under-utilization, to date there has been no large-scale, coordinated effort to transform this story into one of professional growth and positive economic impact.

This report is meant to signal a change in the prevailing winds. It brings together examples of promising practices – developed by experienced practitioners across the U.S. – that can effectively guide immigrant professionals in launching their American careers. It describes the real barriers *and* the real opportunities that exist in the field of skilled immigrant workforce integration.

As a snapshot of the field and of effective interventions, *Talent is Ready* draws on the deep knowledge and combined experience of the five nonprofit organizations that make up the coalition IMPRINT.<sup>2</sup> The report shares practical advice on such wide-ranging topics as volunteer engagement, sector work, and skill building for the U.S. professional job search.

Through this report, IMPRINT members hope to inspire service providers, policymakers, and philanthropists to support the continued development of effective tools and career pathways for the immigrant professionals who reside in their communities.

With that in mind, the report is divided into three primary sections, each of which describes promising practices in serving immigrant professionals:

- 1. Assessment and Advising**
- 2. Skill Building**
- 3. Organizational Capacity Building**

*Talent Is Ready* concludes with an overview of current opportunities for advocacy and engagement in this dynamic, still-emerging field.

We are deeply grateful to the J.M. Kaplan Fund, which has supported IMPRINT in producing this report, as well as fostering the growth and success of immigrant integration work more broadly. We invite other interested philanthropists, public officials, community leaders and fellow advocates to contact IMPRINT for more information about joint efforts and upcoming activities.

<sup>2</sup> More information about our work can be found at [www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org), and in the *About IMPRINT* section of this report.

## Broader Context for this Report

Some may ask why services to immigrants should be provided even as the American economy struggles to recover from recession. The answer is straightforward: because their talents are needed, both by business and by our wider society. A family medicine doctor from Guatemala is an asset not only because of her education, but because of the role she can play in providing high-quality and culturally appropriate care. Similarly, a Chinese or Indian electrical engineer with high-level language skills may be especially valuable to an American company seeking to build its global markets.

On a more personal level, skilled immigrants are also members of our communities. Without targeted interventions, many will languish in poverty rather than realizing the civic, economic and social benefits of full integration.

This untapped talent pool runs deep: the Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are 2.7 million unemployed or underemployed immigrants nationwide who hold bachelor's or graduate degrees.<sup>3</sup> The cumulative impact of this underutilization is staggering – lost wages, lost productivity, and a squandering of human capital that has significant consequences for individual families as well the states and localities in which they reside. Equally powerful is the potential for positive economic and social impact when these talented men and women find skill-appropriate employment.

For work-authorized immigrants who dreamed of using their professional training in the United States, the reality can be painful. All too often, their introduction to the American labor market is characterized by low-wage work in menial jobs, delayed entry into the fields for which they were trained, and confusing and even contradictory information about their educational and vocational options. This can occur even as communities wrestle with the challenge of finding, for example, sufficient bilingual healthcare professionals, or experienced mechanical engineers.

Yet optimism remains a defining feature of the immigrant experience. It is IMPRINT members' experience that this



optimism can be well-founded, especially when appropriate interventions are available to re-direct a person's trajectory towards success. Our organizations have spent a collective six decades developing and refining such interventions. We are very pleased to share some of them here.

This report does not have the space to do justice to the many noteworthy and valuable services being provided to immigrant professionals in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere, and thus we have deliberately chosen to limit the scope of the examples provided. More information can be found in the *Additional Resources* section at the end of this report. **We welcome your comments, critiques, and recommendations at [feedback@imprintproject.org](mailto:feedback@imprintproject.org).**

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*Please note that we have also chosen to use both "he" and "she" throughout this report to refer to a typical skilled immigrant. We also use the terms "Immigrant professional," "skilled immigrant," and "jobseeker" interchangeably. However, it is important to note that job seeking is often the ultimate stage in a longer process that also includes information seeking, skills assessment, educational enrichment, and credential transfer.*

3- Jeanne Batalova, personal communication, March 2011, as update to the Migration Policy Institute 2008 report *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants*.

## Closing the Information Gap

A key impetus for this report was a 2009 survey by Upwardly Global which found that a lack of information was one of the top barriers faced by immigrant professionals.<sup>4</sup> Without vital information on how to navigate within the society to which they were migrating, immigrant professionals struggle to decipher the social and professional codes that would allow them to chart their own course toward success.

This finding reflects the relatively ad-hoc nature of U.S. skilled worker immigration. Among the 1.1 million immigrants admitted legally to the U.S. each year, a majority arrive through family-based visas or the diversity visa lottery.<sup>5</sup> While U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offers useful resources such as its “Welcome to the United States” guidebook (Publication M-618) and [www.welcometousa.gov](http://www.welcometousa.gov) website, the information provided is general in nature and not oriented toward skilled immigrant integration. There is no formal entity or process, federal or state, for orienting and integrating these new arrivals.

Like generations before them, skilled immigrants must rely on ethnic networks, word-of-mouth advice, and community-based organizations to launch their new lives. But unlike past generations, they are migrating to a society increasingly characterized by complex, high-interaction jobs – the so-called “knowledge economy.”

In this environment, there is a great need for accurate, accessible information that will aid skilled immigrants in making informed decisions about how best to invest their time and energy in launching an American career. It is our hope that this report will foster needed partnerships among IMPRINT, nonprofit practitioners, government and philanthropy to address this and other barriers to workforce integration of skilled immigrants.

4- This survey of Upwardly Global’s national network found that nearly half of over 500 respondents (48.6%) cited “not enough advice to understand my options” as a barrier. (Source: Upwardly Global, unpublished.)

5- U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Handbook of Immigration Statistics.

## I. ASSESSMENT & ADVISING

Section I covers the initial assessment of a skilled immigrant program participant, the credential evaluation process, and ongoing case management or coaching services.

### A. INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Conducting an initial assessment (sometimes called “intake”) with a prospective program participant helps both the skilled immigrant and the organization. Participants benefit from a thoughtful, individualized review of their circumstances and goals, and may gain trust in the program as their professional selves are validated. Organizations benefit from data collected to both create a roadmap for services to the individual and also to paint a broader portrait about the issues and opportunities faced by immigrant professional for use in education and advocacy efforts.

**Characteristics of a high-quality assessment.** A good assessment should evaluate and document a participant’s U.S. professional aspirations, skills and knowledge base, educational and employment history (both abroad and in the U.S.), any disabilities and health-related needs, and current responsibilities and opportunities.

**Barriers.** An assessment should delve into skilled immigrants’ diverse barriers to U.S. professional workforce integration, including:

- Need for immediate “survival job” income to support family
- Lack of career information and guidance
- Language fluency
- Lack of professional networks
- Lack of culturally appropriate U.S. job search skills
- Technical skill gaps
- Age or stage in career
- Discrimination
- Family obligations
- Professional licensing
- Lack of U.S. work experience
- Employer concerns about visa sponsorship or lack of context for foreign education and experience



**Assessment processes.** While there are many effective models for assessment, we advise organizations to choose one model and adhere to it for all participants. The model should be documented for ongoing reference.

- The Welcome Back Initiative uses an intake process that includes an initial questionnaire followed by a three-pronged assessment of participants' educational, professional, and psycho-social backgrounds. Staff members consider a participant's past expertise, current experience and future aspirations in creating a blueprint for next steps. They also examine any existing assessments, such as that done upon enrollment in community college, to avoid redundant and unproductive demands on participants.
- The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians engages participants through an initial phone screening, a small-group session including brief English language and mathematics skills assessments, and then by lengthy individual consultations.
- Upwardly Global's first contact with participants occurs during its workshop "Using Your Foreign Degree in the U.S." or through applications via its website. This contact is quickly followed by one on one information-gathering, examination of credentials, and assessment interviews both before and after core training.

**Resuming vs. shifting careers.** Some skilled immigrants have fewer barriers to career re-entry than others. For example, those in non-regulated careers with a robust job market in their field, such as IT professionals, may have a job search action plan that closely parallels their experience in their home country. With appropriate guidance, they can often resume their careers swiftly.

Others face challenges due to barriers listed above and/or job market forces. Practitioners must therefore strike a delicate balance between encouraging skilled immigrants to pursue ambitious career pathways and acknowledging the very real constraints they face. Thinking creatively about career options can often lead to a highly positive outcome: skilled practitioners may pick up on a participant's untapped passion for another field which may have fewer barriers to career re-entry, such as teaching a subject for which she is uniquely qualified, or starting a business. For example, a dermatologist in her late 50s was advised by the Welcoming Center on how she could obtain licensure as a cosmetologist and esthetician, and went on to a highly successful second career as an entrepreneur with her own high-end beauty salon.

Lastly, other immigrants may simply be ready for a career change post-migration. In these cases it is especially useful to assess transferrable skills to determine what other professional jobs offer a good fit.

*“It was through networking events that I found the way to people who put me in the right position at the right time to take the job I am working at right now! I am still learning about international aid, but so far it seems like a good complement to my previous work as a lawyer.”*

**Alejandro**  
*Lawyer, Costa Rica*

**Assessing English language learners.** Non-native English speakers often confront an additional challenge in pursuing their educational and vocational goals, as their limited language skills may be misunderstood or misconstrued as an overall lack of intelligence, knowledge, or education. A service provider may save an immigrant time and money by conducting a review of his current or anticipated coursework as part of an assessment to ensure he is not being misdirected towards “developmental” or remedial education tracks. More information can be found in Section 2A, *Learning English*.

**Data compilation.** High-quality assessments should also include well-structured data collection. Programs that are most successful in serving immigrant professionals are those that can accurately describe the demographic characteristics of the population they serve, their educational and vocational needs, and the most effective interventions in serving them. Effective data collection will also help to remedy the field-wide challenge of limited data about the barriers faced by immigrant professionals and the services they most need. For more on data collection for fundraising and advocacy, see Section 3E, *Program Administration*.

## **B. CREDENTIAL ASSESSMENT**

Any attempt to assist immigrant professionals in establishing their American careers will quickly run up against one of the more challenging aspects of migration: transferring foreign credentials. While this can be considered part of the initial assessment process described above, its complexity merits its own section.

As used here, “credential” is an umbrella term that describes a wide variety of documentation of education and experience, as well as professional licenses or certifications typically issued by educational institutions or regulatory



bodies. “Credential evaluation” entails an objective, third-party assessment of existing credentials to determine the degree to which they correspond to prevailing U.S. standards.

In order to provide accurate guidance to immigrant professionals, an organization should ensure that its staff have the skills to: ascertain whether an evaluation is needed; determine its purpose; and assist in the selection of an appropriate credential evaluation service.

***Ascertaining whether credential evaluation is needed.***

Misinformation about the validity of foreign credentials can result in dangerously poor advice being given to skilled immigrants. For example, an individual who holds an advanced degree may be told that the best route back into her career is to take the U.S. high school equivalency exam!

It is also important to note that the value of professional credentials is highly field-specific. In some fields a credential is a baseline requirement. In others, it is a “nice to have” that is not necessary for advancement. For example, an accountant can work successfully in her field without earning a Certified Public Accountant license. Practitioners are strongly encouraged to do the research necessary to understand which credentials are truly required for an individual’s field.<sup>6</sup>

***Determining the purpose of the credential evaluation.***

Knowing how a skilled immigrant hopes to use a credential evaluation is the key to providing appropriate advice. The type of evaluation as well as the organization authorized to complete it may vary widely depending on its use. If instructions aren’t carefully followed, a skilled immigrant can end up paying for a legitimate evaluation that is nevertheless worthless for their intended purpose. There are three uses, each with distinct considerations:

- **Additional education:** Universities, and even the schools within them, can vary significantly in their credential evaluation requirements. Some evaluate credentials internally while others rely on independent evaluation services. Prospective students should research requirements on a case-by-case basis, and can begin by speaking with a school’s admissions or international students’ office.
- **Professional licensing:** Immigrants coming from more centralized societies may be surprised at the degree of



variation in licensing requirements among U.S. states. Before obtaining a credential evaluation, it is valuable not only to confirm the requirements of the relevant professional board in a given state,<sup>7</sup> but to affirm that the immigrant intends to continue residing in that state, or if not, that reciprocal licensing is available in the state to which she is moving.

Practitioners should also caution immigrant jobseekers that it is common for professional boards to require foreign-trained applicants to supplement their education with additional courses and training before they are permitted to take a licensing exam.

- **Employment:** While many larger employers, including government agencies, have established processes for reviewing international credentials, most smaller employers do not, and many may even be unaware of credential evaluation as a field. In general, if an immigrant professional has *already* obtained a credential evaluation it is helpful to list it clearly on his resume, but if he has not yet gotten an evaluation it is worth seriously considering whether or not one is necessary.

***Selecting a reputable credential-evaluation service.***

Service providers should be aware that there are unreliable and even fraudulent services that advertise widely on the web. Immigrant professionals should be advised to thoroughly research their choice of credential evaluation companies to ensure that the one selected is reputable, ethical, and – in the case of licensing – a company that is allowed by the specific profession and state’s regulatory body. One useful indication is whether the company is a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES). This group of peer organizations is committed to upholding specific professional standards.

6- Upwardly Global’s website includes Licensed Professions Guides for 10 regulated careers in Illinois, California, and New York; Welcome Back Initiative has created licensing maps for up to 11 healthcare careers in the states where it is active; Welcoming Center’s website includes 4 career-specific licensing guides.

7- States typically list licensing requirements online. These can often be found by searching for profession keywords on the state’s home page, and then following links to the state regulatory body for the profession(s). This regulatory body may be a freestanding department or be part of other state agencies charged with issues of labor/workforce, education, or economic development.

### C. ONGOING CASE MANAGEMENT OR COACHING

This section focuses on the tools staff may use to assist program participants on an ongoing basis. Information on staff hiring and development is discussed in Section 3A, *Staffing*.

**Program structure.** It is beyond the scope of this report to explore in depth all of the various models for providing educational and vocational services to immigrant professionals. However, the model used by several IMPRINT members combines semi-regular one-on-one advising appointments with small-group training sessions (described in greater detail in section 2C, *Refining Professional Job Search Skills*). This allows for both personalized assistance in discerning an individual's opportunities and potential barriers, and introduction to a supportive peer group that is undergoing a similar career transition.

**Staff Role.** As outlined in the sidebar *Closing the Information Gap*, immigrant professionals often lack accurate and relevant information on which to base decisions that take into account their socioeconomic, educational and career concerns. Remediating this information gap is a multi-step process. It can start with static information on professions or U.S. white-collar workplace culture, gathered from outside sources or created by a given service provider. Yet such general background information is typically insufficient alone. Specialized advice from an informed advisor is also needed.



IMPRINT members address immigrant professionals as peers and focus on restoring a sense of self-efficacy and competence that may have waned as individuals faced persistent unemployment or underemployment and other integration obstacles. Via this empowerment model, staff can reassure immigrant professionals that services are not charity, but rather skill-building for their own self-directed development.

Working with immigrants at the job seeking stage provides a natural environment for organizations' staff and volunteers to model U.S.-appropriate professional appearance and demeanor. This can include providing tactful but candid feedback to jobseekers in cases where cultural values and beliefs, perceived attitude, or even differences in grooming may leave the candidate in danger of making a poor impression on prospective employers.

Personal accountability is a cornerstone of an empowerment model. Therefore, the skilled immigrant bears the responsibility of responsiveness during the job search process. At Upwardly Global, if she fails to attend an event or interview, the case manager may inquire to see what obstacles may be preventing engagement, but over the longer term, continuing difficulties in meeting U.S. expectations for punctuality and attendance are a signal that the jobseeker may not be ready to seek immediate professional employment and may result in her case being put on hold.

**Scams.** One of the most difficult tasks in a new culture is to separate genuine opportunities from too-good-to-be-true scams. Given the many illegitimate businesses that actively seek to exploit an immigrant's lack of familiarity with the U.S., service providers can play an important watchdog role helping participants to accurately assess the value of potential training courses and certifications, as well as to screen other opportunities for scams and inappropriate shortcuts.

**Supplemental services.** In addition to core program services such as case management, organizations may wish to supplement their services with additional activities that build immigrant professionals' ability to meet their educational and vocational goals. For example, the Montgomery County, MD, Welcome Back Center's foreign nurse initiative includes a foundation-funded pool from which disbursements are made for English classes, licensing test prep, transportation and childcare, and emergency rent assistance, among other purposes. Programs that do not provide this type of additional services may wish to build referral relationships with other organizations that do.

**Coordinated case management for program improvement.** IMPRINT members who provide direct services have formal systems to capture and assess data on skilled immigrant progress through their programs. Upwardly Global’s management team holds weekly calls across locations and jointly tracks an array of program performance measures using the Balanced Scorecard tool. In addition, the organization’s website and Salesforce database allow both staff and jobseekers to access and register information online. For example, jobseekers can search an online volunteer database for referrals for informational interviews and can also log interviews and other data; staff can record introductions of jobseekers to employers, interviews held, meetings, and more. Taken together, the organization is able to conduct a variety of analyses including gauging the effectiveness of employer networks in job placements.

The Welcome Back Initiative has nine sites in 8 states, and each adheres to reporting on similar outcomes. These include numbers of participants who: passed licensing exams; advanced in their career ladders; obtained employment in the health sector for the first time; and entered medical residency training programs. The site directors hold a monthly call to share information about funding opportunities, emerging partnerships, trends, and needs, and to ensure the quality of the data collected across centers. Standardized criteria allow the programs to report jointly on outcomes, allowing for greater cumulative impact. A more detailed account of data tracking suggestions can be found in Section 3E, *Program Administration*.



*“I hadn’t gotten any interviews or any answers at all from the jobs that I had been applying to over the last two years! [My case manager] helped me understand how my skills and education transferred to the US and the types of organizations and positions that I should be targeting in my job search. After 3 months, I was offered a position as a bilingual referral specialist.”*

**Claudia  
Psychologist, Colombia**



## II. SKILL BUILDING

Section II discusses three skill-building processes that are vital to career re-integration: learning English, acquiring technical skills, and refining professional job search skills. Identifying potential skill gaps in these areas should be a part of each individual's initial assessment.

### A. LEARNING ENGLISH

Language fluency is measured across four primary skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. It is common for a person's skill levels to fluctuate across these four categories. For example, a businesswoman may have read extensively in English for her university degree, but have had limited opportunity to practice speaking and listening. Conversely, a public health educator may have picked up conversational English at a survival job since arriving in the U.S., but not yet learned the specific technical vocabulary needed to function in his professional field.

**Accessibility and fit for immigrant professionals.** While there are many community-based English classes available, few are focused on specific vocations and even fewer are designed for people with high levels of formal education.

*“I am an engineer, so I can write strong technical English but not resume or social English! At first, I had trouble talking about my professional accomplishments [...] saying ‘I’ instead of ‘we.’ In my home country, this would have been very rude and disrespectful. I wanted to learn though, and practiced expressing my accomplishments to companies.”*

*To  
Coastal Engineer, Vietnam*

It is useful to begin by surveying the existing landscape in a community, including free and paid classes in informal, nonprofit, community college or university settings, ranging from small-group classrooms to individual tutoring.<sup>8</sup> Once potential classes are identified, making personal contact with instructors or program administrators allows a service provider to understand their course offerings and target audience before referring a potential participant. Over time, a provider should be able to develop recommendations as to the more effective and affordable local offerings, being care-

ful not to force a fit when a program is unlikely to advance the participant's goals.

**Vocational or contextualized ESL (VESL).** Vocational or contextualized English is taught in the context of a given industry, with the intention of building or reinforcing subject-matter expertise together with English language building blocks. Perhaps the best-known program is I-BEST, which integrates English and technical skills in a community college setting.<sup>9</sup>

An advantage of vocational English programs is their workforce focus, which provides participants with practical, direct preparation for the American workplace, reinforcing technical skills while also rebuilding professional confidence. Drawbacks of these programs primarily stem from the difficulty in recruiting qualified instructional staff and in maintaining an ongoing stream of participants. For example, a specialized curriculum can be daunting to an ESL teacher without subject matter expertise, while recruiting sufficient participants may be difficult in a small community or for a specialized course.

Many VESL programs are geared to language learners who do not have postsecondary education. Only a few are geared specifically to professionals, including the Welcome Back Initiative's English Health Train curriculum, designed to help foreign-trained professionals improve their English communication skills, career potential, and confidence while acquiring an understanding of the healthcare workplace culture, technical vocabulary, and a strong grammatical base. Another program by CEO Women offers an ESL curriculum that uses DVDs in the manner of soap opera episodes to develop entrepreneurship skills. Of course, “Business English” classes which emphasize professional communications may be useful to a skilled immigrant needing to strengthen written skills in email, reports, and presentations.



8- A useful starting point is the federal website of adult education providers, [www.literacydirectory.org](http://www.literacydirectory.org), as well as each state's department of education, which is likely to list community-based agencies funded to provide English language classes.

9- I-BEST was originally developed in Washington state. For more information, see: [www.sbctc.edu/college/e\\_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx](http://www.sbctc.edu/college/e_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx)



Finally, immigrant professionals who have gained a foothold in the American labor market can often draw on employer resources to help themselves continue to move up. For example, ACTS Retirement Communities offer onsite English classes for employees, while Marriott Hotels' "Thirst for Knowledge" program provides employees with take-home electronic materials for self-tutoring in English.<sup>10</sup>

**Informal language acquisition.** Beyond formal classes, immigrant professionals can often acquire English proficiency the old-fashioned way: by using the language every day. For this reason, it is advisable that jobseekers look for "survival jobs" in English-speaking environments, where co-workers and customers alike are constantly providing a flow of new vocabulary and language, and the temptation to relax into a primary language is reduced.

An option for immigrant professionals who are not yet able to enter paid employment is to volunteer in English-dominant environments. The return on investment in these cases directly correlates to degree of effort – an individual who deliberately engages with English-speaking colleagues, uses a notebook to record new words, seeks out English-language articles on the field, etc. will get much more out of the experience.

Because American-style volunteering-as-professional-development is less common elsewhere in the world, its advantages may need to be explicitly explained to potential participants. In addition, volunteer opportunities allow participants to become familiar with the work environment they hope to enter, and may yield valuable letters of reference for the future.

## **B. TECHNICAL SKILLS ACQUISITION**

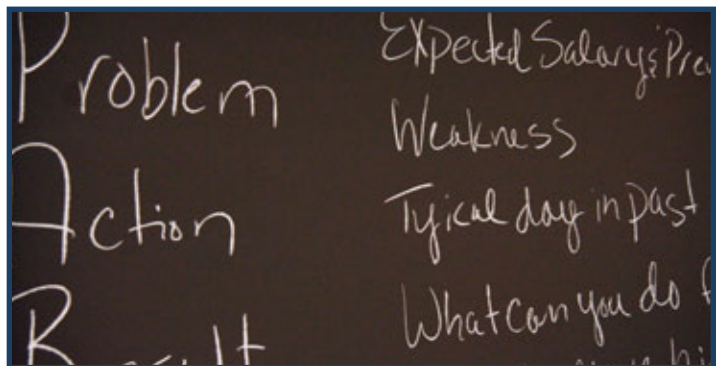
Other discrete skills gaps may be identified that are unique to a person's profession: perhaps technology has advanced since the immigrant has been able to practice in his field, or perhaps his skills were applied in a different context abroad.

**"A la carte" classes.** In some cases, an immigrant professional who broadens or refreshes technical skills can make himself more valuable in the job market. For example, an architect who is not well-versed in Computer-Aided Drafting & Design (CADD) or an accountant unfamiliar with common U.S. software packages such as Peachtree or QuickBooks is often at a severe handicap in the American labor market.

In other cases, an immigrant professional in regulated fields such as K-12 teaching, nursing, or engineering may seek "à la carte" access to specific courses in order to proceed with U.S. professional licensing. The credential evaluation organization and a state's licensing body will determine which courses are required to continue the licensing process. For example, a teacher may lack a U.S. history course or a nurse may require an obstetrics course.

**Bridge programs.** Bridge programs are training programs in specific in-demand fields, usually offered in community colleges, which offer a pathway into a new field through postsecondary education. While only a few are directed at highly skilled populations, this is a promising area for providing clear and faster pathways to alternative careers. These can vary significantly in length and content. Westchester Community College, a member of the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, has partnered with local biotech companies to offer a week-long "Mini-MBA" program for scientists, preparing them to move into higher management positions. Most of these students are foreign educated, needing to acquire the U.S. business acumen to advance their careers. The course is taught by a Columbia University professor during the regular work day.

**Train to work, work to train.** Considering the time and money an immigrant professional must invest in a training program, no training should be embarked upon without a realistic assessment that it will fulfill a genuine employment demand or meet a key licensing requirement. In addition, participants who are working should be mindful of potential opportunities for tuition reimbursement and related educational support through their employers. Particularly common in healthcare, these opportunities can allow a skilled immigrant to acquire additional U.S. certification or credentials while continuing to work and climb a career ladder.



10- Marriott's program is described in "Companies Take Lead in Assimilation Efforts," Washington Post, Aug. 9, 2008, online at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/08/AR2008080803425.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/08/AR2008080803425.html)

### C. REFINING PROFESSIONAL JOB SEARCH SKILLS

In addition to English and technical skills, immigrant professionals also benefit greatly from acquiring general job-search skills geared for the American white-collar workplace. This section outlines IMPRINT's recommended approach for immigrant professionals who are at the job seeking stage.

**The fallacy of a “common sense” job search.** Culturally specific skills may feel innate even though they are learned. As a result, a jobseeker may go about the U.S. job search process using his own culture's “common sense” practices, unaware that those practices are ill-suited to the U.S. professional environment, and increasingly frustrated at the lack of response to his many job applications. This frustration can occur even when a participant has already worked successfully in entry-level jobs in the U.S., because a different set of skills are needed to gain entrée to more professional opportunities. Service providers can play a vital role in bridging these cultural divides to help skilled immigrants build U.S.-style professional job search skills.

As one agricultural engineer from Uganda recounted, “I had been searching for a job for about two years. I didn't really know what was required of a good job search until I learned of late that I wasn't using the right tools.” Through his participation in Upwardly Global's program for immigrant professionals, he obtained a robust set of job search tools, including resume and cover letter writing, networking and interviewing skills, background information on U.S. professional culture, and soft-skill development to address more subtle cultural barriers.

An overview of these tools is provided below. More information, including sample documents, can be obtained through IMPRINT's technical assistance services.

**Resume and cover letter writing.** Every country has a particular resume style that reflects its unique professional working environment. Practices that are common in some countries – such as including marital status, religion, or a

photograph – are totally unknown in the U.S. Immigrant professionals who attempt to apply for U.S. jobs using a foreign-styled resume may struggle to get past the initial application stage to even be considered for an interview.

Practitioners can address this challenge in several ways:

- By providing jobseekers with a U.S.-style resume template;
- By clearly explaining key differences in American-style resumes compared to other countries'
- By working with individual jobseekers to reframe their experience in U.S. terms.

**Contextualizing.** It is a hard truth that even major international companies and universities may not be recognized by U.S. employers. Therefore, it is vital to counsel a jobseeker individually on how he can provide detailed context to illustrate the breadth of his experience to American hiring managers. This may include noting the size (in employees or revenue) of his former company, the number of people supervised, and other relevant background information that can illustrate the magnitude of his achievements.

**Interviewing skills.** Immigrant professionals may be unfamiliar with or may struggle with key elements of the American professional job interview, including such varied aspects as eye contact, handshakes, self-confidence, and self-promotion. To aid in the adjustment, it is often helpful for practitioners to describe mastering the American way as learning a new code. Thinking of the process as a code breaking game also makes it easier for U.S.-born practitioners to gain sufficient distance on their own culture to be able to spell out expectations that they may previously have regarded as simply “normal.”

Armed with their new knowledge, jobseekers benefit significantly from practicing via mock interviews and debriefing. Jobseekers can also benefit from coaching in how to imagine the hiring manager's perspective, and how they



*“I didn't get any replies... not on my own. My fellow Filipinos would tell me to just forget your career back home; just be a nurse! Upwardly Global told me that I can be what I wanted to be here, the same experience that I had back home. [...] They guided me through the process.”*

**Maria  
Stockbroker, Philippines**

may be coming across to an American. When an actual job interview presents itself, service providers can offer to help jobseekers prepare via a practice interview that is framed around the specific job opportunity.

**Communication skills.** In addition to the general interviewing skills described above, practitioners may find it is useful to work with immigrant professionals on communication skills specifically. Two types of skills are valuable: in-person skills, including listening comprehension, vocabulary, contextual cues, and body language; and remote skills, including phone and email. Phone skills include navigating and leaving voicemails and recording appropriate messages for potential employers. Email skills include details such as creating a work-appropriate email address, and employer-employee business response etiquette.

Helping immigrant professionals improve their communication skills often has a positive side-effect of increasing their ability to independently make connections and foster relationships with potential employers.<sup>11</sup> While participants may initially struggle with the assertive U.S. model of communication, those who persist are more likely to be successful in their job search.

**Networking.** Ideally, networking should be incorporated throughout each phase of programs serving immigrant professionals. Applying their new skills in a real-world context is important; jobseekers can gain practice in networking by attending formal and informal events such as those offered by the local Chamber of Commerce, professional associations, or affinity groups. These informal events help jobseekers to improve their comfort level with American slang and informal business vocabulary as well as their ability to engage in U.S.-style “marketing yourself.” Practitioners can compile such local networking information for jobseekers, such as the Welcoming Center does in its “How to Succeed in the Workplace” guide.

A practitioner organization can also organize and moderate sector-specific events in which immigrant professionals provide peer support to each other, such as Upwardly Global’s industry roundtables, Engineering Development Series or International Medical Graduate forum, in which participants learn networking strategies through successes of others in their field. Service providers can also play a key role in helping jobseekers identify prospects for informational interviews and in setting up such interviews.

## III. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Organizations which already provide educational or workforce services to immigrants are likely to be well familiar with the challenges in expanding their existing work. At the same time, IMPRINT recognizes that organizations that are *already* providing effective services are often the best positioned to build upon their offerings to immigrant professionals.

In Section III, we address several opportunities for strengthening organizational capacity with a particular eye to limited resources: the knowledge and training of an organization’s staff and volunteers; the cultivation of employer relationships; sectoral strategies; and program administration.

### A. STAFFING

A particular challenge in providing workforce services is that even staff members who are highly experienced in social services may lack detailed knowledge of employment-related issues and resources. Yet it is critical for advisors themselves to have accurate information to share with participants. This typically requires a highly educated staff with hands-on exposure to U.S. workplace practices via backgrounds in human resources, business administration, adult learning/corporate training, or in such practice areas as job development or business development.

In some cases, organizations may be able to hire for these skill sets specifically. Where organizations are concentrating on growing the skills of existing staff, one way to build expertise is to have staff specialize in a particular professional field or industry, as described in Section 3D *Considering Sector Work*.

Other professional development resources are available through the websites of IMPRINT and its member organizations, as well as national initiatives such as the Aspen Institute’s Sector Skills Academy or the National Skills Coalition.

Of course, thoroughly documenting work processes and training tools can both help to improve staff skills, and make service delivery more consistent.

11- When it comes to finding jobs, Upwardly Global numbers bear this assertion out: about two-thirds of jobs attained by Upwardly Global participants can be attributed to leads discovered and/or pursued by jobseekers themselves, reflecting the independence that comes from acquiring specific, teachable skills.



## B. USING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers can be the lifeblood of a low-budget service endeavor, but require a deliberate infrastructure to function effectively.

**Defined roles.** While volunteers can be incorporated into services in a multitude of ways, setting a limited number of well-defined and documented volunteer roles allows staff to more efficiently manage the program and volunteers to understand what is expected in their commitment. Clearly defined roles also allow for peer relationships to emerge among volunteers who are carrying out similar functions. Roles can be event-based or focused on an ongoing relationship. Some examples:

- **Interpreting:** When agencies do not have multilingual staff, volunteer interpreters can help convey the information participants need to know as they pursue their professional goals. Note that volunteer interpreters should be trained; untrained interpreters should only be used for non-critical situations and even then should abide by confidentiality standards.
- **One-on-one assistance with resume writing:** This requires that volunteers have a keen understanding of the desired American format for a resume as well as the pitfalls common to many foreign-born applicants. Volunteers should also be practiced in helping a jobseeker describe their accomplishments in American terms (self-promotion or “bragging”; Problem-Action-Result examples; use of numbers to capture impact) rather than merely describing their tasks or responsibilities at a former job.
- **One-on-one mock interviews:** In this scenario, a volunteer role-plays a job interview with an immigrant candidate. At the end of the mock interview, the volunteer shares feedback with the jobseeker. The volunteer may also provide more detailed notes on the jobseeker’s performance privately to staff members later.
- **Small-group networking events:** Here, a group of volunteers and a group of jobseekers gather for an informal cocktail hour or business breakfast to practice networking. Jobseekers may be given a task of completing two or three successful exchanges and obtaining business cards from several American-born volunteers. The volunteers, in turn, may be given a handful of prompts or conversation starters to use in eliciting information from jobseekers.

- **Mentoring:** Mentors typically are experienced in other volunteer roles before committing to assignment to an immigrant professional and a consistent meeting schedule (by phone and/or in person more than once a month). Mentors reinforce job search skills and also often provide a level of emotional support or act as sounding board for life issues that affect a participant’s ability to conduct a successful job search. Effective mentors often create meeting agendas and hold jobseekers accountable for progress from one session to the next. Some programs may wish to develop a mentoring reference book to suggest session topics.

Volunteers can best fill such substantive roles within a program when practitioners recruit actively with some basic criteria in mind.

**Sources of volunteers.** Potential sources for new volunteers include employers and membership associations, such as the Jaycees or Rotary, and professional associations such as the American Medical Association or Society of Professional Engineers, as well as ethnic-specific professional associations. Advertising volunteer opportunities through online tools such as Idealist.org, VolunteerMatch.org, Facebook or Twitter can also bring in new recruits. Once a volunteer base is established, targeted requests for personal referrals can bring in new help. Depending on program needs, volunteers from specific ethnic or linguistic groups may also be recruited, either through word of mouth or community organizations.

**Screening.** Screening helps ensure that a volunteer base is capable and committed. For example, the Welcoming Center asks potential volunteers about why they are interested in the opportunity, their specific skill set, and their idea of a successful volunteer engagement. A short phone screening with these questions allows potential volunteers to picture what volunteering will actually be like, and provides a low-key way to decline if it’s not a fit.

**Providing appropriate training and orientation.** Good training ensures that volunteers are fully equipped to support program goals, and therefore it is critical to invest sufficient time in their training and orienting. IMPRINT members have also found that volunteer confidence and retention are improved when training is formalized and it is made clear that technical support is available as needed.

The Welcoming Center budgets 2 hours of training for each new volunteer, plus an additional 30-60 minutes for each new type of activity the volunteer is asked to do. Given this investment of time, the organization focuses on “repeat”



volunteers – people who are available to commit to 3 hours of volunteer time on at least 4 occasions.

Upwardly Global volunteer orientations vary depending on the function, ranging from role-playing demonstrations to PowerPoint presentations. Its model incorporates approximately 1,000 unique volunteers on an annual basis, and embraces both repeat volunteers and one-time participants. One format draws on partnerships with Fortune 500 companies, which host jobseeker events staffed by volunteers from their own Human Resources departments. Such events provide HR staff with experience in multi-cultural interviewing and a skills-based Corporate Social Responsibility activity, while jobseekers get much-needed practice and feedback. Even these low-key, one-time experiences can still pay excellent dividends in good will, future engagement, and the occasional new hire.

**Ensuring quality control.** Beyond the initial recruitment and training of volunteers, it is essential to monitor their activities to ensure that they are equipped to be effective guides for immigrant jobseekers. As in Section 3A's discussion of staff training, similar controls should be exercised so that volunteers can operate effectively and according to the principle of "first do no harm."

Both Upwardly Global and the Welcoming Center emphasize the value of making sure that volunteers are invested in the organizational philosophy and are familiar with the tools they are using. This helps to ensure that well-meaning volunteers aren't leading jobseekers astray with inaccurate information or unrealistic expectations. Such unhelpful help can cause a jobseeker to close off educational or job options prematurely or to take on undue financial burdens.

Periodically seeking volunteer and/or jobseeker feedback through individual check-ins or group surveys can also help gauge not only volunteer quality, but also program curriculum strength.

The Welcoming Center has found that volunteers raised and/or educated in the U.S. and those who immigrated as adults tend to have different strengths and weaknesses. Immigrant volunteers can bring tremendous value by illuminating the American job-search experience from their own vantage point as former newcomers, but may have more limited social capital in the U.S. In contrast, American-raised and -educated volunteers typically bring a broader social network that can help them connect the jobseeker with opportunities, but can also be more prone to overestimating the ease of the jobseeker's transition to an entirely new labor market.

Both organizations agree that volunteers should not act entirely independently, but should have as part of their service commitment a regularly scheduled opportunity to debrief with staff and fellow volunteers. If planned together with a social event such as a volunteer recognition party, this can also be a means to build camaraderie among volunteers and ensure ongoing satisfaction.

**Engaging program participants and graduates.** Program participants can put their talents to use even before they have found a professional position. Volunteering for the service provider can not only provide material support for the organization, it can boost the confidence and skills of the immigrant volunteer while providing fodder for the résumé. Here are just a few ways to engage program participants and alumni:



At any time:

- Provide assistance interpreting for limited English proficient participants
- Offer short motivational speeches at different events (conferences, fundraisers, employer breakfasts, trainings for new participants and volunteers), as either success stories or in-progress testimonials
- Act as ambassadors to new employers, funders, and jobseekers – referring them to the program
- Be considered for employment within the service organization

Once placed in a professional position or advanced in a licensing process:

- Refer other jobseekers to company HR department
- Lead study groups: share old study materials, provide guidance in terms of approaching the topics to study, facilitate discussion, etc.
- Volunteer in any capacity (as mentor, mock interviewer, etc.)

### C. ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

Having a robust network of employer contacts is a strong asset for any program serving immigrant professionals. This section outlines key reasons for service providers to proactively engage employer partners, and describes how such partnerships can be established.

Employer engagement is valuable for three primary reasons: to aid in direct job placement; for program support; and for advocacy and systems change over the long term. Yet it is not uncommon for U.S. employers to undervalue foreign education and work experience or even to harbor bias against immigrant professionals who are assumed to require visa sponsorship. Thus, while employers can be a program's strongest asset, they also require significant attention to educate fully about the untapped talent pool represented by underutilized skilled immigrants.

**For placement:** With a wide world of employers to choose from, programs are advised to narrow their employer outreach efforts by finding a natural starting point to build connections. This could include:

- **Local business networks:** Approach the local Chamber of Commerce to become a known quantity among a variety of employers in the area.
- **Tracking employer demand:** Even in an economic downturn, some companies struggle fill skilled positions. Acquiring knowledge of the local labor market can uncover these companies, which may be more



open to considering a new pipeline of candidates from a direct service provider.

- **A sector approach:** When there is a critical mass of several jobseekers from a given industry, a provider can approach employers in that sector en masse through an industry roundtable or other convening.
- **Target companies:** Newer small and mid-sized companies, particularly those that are growing, may be more open to non-traditional hires.

**What to propose?** A service provider should determine ahead of time what to offer an employer for the most productive encounter possible. Some ideas for service providers:

- **Placement:** Ask to present a candidate for an open position with the company. This allows employers to begin to rely on a not-for-profit program as they would a recruiter, and can help a service provider build its reputation as a source of talent.
- **Backfilling:** When a skilled immigrant is placed who was previously in a lower-skill job, it's a perfect time to approach the employer and ask to aid them in filling their now-vacant position with another program participant.
- **'Try and buy':** If an employer is reluctant to hire, paid (or if necessary, unpaid) internships are a viable option. Taking on an intern allows a skeptical employer to mitigate risk while the jobseeker gains additional experience and polish.

**For program support.** There are many ways that employer partners can provide support to a service program, including:

- **Influencing program design:** Without employer input, programs are in danger of providing well-meaning but irrelevant advice, or even damaging jobseekers' prospects by steering them toward poorly valued certifications and credentials.<sup>12</sup>
- **In-kind donations:** Space, clerical supplies, and even food: if an organization has nonprofit status, it is worthwhile to research the extent to which these dona-

12- The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians reports that this is an area of significant concern, as it continues to see new jobseekers who were previously given bad advice by untrained advisors (for example, told to attend training programs that do not lead to industry-recognized credentials or are unsuited to the jobseeker's age and financial responsibilities).

tions may be claimed as tax deductions by participating companies.

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Inviting HR staff to participate in a mock interview or networking event allows corporate partners to benefit from multicultural interviewing practice and exposure to diverse jobseekers in an informal environment, while providing immigrant jobseekers with real-world interviewing experience.
- **Financial donations:** Contributions can be solicited through direct giving or corporate foundations.
- **Pilot programs and collaborative programming:** These can be developed after a strong employer partnership has been established. For example, the WBI site in Maryland has a foreign nursing initiative in which local hospitals interview and hire foreign-trained nurses who have certified nurse aide credentials but have not yet obtained their American RN licenses. Participants are paid at a higher rate as “nurses in training”—a significant contribution by the employer.

**Advocacy:** While new programs tend to be focused on establishing initial relationships with employers, over time organizations may develop closer ties with their corporate partners that can inform advocacy and systems change efforts. This can range from providing support at conferences to giving testimony at legislative hearings. Whatever form it eventually takes, it is important to note that trust is essential to creating such relationships, and organizations have ample opportunity even in the early stages of employer engagement to either reinforce or weaken that trust. More on this topic can be found in the conclusion of this brief.

#### D. CONSIDERING SECTOR STRATEGIES

Should a service provider new to skilled immigrant workforce issues focus, in whole or in part, on a specific sector? Focusing on a field such as healthcare or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) has certain clear advantages for service providers:<sup>13</sup>

- Development of a deep field of expertise
- Increased awareness of reputable versus disreputable certifications
- Better understanding of actual (not theoretical or projected) employer needs
- More focused employer recruitment with the added draw of peer business networking opportunities
- Volunteer use of their direct professional experience in coaching jobseekers

- Compelling arguments to funders, employers and policymakers built on sector-specific program results and local labor market information

What form this sector strategy will take depends on practitioner resources and a needs assessment of both jobseekers and employers in a given community. Some options to consider include:

- **Vocational English as a Second Language:** Gathering professionals from one sector together allows opportunities to develop specialized language proficiency. If an organization isn't ready to launch a full course, low-cost alternatives include conversation groups or one-on-one tutoring that uses vocabulary from a specific professional field.
- **Network support:** Jobseekers often feel more motivated in a peer group – it makes reviewing job search skills and building confidence for interviews more effective. Assembling a group of engineers or teachers also provides opportunities for networking events such as industry roundtables, or mock interviews with volunteers who work in the field.
- **Internships:** In fields where employers require American experience, it may be possible to implement a short-term internship program where interns can acquire U.S. workplace experience while receiving mentoring from outside volunteers or staff. These can end in strong references and even job offers.

Useful strategies for a sector approach:

- **Track employer demand:** When considering opportunities for jobseekers, it's important to keep in mind the current value of their skill set in the local labor market. In a region where construction jobs are scarce, civil engineers may find opportunities with niche employers (such as water treatment plants), or programs receiving government incentives (green industries). Service providers should thoroughly examine local employer needs before deciding on a sector for focus.
- **Work top-down:** Umbrella organizations which already convene key players in a sector can provide high-level access to decision makers. For example, monthly meetings of a regional healthcare council may include representatives from hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, and nursing homes.
- **Lead with sectors:** If an organization is only beginning to organize services to immigrant professionals, choosing a particular sector to work with can build competency and also attract interest from funders which, if desired, can drive expansion to multiple sectors.

13- There are many resources on sector-specific workforce initiatives. Two of the best-known are the National Network of Sector Partners ([www.insightcced.org/index.php?page=nnspp](http://www.insightcced.org/index.php?page=nnspp)) and the Aspen Institute's Sector Skills Academy ([www.sectorkillsacademy.org/](http://www.sectorkillsacademy.org/))



## Healthcare Sector Snapshot

Demographics is destiny in healthcare. As the industry grows to meet demand from aging Boomers and patients newly insured due to healthcare reform, the nation is facing significant shortages among Family Medicine and General Practitioners while continuing its trend toward a majority-minority population.

These factors – combined with consumer desire for culturally and linguistically-appropriate care – make skilled immigrants a natural fit to bolster ranks of healthcare providers. Yet even as qualified professionals seek to restart their careers in the US, barriers remain. Emerging partners in overcoming those barriers include community colleges and, potentially, professional associations.

### *Challenges to Healthcare Workforce Integration*

For skilled immigrants looking to resume the same profession:

- Redundant skills verification (e.g., 17 states require a foreign-trained nurse to take 2 competency tests while U.S. graduates only take one)
- Difficulty connecting to employers where supervised clinical hours are required (e.g., foreign-trained pharmacists normally must complete over 1,000 hours of documented work under a licensed pharmacist)
- Lack of access to financial assistance for relicensing

For those seeking interim or alternative careers in healthcare:

- Lack of transparent information about wages and credential requirements for allied health professions
- Siloed healthcare careers which make lateral moves difficult (e.g., while many foreign-trained physicians may make excellent Physician Assistants, the law in many states requires completion of an entire course of study, including back-to-basics courses such as biology and anatomy)

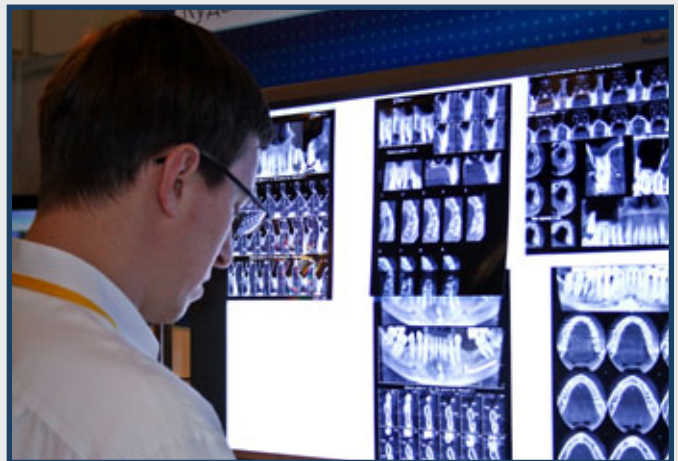
### *Promising Practices*

Vocational English as a Second Language specially geared to healthcare professionals can build language skills while providing exposure to U.S. healthcare

work environments. Examples include Welcome Back Initiative's English Health Train curriculum and Chicago-based Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud program.

Alternative pathways can provide an additional entry point for qualified workers. CCCIE member Miami Dade College's Foreign Physician Alternative Certification Program offers students special advising on career planning, preparation for exams like the USMLE medical licensing exam, and discounts for the popular TOEFL English exam.

Employer involvement in interim employment prior to licensing, such as Montgomery County WBI's foreign nurse initiative, in which workers with certified nurse aide credentials are paid a higher wage as "Nurses in Training" for up to two years as they pursue U.S. registered nurse licensure.





## E. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Many of the practices discussed earlier in this report can be implemented without establishing a formal direct services program. For example, an existing organization or group of volunteers can organize a series of one-time events – such as resume workshops, mock interviews, and networking evenings -- without needing to provide continuing case management. This next section, however, discusses some essential program infrastructure elements recommended for organizations seeking to achieve robust employment outcomes for immigrant professionals via a more formal program.

**Outreach.** What regions have a sufficient pool of potential candidates? A 2011 Brookings Institution report<sup>14</sup> noted that 100 U.S. metropolitan areas have immigrant populations where high-skilled immigrants outnumber those with a high school degree or less. IMPRINT suggests that cities that are traditional or new immigrant gateways, and which have a significant number of professionally employed immigrants, are likely to also include an underutilized population of immigrant professionals.<sup>15</sup> IMPRINT's direct service organizations see this pattern reflected in the 11 metro areas where we work.<sup>16</sup>

Due to the diversity of national origins and professional fields of skilled immigrants, outreach can be a challenge. Much like volunteer recruitment, making skilled immigrants aware of this work requires activity on several fronts. The first logical source is a community's existing institutions.

For example, Upwardly Global establishes formal referral relationships by making presentations to refugee resettlement organizations, librarians, community college ESL departments, and members of ethnic professional groups or immigrant and neighborhood social organizations. This is followed by having a partner organization publicize a free outreach workshop, "Using Your Foreign Degree in the United States," as a means to give basic information on the professional job search to all comers, while also screening for those who are eligible for intensive services.<sup>17</sup>

Workforce development one-stop centers, ethnic media, referrals from agency staff or other clients, and other types of word of mouth are other promising avenues for outreach. Welcome Back relies heavily on media coverage, word of mouth, and its ongoing relationships with employers, educators, and community-based organizations which serve immigrants.<sup>18</sup>

**Data.** Documenting services and outcomes is a non-negotiable aspect of strong program delivery. IMPRINT organizations have found that strong data collection and program evaluation practices are critical in maintaining and improving quality of service, as well as making the most persuasive arguments to funders and policymakers.

14- Hall, Matthew, Audrey Singer, Gordon F. De Jong, and Deborah R. Graefe. "The Geography of Immigrant Skills: Educational Profiles of Metropolitan Areas." State of Metropolitan America 34. The Brookings Institution, 9 June 2011.

15- Detailed information on a community's foreign-born population, including educational levels and English ability, can be accessed using the Census Bureau's American Fact Finder tool at census.gov.

16- IMPRINT member direct service programs range in size from 2-15 staff members, with 40-250 jobseekers served annually per site. Programs are based in the Alamo area, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Montgomery County Maryland, New York, Philadelphia, Providence, San Diego, San Francisco, and the Seattle area.

17- For example, Upwardly Global program eligibility requirements are: permanent work authorization (as a permanent resident, refugee or asylee); a bachelor's degree equivalent or higher; 2 years' professional experience outside the U.S.; English skills capable of employer interviewing; and current unemployment or underemployment in the U.S. Preference is given to people coming from less-developed countries.

18- WBI's only requirement to qualify for services is the possession of a degree in a health profession earned outside the U.S..



Among the data elements collected by IMPRINT member organizations are the following:

**Demographic data:**

- Gender; race/ethnicity; national origin; country of training; age; number of dependents; length of time in U.S.; English ability; educational background

**Program activity data:**

- Number of participants served
- Numbers pursuing licensing, enrolled in skill-building programs or educational programs, or placed in jobs
- Number of participants who obtained licenses or certifications
- Number of employers that received outreach efforts
- Number of employers actively engaged with the program (participating in events and/or hiring jobseekers)
- Number of community partners with whom referral relationships have been established
- Number of community partners engaged in joint service delivery

**Employment data:**

- Number unemployed or underemployed at time of enrollment
- Number of jobseekers placed and retained (for 3, 6 and 12 months after placement)
- Wage levels at entry and exit of the program (allowing for computation of average salary, average salary increase, etc.)

**Economic impact data:**

- Number of participants who obtained health benefits as a result of placement
- Number of participants who were able to reduce or cease receipt of public benefits (food stamps, etc.) after placement

Mechanisms for collecting this information include a customized in-house database (Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians and Welcome Back Initiative) and an adapted Customer Relationship Management web-based application (Upwardly Global).

Beyond collecting individual-level data, IMPRINT members also use program data to make a broader case. For example, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians provided one year of job-placement data to the economic consulting firm Econsult Corp., which calculated the impact on local and state tax revenue using standard economic multipliers. The resulting report, *Shared Prosperity*, was disseminated widely among legislators, policymakers and funders interested in assessing the ripple effects of providing a one-time intervention of workforce services to immigrant professionals.<sup>19</sup>

The Welcome Back Initiative uses data to inform its advocacy work. For example, documenting the time it takes to evaluate foreign credentials allows WBI to offer suggestions about alternatives that maintain the integrity of the process while expediting its outcome. WBI also reports that data collection and reporting is essential in the pursuit of new funding opportunities.

**Fundraising.** IMPRINT practitioners have found that full-scale services that lead to verifiable professional job placements cost on average \$5,000-\$9,000 per participant in an efficient operation depending on services offered. Even if this cost is more than justified by the economic impact of job placements with wages of \$30-50,000 a year, it still demands significant fundraising.

Programs seeking to serve immigrant professionals should consider seeking funding from a broad range of potential sources, including not only private foundations and individual donors but public funding streams for education, workforce, and refugee services. In each case, it is wise



19- The report can be accessed at: [www.welcomingcenter.org/publications/publication-downloads](http://www.welcomingcenter.org/publications/publication-downloads)



to thoroughly research available opportunities to prevent wasted time and effort in developing proposals that will immediately be deemed ineligible.

A starting point for that research is the Foundation Center, a nationwide network of library-based centers as well as an online resource located at [www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org). Foundations that have already identified immigrants as a population of interest are often members of the affinity group Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees ([www.gcir.org](http://www.gcir.org)). In addition, local community foundations typically offer both general funding opportunities and specialized “donor-advised funds” whose eligibility criteria may allow for services to immigrants.

In time, programs may want to consider the creation of “alumni” groups that will allow them to seek support from program participants who have reached their professional goals and may be in a position to financially support the programs that helped them achieve those goals.

Cultivating the power of the private sector for fundraising purposes should not be overlooked. Employer partners may contribute through both fee-for-service activities (such as headhunting fees) and corporate philanthropic initiatives.

Organizations that wish to pursue funding opportunities in partnership with established programs serving immigrant professionals are encouraged to contact IMPRINT for advice and referral.



## CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVOCACY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

Given the remarkable asset that immigrant professionals represent to the United States, it is perhaps surprising that our society’s process for incorporating and drawing on their talents is still such a fledgling enterprise.

Both in preparing this report and in our daily work, IMPRINT member organizations have had the opportunity to learn about numerous local endeavors around the country that are attempting to tackle this challenge. We are often energized and inspired by the successes of these far-flung projects, many of which are undertaken as shoestring operations with few financial or human resources with which to accomplish their goals.

At the same time, we are keenly aware that this field is just emerging. Indeed, in contrast to well-established refugee resettlement programs or the broad landscape of post-secondary education and training programs, immigrant professional integration has barely begun to be understood as a unique set of workforce issues and opportunities with positive ramifications for both economic development and immigrant integration.

Yet even in this emergent moment, we are at a vital crossroads. Decisions made today will shape the landscape for a generation to come. Whether this work will find a home under the auspices of workforce development or adult education; whether it is seen as economic development or human capital enrichment; whether it is considered primarily the task of governmental or nongovernmental institutions; whether it is to be approached as a national or state issue; these and many other questions remain unanswered.

Amidst these questions, however, there are some clear guideposts. Below, we outline five areas of immediate opportunity that IMPRINT has identified as ripe for exploration. We invite you to contact us with your ideas and suggestions for creating a shared agenda for skilled immigrant workforce integration.

**1. Data-Driven Advocacy.** As described at several points in this report, practitioners are well-positioned to gather data about the needs, opportunities, and economic impact of the immigrant professionals in their communities. Collecting this information in a rigorous and well-defined manner is essential in building an evidence-based case. As the field continues to mature, IMPRINT encourages efforts to identify and standardize measures across practitioners, including

participation in existing national initiatives such as Public/Private Ventures' Benchmarking Project. Developing these common measures will allow practitioners nationwide to strengthen the economic and social case for our work and to share this information more widely.

**2. Partnerships with Established Systems.** Shared interests make natural alliances, and there are several well-established systems nationally which see a flow of immigrant professionals through their institutions, regardless of whether they are currently organized to deliver workforce development services to the population. Chief among these are institutions of higher education, professional associations, federally-funded workforce centers, and refugee resettlement agencies.

For example, as detailed in this report, both community colleges and four-year universities have a clear overlap in their constituencies with immigrant service providers, and some have already partnered with nonprofit organizations to develop programs and services to aid their mutual participants. There is tremendous opportunity for growth in higher education partnerships, whether in the realm of bridge programs, alternative licensing and certification pathways, or information provision to immigrant students.

There also exists significant untapped potential for connections between professional associations and immigrant service practitioners. Because these associations often play such a critical role in setting and regulating licensing standards, they can be powerful partners when there are clear and shared expectations and goals.

Practitioners have a number of pathways through which they can approach these potential partners, including exploratory meetings, proposals for joint or co-sponsored events, and more ambitious efforts to work together on program design, implementation, fundraising and advocacy.

**3. Scaling Up of Direct Service Models.** IMPRINT member organizations already provide direct services to thousands of immigrant professionals each year. Our own proven models and those of other pioneers provide a blueprint for potential expansion of comprehensive direct services to immigrant professionals. Across the United States, in established and new immigrant gateway cities and states, we know that there is tremendous opportunity for such expansion. We invite potential partners to contact us and begin the conversation of how their own communities can tap into the assets of underutilized immigrant professionals for the economic betterment of all.

**4. Informed Policymaking.** Few policymakers have detailed knowledge of the barriers faced by skilled immigrants, the

services that are effective in placing them, and the positive economic impact that such placements produce. Yet they are often faced with the responsibility of setting policies, designing regulations, and determining the scope of service provision for constituencies that encompass this population.

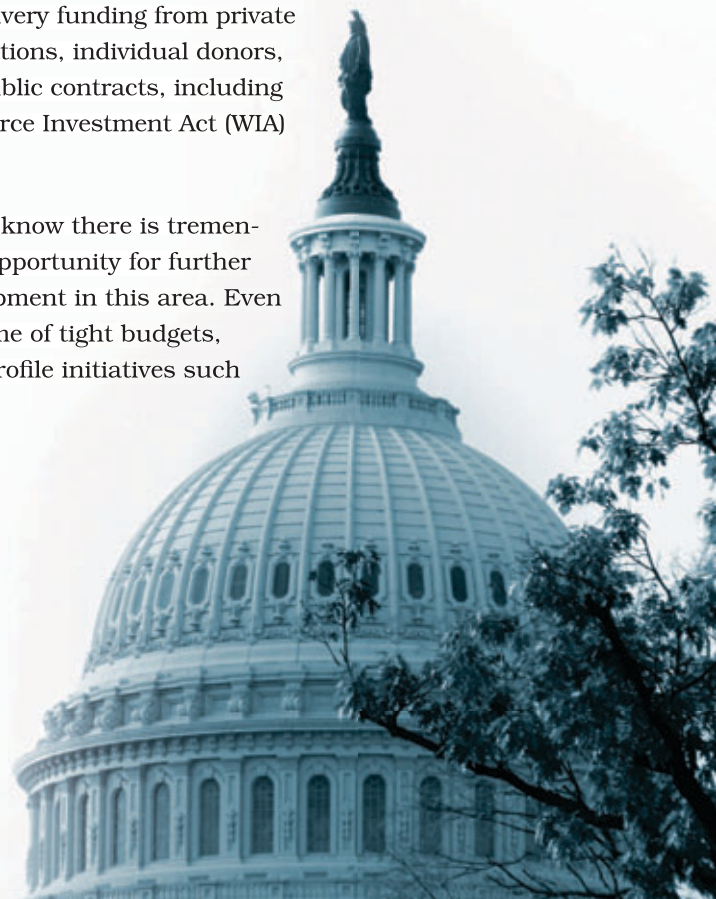
Practitioners have a variety of avenues for sharing information and opportunities for action with policymakers. On the most fundamental level, well-illustrated and succinct program data can be a valuable tool in building awareness and support among elected officials and civil servants at all levels of government. Practitioners can also seek opportunities for public comment on legislative, regulatory, and rulemaking processes. Even in the more mundane realm of administration, advocates can make meaningful headway, for example, by encouraging a public agency to structure an intake form that will capture data on a participant's international credentials and experience.

While substantive regulatory and legislative change typically require sustained, multi-year efforts, policy advocacy efforts can focus in the nearer term on administrative change and/or convening with government for potential partnerships, as well as building connections with existing educational and workforce systems.

**5. Fostering Philanthropic and Public-Sector Support.** IMPRINT member organizations

have already used program data to successfully argue the case for service-delivery funding from private foundations, individual donors, and public contracts, including Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds.

Yet we know there is tremendous opportunity for further development in this area. Even in a time of tight budgets, high-profile initiatives such





as New York mayor Michael Bloomberg's Partnership for a New American Economy are staking out bold new territory in their recommendations for immigrant integration and policy change.

Indeed, we challenge practitioners to envision the *unusual suspects* – public or private funders that have not historically seen a role for themselves in immigrant integration – in building momentum for sustained funding and large-scale services in support of immigrant professional integration.

Taken as a whole, and even amidst a backdrop of political and economic flux, IMPRINT nevertheless sees an expectant moment: now is the time to piece together a strong fabric from the patchwork of innovative programs and ideas seeking to advance the integration of skilled immigrants. Now is the time to galvanize practitioners and policymakers for the benefit of all. And – most of all – now is the time for the United States to fully recognize the extraordinary men and women who have chosen to make our country their home

“I love the American people. They are so kind. There is freedom. I have everything because I have freedom: I can start again.

”  
**Atireza**  
*Physician, Iran*

## **ABOUT IMPRINT**

IMPRINT, founded in 2011, is a national coalition of non-profit organizations with decades of collective experience in immigrant professional integration services. Member organizations include:

**Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education**  
[www.cccie.org](http://www.cccie.org)

**Upwardly Global**  
[www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org)

**Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians**  
[www.welcomingcenter.org](http://www.welcomingcenter.org)

**Welcome Back Initiative**  
[www.welcomebackinitiative.org](http://www.welcomebackinitiative.org)

**World Education Services**  
[www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)

IMPRINT's efforts start with the recognition that foreign-born professionals have already attained university educations. With minimal additional investment, these individuals offer remarkable potential for economic impact. Indeed, professionals who move into high-skilled positions will create job vacancies for entry-level workers, provide the next generation with access to higher education, and become economic drivers and job creators themselves.

IMPRINT links the resources needed to ensure new American professionals can be rapidly connected to employment in their fields of expertise. As a clearinghouse of information and resources on this specialized topic, IMPRINT advocates for improved policies, aggregates existing research data, and broadcasts best practices to help create an efficient path for skilled immigrant professionals to put their in-demand skills to work for American companies.

IMPRINT also provides immigrant service organizations with the resources they need to build their capacity and empower skilled immigrants to approach employers, obtain recertification or re-credentialing, and start using the talents they brought to the United States.

If the proven solutions championed by IMPRINT can reach just 5 percent of the 2.7 million marginalized immigrant professionals nationwide, it would represent \$6 billion in tax revenues alone over the course of five years. These new American professionals would also gain billions of dollars in increased buying power for themselves and their families while helping to ensure that the U.S. has the skills necessary to continue to be innovative and competitive on a global scale.

# IMPRINT

[www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This list provides a very brief overview of some of the non-profit, education, government and philanthropic partners who are engaged in high-skill immigrant integration work in the United States.

- **B'nai Zion Foundation Re-Training Program for Immigrants:** This New York City-based program offers bridge programs allowing immigrant scientists and engineers to update their skills for the U.S. workplace. *www.bnaizion.org/retraining.php*
- **CAMBA:** This New York City-based nonprofit offers a seven-week series of classes for immigrant professionals, encouraging participants to attend networking events and to schedule independent interviews in order to continue building their skills *www.camba.org*
- **Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration of the University of Southern California:** This interdisciplinary center provides scholarship and convening activities for national experts in a broad variety of topics in the field of immigrant integration. *www.csii.usc.edu/*
- **Chicago Bilingual Nursing Consortium:** The program has provided exam preparation and other support for over 400 foreign trained nurses since its establishment in 2002. *www.chicagobilingualnurse.org*
- **Diversity Dynamics:** this consulting firm publishes a regular newsletter and compiles immigrant policy updates on a regular basis for a number of topics, including economic and workforce development. *www.usdiversitydynamics.com*
- **International Bilingual Nurses Alliance:** This is a national body to promote success among foreign trained nurses in licensing, workplace integration and advancement, and remediation of healthcare disparities among minority populations *www.bilingualnurses.org*
- **International Rescue Committee (IRC), San Diego:** IRC San Diego is a refugee resettlement agency with myriad programs for the economic independence and social integration of newcomers, including offering specialized career guidance to skilled immigrants. IRC is a 2011 recipient of the Migration Policy Institute's E Pluribus Unum award. *www.rescue.org/us-program/us-san-diego-ca*
- **J.M. Kaplan Fund:** A visionary funder of immigrant integration work, the JM Kaplan Fund sponsors the Migration Policy Institute's E Pluribus Unum awards for excellence in immigrant integration services and also funds Upwardly Global, CCCIE, and IMPRINT efforts in skilled immigrant workforce integration. *www.jmkfund.org*
- **Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council):** The New York City-based social services agency offers a free 200 hour course for foreign-trained nurses to prepare for the nurse licensure exam. *www.metcouncil.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Programs\_Career\_Services\_Nurses\_FAQ*

To recommend additional resources, please contact IMPRINT at [feedback@imprintproject.org](mailto:feedback@imprintproject.org). *Please note: Due to space limitations, we have only included U.S.-based organizations on this list although there are excellent programs in Canada and elsewhere pursuing this important work.*



- **Migration Policy Institute (M.P.I.):** A nonpartisan think tank based in Washington, D.C., M.P.I. offers tremendous data and community resources on national and international migration. Offerings of special interest for high-skilled workforce include the U.S. Immigrant Integration Network [www.immigrant-integration.ning.com](http://www.immigrant-integration.ning.com), the M.P.I. Data Hub [www.migrationinformation.org/datahub](http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub) and the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy [www.migrationinformation.org/integration](http://www.migrationinformation.org/integration). M.P.I. also awards the annual E Pluribus Unum awards for outstanding efforts in immigrant integration nationally. Two IMPRINT members, Upwardly Global and the Welcome Back Initiative, are E Pluribus Unum award recipients.
- **National Partnership for New Americans:** This consortium of 12 robust state-based immigrant advocacy groups was formed in 2010. It is now the official organizing body for the National Immigrant Integration Conference. [www.integrationconference.org/new-americans-partnership](http://www.integrationconference.org/new-americans-partnership)
- **RefugeeWorks:** The workforce technical assistance arm for the U.S. refugee resettlement community, RefugeeWorks has sponsored a Refugee Professional Recertification Conference, published a variety of career guides for immigrant professionals, and offers professional development for job developers nationwide from its base in the Baltimore, Maryland headquarters of Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services. [www.refugeeworks.org](http://www.refugeeworks.org)
- **Service Employees International Union (SEIU):** This healthcare worker union offers scholarships to assist foreign-trained nurses in the licensing process in the state of New York. Participants must be current SEIU members. [www.1199seiubenefits.org/funds-and-services/training-and-employment/training-for-employed-rns](http://www.1199seiubenefits.org/funds-and-services/training-and-employment/training-for-employed-rns)
- **State of Illinois Office of New Americans:** the Office of New Americans has served as the Illinois Governor's office liaison for the full breadth of immigrant inclusive policies in the state across two administrations. The Office has been a particular champion of skilled immigrants through special efforts to understand and reduce licensing barriers in partnership with Upwardly Global, including spearheading Licensed Professions Guides at [www.upwardlyglobal.org/job-seekers/american-licensed-professions](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org/job-seekers/american-licensed-professions) and providing ongoing support to Upwardly Global's work in the region. [www2.illinois.gov/immigrants/Pages/NewAmericans.aspx](http://www2.illinois.gov/immigrants/Pages/NewAmericans.aspx)
- **UCLA International Medical Graduate Program:** this program provides extensive assistance to Spanish-English bilingual foreign-educated physicians hoping to compete for family medicine residencies in the state of California, with the proviso that the physicians will work in underserved communities post-licensure [fm.mednet.ucla.edu/IMG/img\\_program.aspx](http://fm.mednet.ucla.edu/IMG/img_program.aspx)
- **Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment (WISE) and the African and American Friendship Association for Cooperation and Development (AAFACD):** St. Paul Minnesota-based WISE and AAFACD advocate for the role that foreign-trained physicians and other healthcare workers can play in the ever more diverse landscape of the Twin Cities and supports them in their processes of licensing and seeking alternative career pathways. [www.womenofwise.org](http://www.womenofwise.org) and [www.aafacd.org](http://www.aafacd.org)

