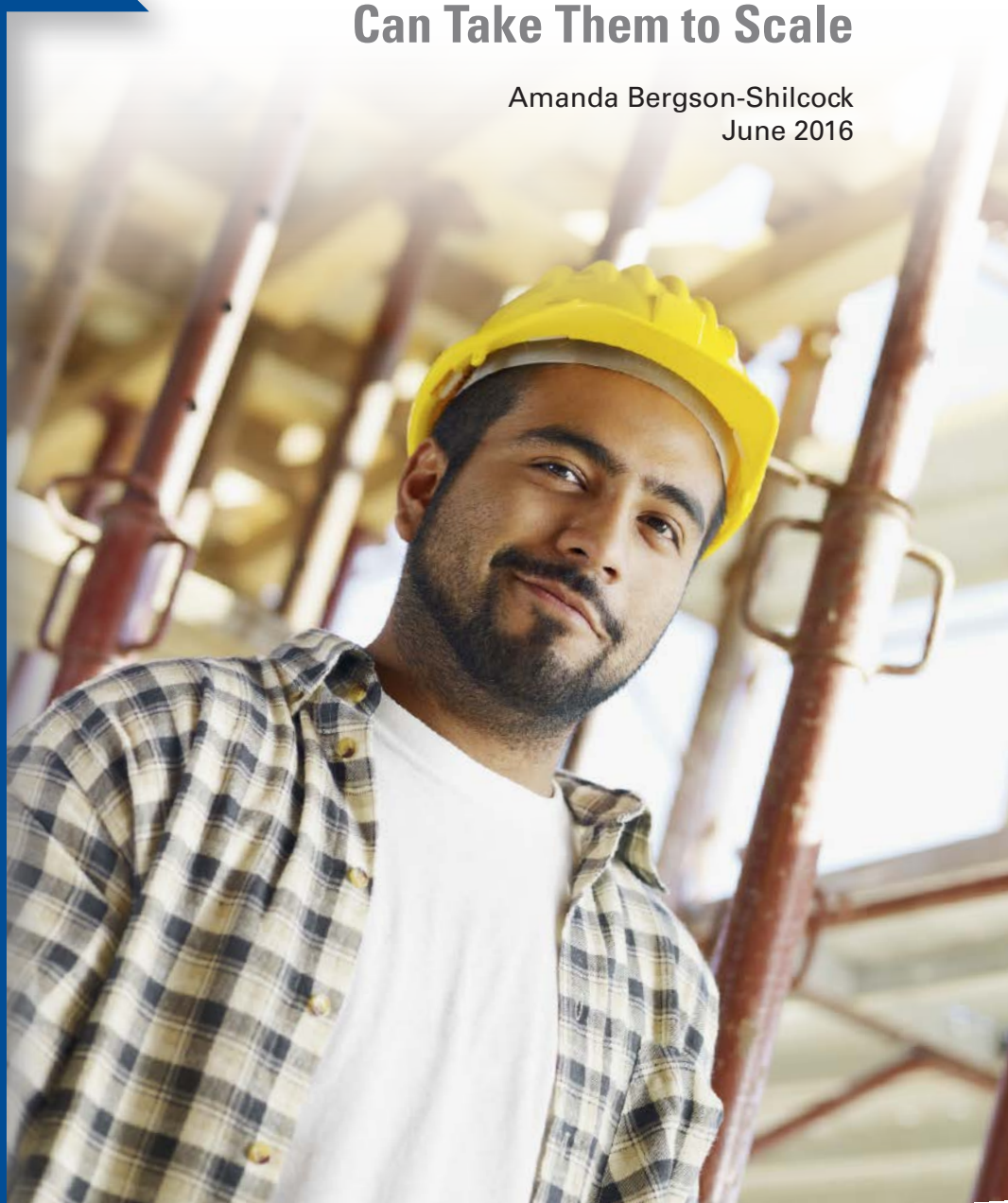
Upskilling the New American Workforce

Demand-Driven Programs that Foster Immigrant Worker Success & Policies that Can Take Them to Scale

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock
June 2016



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. **A strong economy.**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Ford Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of these foundations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 2

Why This Report? Policies to Scale Successful Practices 3

Programmatic Examples 4

- ***Example 1:*** *An Innovative Pipeline to Electronics Assembly Jobs in Seattle* 4
- ***Example 2:*** *Skill Building in a Community Setting: Suburban New York City* 6
- ***Example 3:*** *California Program Connects Day Laborers to Community College* 8
- ***Example 4:*** *Collaborating to Help New Americans Succeed in Community College: An Example from Minnesota* 10
- ***Example 5:*** *Blending Employer & Worker Investments to Foster Upskilling in California* 13
- ***Example 6:*** *New York's DACA Initiative Affirms the Importance of Adult Education* 15
- ***Example 7:*** *Ready to Work: Seattle Creates New On-Ramp for Immigrant English Learners* 17

Conclusions 21

Policy Implications 22

Endnotes 24

INTRODUCTION

Immigrants today represent more than 1 in every 6 workers in the United States – a full 17% of the American workforce. As American businesses increasingly seek workers with postsecondary credentials, immigrant workers are playing a significant and growing role in filling those talent needs.

This issue is particularly pronounced in the area of middle-skill jobs – those that require more than a high school diploma, but not a four-year degree. A full 54% of jobs in the U.S. are middle-skill occupations, while only 44% of workers are trained to the middle-skill level.[1]

While many immigrants have successfully pursued postsecondary education and obtained middle-skill employment, others have not yet done so. Nationwide, among immigrants age 25 and older, approximately 30% have less than a high school diploma, and another 23% have a high school diploma or equivalent.[2] In addition, among adults ages 18-64, 19 million people have limited English proficiency.[3] This comprises a full 10% of the *overall* U.S. working age population.

Creating opportunities for immigrants to build their skills and meet the demand for middle-skill workers is a process that can be undertaken by a variety of actors, including workforce development agencies, adult education providers, postsecondary institutions, and immigrant advocacy organizations. Yet historically, each of these systems has sometimes struggled to serve the full range of immigrant workers who could benefit from skill-building opportunities.

In particular, immigrant-serving organizations have often been focused on providing legal and social services. Many also provide English language classes or youth programs, but these are typically not employment focused and relatively few of these nonprofits have developed job training or other workforce programs. Those that do exist are often funded by a haphazard patchwork of private and local sources, rather than traditional state and federal workforce development funding streams.

At the same time, the broader adult education and workforce system has been called upon to serve a wide range of adult learners, jobseekers, and workers. Faced with the responsibility of addressing the varying needs of veterans, people with disabilities, youth aging out of foster care, and a host of other populations with barriers to employment, the system has sometimes struggled to focus attention and effort on immigrants and individuals with limited English proficiency.

There is no federal funding stream dedicated to immigrant worker upskilling or immigrant integration.[4] As a result, immigrant workers are served unevenly across a range of federal adult education and workforce development programs that are often not designed with their assets and needs in mind. In addition, many federal skill-building programs do not even require the collection of nativity data, making it impossible to determine how many immigrants are actually being served.

For example, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) represents a significant federal investment in adult education and workforce services. WIOA does not collect data on nativity, but the program does have data on participants who have limited English proficiency. Here the data is stark: Less than 2% of participants who receive WIOA Title I intensive or training services have limited English proficiency, while 10% of working age U.S. adults have limited English.[5]

Title II of WIOA is by far the largest federal investment in adult education, including adult basic education, adult secondary education (high school equivalency), and English language acquisition. Title II provides more than $500 million in federal funds each year, serving more than 1.5 million participants. While data on the number of immigrant participants is unavailable, approximately 1 in 3 participants (36%) has education from outside the United States, and approximately 45% of participants are enrolled in English language classes.

WHY THIS REPORT? POLICIES TO SCALE SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES

This publication's purpose is twofold: First, to shine a spotlight on parts of the immigrant integration and adult education/workforce development systems that are working well. The robust and creative efforts described below *are* helping immigrant workers to build skills, acquire recognized postsecondary credentials, move into in-demand occupations and make meaningful wage gains. Second, to provide advocates with information about key federal and state policies that can be used to sustain these programs, replicate them, and take them to scale. This broad-based investment is crucial in closing the middle-skill gap and ensuring that immigrants can fully contribute to the economy.

The seven programs highlighted offer fresh angles on the immigrant skill-building conversation, and intriguing opportunities for expansion. Some of the initiatives profiled here are nascent, while others have been in existence for a decade or more. Some were seeded by private philanthropy, while others capitalize on state-specific policies or federal funds to support their work. More often, these efforts are supported by a range of disparate funding sources braided together.

This report is not comprehensive. There are many isolated pockets of excellence and innovation across the United States, and this brief publication cannot cover all of them. Nor is this report intended to endorse one particular skill-building strategy at the expense of another. Certainly there are evidence-informed practices, and emphasis has been placed on those that have proven to be most effective. But, in this pool of effective approaches, some will be more relevant in a given context than others.

Although several of the initiatives profiled here are located in or near the large coastal cities that have traditionally served as immigrant gateways, others represent suburban, Midwestern, and other types of American communities that are increasingly home to immigrant newcomers.

Hopefully, spotlighting these examples will help to spur wider adoption of policies that will allow immigrants to participate in closing the middle-skill gap and foster their economic success in communities across the United States.

PROGRAMMATIC EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1: An Innovative Pipeline to Electronics Assembly Jobs in Seattle

Strong industry engagement is a well documented best practice for job training programs. This example highlights a program that works closely with Seattle's high-tech manufacturing companies to ensure that its curriculum prepares participants to meet employer needs. Notably, one of the funding sources for the program is the federal SNAP Employment and Training program (formerly known as food stamps). Washington State has been the national leader in developing innovative training programs that capitalize on the availability of federal SNAP E&T matching funds to help food-stamp recipients move into family-sustaining employment.

As implementation of WIOA moves forward, many localities are seeking to identify program models that respond to employer demand while effectively serving jobseekers who have barriers to employment. One Seattle program has a nearly two-decade track record of success in doing just that.

The nonprofit Refugee Federation Service Center provides immigrant and refugee jobseekers with training in electronics assembly. The three month, 150-hour course provides jobseekers with customized, employer-informed training in the skills they need to find employment in Seattle's robust manufacturing industry.

Graduates of the program go on to work for employers such as Boeing and CarlisleIT, earning $12 to $15 per hour – an impressive outcome given that many arrive at the Refugee Federation with limited English proficiency and little or no American job experience. Staff member Mengstab Tzegai explains: "We do an intake to assess their level of education, their English level, their mathematics ability. Based on the intake, we know whether our program can serve them."

Focus on Jobseekers with Barriers

The demographics of electronics assembly training participants vary, but most are newly arrived refugees or asylees (that is, immigrants who have been granted asylum in the U.S.) with low incomes, limited English proficiency, few transferrable skills, and little American work experience. A minority of participants have high levels of education from abroad (such as former engineers), but most have much more limited formal education. In addition to the variety of educational backgrounds represented among participants, the program serves a diverse mixture of men and women from countries throughout Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and East Africa.

Classes meet for three hours a day, four days a week. Each quarter, the Refugee Federation serves two cohorts of approximately 40 students each, with one class meeting in the morning, and the other in the afternoon.

Participants in both cohorts have the option of also participating in an hour-long lunchtime English class. This Vocational English for Speakers of Other Language (VESL) class focuses on industry specific vocabulary as well as the communications skills that participants will need to successfully obtain and maintain employment in the field.

"We created this program because we want to promote long-term self-sufficiency and self-reliance for refugees and immigrants, not place them in dead-end positions," explains Tzegai.

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 1

WHAT IT IS: 150-hour training course in electronics assembly.

ENABLING POLICIES: SNAP E&T; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Refugee community-based organization; major companies in aeronautics industry.

FUNDING SOURCES: SNAP E&T, TANF, state refugee funds, private philanthropy, participant fees

LEARN MORE: www.rfsc.org

Employer-Driven Training

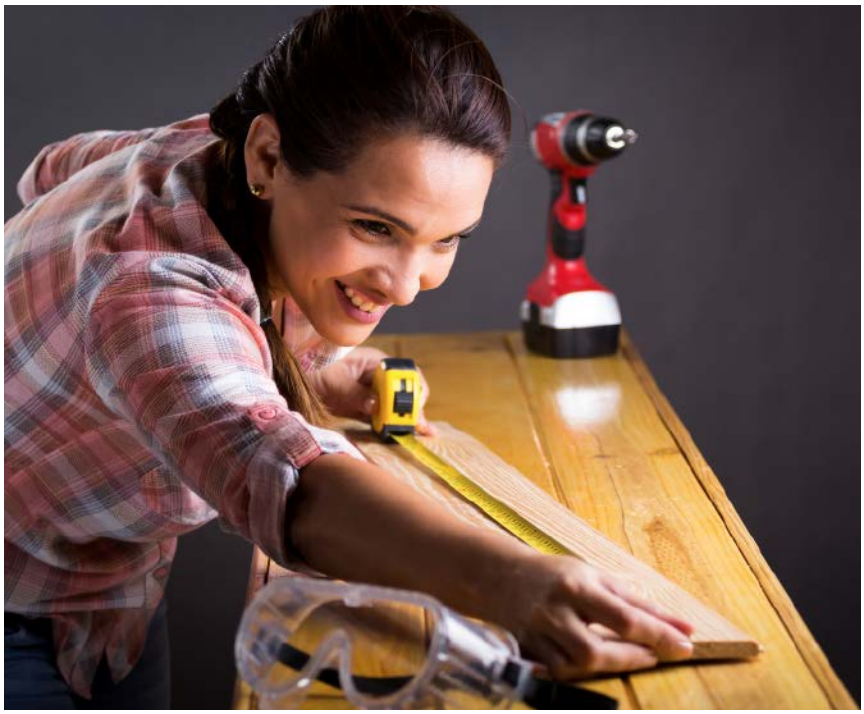
Employers have been involved in the program since its inception, says Tzegai, helping to inform the curriculum and providing feedback and guidance on program design.

The feedback helps ensure that classes are providing the exact skills that participants will need on the job. "We are teaching people how to assemble motherboards...how to solder the components that are put on the motherboards," says Tzegai, emphasizing the practical nature of the coursework.

The program is careful to hire instructors with content area expertise. "One of our teachers is an engineer who graduated from the University of Washington, who is also a former refugee himself," explains Tzegai. "Our lab teacher is a woman who has been working with companies in this industry for a long time. And our blueprint teacher worked in assembly for many years."

An Intentional Path Toward Employment

Each element of the program is designed to lead toward employment, says Tzegai. In addition to the content area instruction and lunchtime ESL classes, the program provides extensive coaching in job search skills.



"Before they graduate [from the program] we prepare their resume, teach them how to dress for an interview, what to expect in the job interview," says Tzegai. "We talk about how they are supposed to work with an employer. And after their training, we send their resumes to the companies, and we schedule their interviews."

The intensive effort works. Tzegai says more than 90% of program graduates find employment within three months. Some start as temporary employees through Kelly Services, a well-known temp agency, making $12 or $13 per hour. Others move directly into permanent employment with major companies, earning $14 or $15 per hour.

Paying For It All: Braided Funding

Funding for the program is provided from a variety of sources, including private foundation support, state refugee funds, TANF funds, and the Washington State Basic Food and Employment Training program. (The latter program is Washington's iteration of the federal SNAP E&T program. Learn more about SNAP E&T funding.) In addition, some participants self pay the class's $450 materials fee.

Beyond the mechanisms of program funding, Tzegai says, is the question of commitment. "You have to have the willingness to do programs like this. The Refugee Federation was created by small mutual aid associations. All of the executive directors of these agencies are refugees themselves. They care...you have to take it upon yourself to make it work."

Tzegai's message is likely to resonate as states move forward with implementation of WIOA, which encourages greater adoption of demand-driven job training program models. Meanwhile, the Refugee Federation is gearing up for the next round of electronics assembly training – now nearing its 20th year of operation.

EXAMPLE 2: Skill Building in a Community Setting: Suburban New York City

Day laborer centers, also known as worker centers, represent a potentially powerful engine for supporting immigrant skill building. The next two examples explore pilot programs that brought together worker centers and local community colleges to develop programs for immigrant workers. A shared finding across these initiatives is the importance of deep knowledge about worker needs and employment pathways. In particular, programs must be designed to accommodate the erratic schedules and family responsibilities of their participants, while also ensuring that local employment opportunities for the relevant occupation actually exist.

A new effort is exploring skill-building opportunities for immigrant workers who are seeking stable employment in Northern Westchester County, NY. The project is a collaboration between Westchester Community College and the nonprofit Neighbors Link Northern Westchester, both located in the suburban New York City area.

It is one of more than a half-dozen similar projects supported by the Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers (BCPIW) initiative of the National Council for Workforce Education. The initiative is funded by the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Each of the BCPIW projects is receiving technical assistance from NCWE, and teams from each project have made a visit to a model program at Casa de Maryland or Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago. In addition, project partners have participated in peer-learning opportunities with each other.

Identifying the Need: Home Health

The New York project team began by examining labor market trends and identifying a growing need for home health workers. Job openings in that occupation in Westchester County are expected to increase by 29% by 2022. Other data gathering documented an aging population, particularly an increase in those age 80 and older, and an expanding local pool of immigrant workers.

Many of those workers pass through the doors of Neighbors Link, which serves more than 2,700 immigrant and low-income families every year. Among the organization's services are a worker center that includes a hiring site and a job bank. "Employers are used to calling here to look for workers in areas like landscaping or construction," explains Carola Otero Bracco, executive director of Neighbors Link. "And some of our clients are very entrepreneurial; they were already doing informal private duty [home care]."

Designing the Program

Initially, project partners anticipated creating a Home Health Aide (HHA) training program. Such programs follow an established process in New York State, which licenses HHAs and which requires that training classes be taught by a registered nurse with home health experience.

It quickly became apparent that a more tailored approach would be needed. "We had to back up and realize that our clients had some foundational skills needs," says Otero Bracco. "Many Neighbors Link clients have limited formal education, perhaps at the 3rd or 4th grade level. When we looked at the textbook that was being used by [other] Home Health Aide training programs, we realized that you really had to have a [higher] level of English in order to participate."

The partners went back to the drawing board. "We ultimately developed a new Home Companion Certificate that provides 20 hours of training, preparing participants to go into the homes of

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 2

WHAT IT IS: 20-hour training course in home companion care.

ENABLING POLICY: Not yet brought to scale; could be facilitated by state policies supporting inclusive career pathways for all workers regardless of documentation status.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Neighborhood-based immigrant worker center; community college

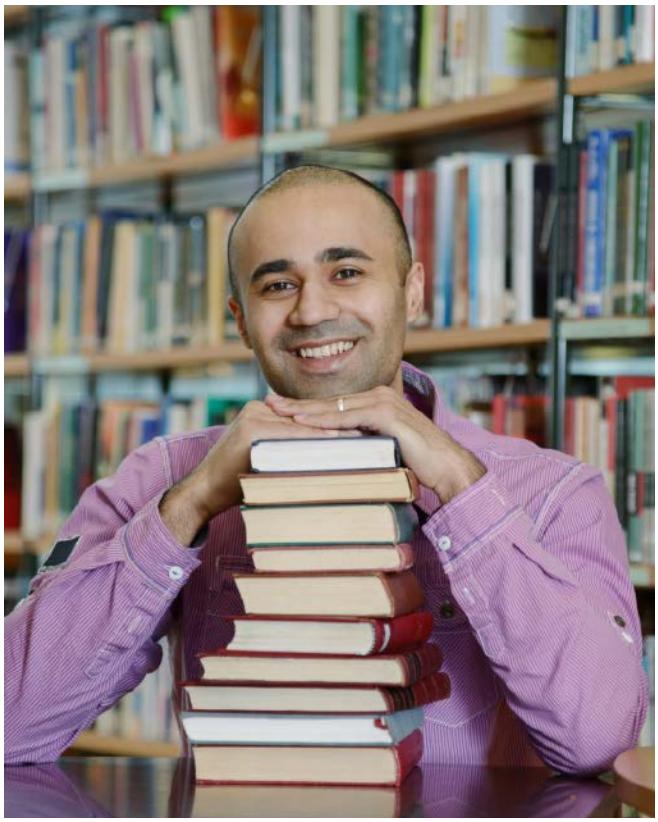
FUNDING SOURCE: Private philanthropy

LEARN MORE: www.neighborslink.org

people who have disabilities or are elderly," explains Kathy Graf, ESL coordinator at Westchester Community College. "The English as a Second Language [ESL] component is interwoven within this program."

The certificate provides an initial step on the career ladder for immigrant workers, Graf adds. "After they complete the Home Companion training [at Neighbors Link], we hope that will be the foundation that allows them to enter the [existing] Personal Care Assistant 40-hour training program" currently offered at the college. The next step for PCA graduates is to take an additional 35-hour course to become Home Health Aides.

"It's about meeting our clients where they are," says Otero Bracco. "We want them to be successful. Kathy and Robert [Nechols] have worked very hard to develop the contextualized ESL component of the Home Companion Certificate, and the program is being taught by an ESL instructor along with a volunteer who has a background in home health." (Nechols serves as director of the English Language Institute at Westchester Community College.)



What Training Includes

The home companion certificate training consists of eight 2.5-hour classes. "Each class period is really three hours, because we added 30 minutes for dinner for the participants," explains Luisa Granda, director of adult education and operations at Neighbors Link. "We have learned through our own experience, as well as our site visit to Instituto in Chicago, that providing dinner and childcare is really vital in making sure that people can participate in training."

The program is also providing other wraparound services to help students persist. Most notable is the learning facilitator, Ramiro Rincon, who serves as a combination counselor, adviser, and troubleshooter. "Commitment [to the training program] is important," says Granda. "We know that retention can be an issue…life gets in the way. We're trying to work with participants to make sure they can stick with the class."

Applying a National Model in a Local Context

"We learned when we visited Instituto that each partner should do what they do well. Let the community-based organization do what it does well, and let the community college do what *it* does well," says Granda. "So Neighbors Link will engage with employers because that's one of the things we do well…. We're developing marketing materials right now."

Eventually – like Instituto – Neighbors Link hopes to expand eligibility for the program to U.S.-born participants. "Our mission is about integrating the whole community – not only the immigrant community, but also longer-term residents," says Otero Bracco. "We take very seriously the concept of integration in the whole community."

Eligibility Requirements

Participants must have an intermediate level of English. A modest enrollment fee of $50 is charged to ensure participants' investment in the class. Because home companions are not state licensed and training participants are not directly placed with employers, the program is open to all immigrants. Learn more about the program.

EXAMPLE 3: California Program Connects Day Laborers to Community College

A new program is experimenting with ways to help immigrant day laborers build additional skills through community college courses. Launched in early 2015, the pilot effort is a joint project of Pasadena City College, the Pasadena Community Job Center, and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON).

To date, approximately 75 individuals have participated in classes, which are held onsite at the Pasadena Community Job Center, a worker organization. Individuals who complete 120 hours of course work earn a California State certificate in VESL, focusing on a topic such as green housekeeping or green construction.

The program is designed to provide an effective on-ramp to community college for workers who may have limited formal education, and little if any experience in a U.S. classroom environment. The program is structured as one building block in a longer career pathway that can enable workers to progress over time. Classes are taught by community college instructors, and attendance (often an issue, given the realities of day labor) is tracked rigorously.

"A lot of workers are focused on the short term 'Am I going to work today?' question," explains NDLON staff member Xochi Flores. "Shifting to a longer term perspective [by investing in their own training and education] is a process. Our staff is having a lot of one-on-one conversations with workers."

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 3

WHAT IT IS: 120-hour VESL certificate in green housekeeping or green construction

ENABLING POLICY: California's state law AB 86 (adult education block grant)

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Immigrant worker (day laborer) center; community college

FUNDING SOURCES: Private philanthropy; AB-86

LEARN MORE: www.pasadenajobcenter.com

Partner organizations worked extensively to ensure that the program would be accessible rather than intimidating. "We wanted to make sure classes were pertinent and relevant to the workers' lives," says Flores, "and that they would contribute to workers attaining more gainful employment."

While many participants are day laborers who work out of the Pasadena Center, others are neighborhood residents who learned about the classes and wanted to join. Demographically, participants are primarily Latino or Asian immigrants. Class enrollment is evenly divided between men and women.

GALVANIZING PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT VIA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Both programs highlighted in this section were part of the foundation-funded Building Community Partnerships to Support Immigrant Workers (BCPIW) initiative. BCPIW was housed at the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE), which provided each of the initiative's eight pilot sites with ongoing technical assistance. NCWE staff used monthly conference calls and occasional in-person gatherings to foster connections among the pilot sites and provide them with targeted guidance.

An important component of NCWE's work was connecting the community-based providers in each of the pilot sites to more experienced peers. These peer organizations, Instituto del Progreso Latino and Casa de Maryland, each have a substantive track record in building and sustaining immigrant skill-building programs. The frank advice provided by these partners helped the pilot sites to navigate and establish their own partnerships with community colleges.

The program was created under the auspices of California's AB 86 law, known as the Adult Education Block Grant, which among other goals encourages community colleges to partner with local organizations.

Pasadena's program is supported by competitive funding from the Ford Foundation's Building Community Partnerships to Support Immigrant Workers (BCPIW) initiative. The initiative is overseen by the National Council for Workforce Education. Pasadena is one of eight pilot sites funded by BCPIW nationwide.

As befitting a pilot initiative, the program is still very much in an experimental stage. "We plan to keep up the green construction VESL class because we eventually want to implement a pre-apprenticeship program," says Flores. "We also experimented with having a driver's license VESL class over the summer, and that went well." In addition, she says, the center offers a popular English conversation class, which provides a more informal way for workers to build their language skills.

And while the program was conceived and implemented by the community college and nonprofit partners, Flores is frank about its true constituency. "It's really important to engage workers in every step of the process, to ensure that they are in charge of their own education plan. We are there to facilitate and support with resources. They are the stakeholders."

Learn more about the Pasadena program in the original project proposal description.

EXAMPLE 4: Collaborating to Help New Americans Succeed in Community College: An Example from Minnesota

What do a small nonprofit agency and an 11,000-student community college have in common? A shared interest in promoting student success. This profile explores a hands-on effort to ensure that immigrant students don't get stalled in developmental education classes or unnecessarily blocked by entrance examinations. Intriguingly, program partners have found that their interventions can also work for U.S.-born students.

What happens when a nonprofit organization learns that its immigrant graduates are struggling to pass required courses in their program of study at the local community college? For one Minnesota organization, the answer included: Work with the college to design and implement robust transitional supports.

This profile looks at an innovative partnership between the International Institute of Minnesota and Saint Paul College.

About the Partner Organizations

Founded nearly 100 years ago, the nonprofit International Institute of Minnesota (IIM) serves approximately 3,000 immigrants and refugees each year via refugee resettlement, education and workforce training, and other services. For the past twenty years, those offerings have included a Medical Careers Pathway program to prepare immigrants for entry-level healthcare positions.

The nearby Saint Paul College (SPC) is a two-year community and technical college. Since its inception in 1910, SPC has served urban residents, underrepresented students and immigrants new to the city. Today, students of color comprise 61% of SPC's overall enrollment, and an estimated 40% of all students are new Americans.

The Challenge

Immigrants who graduate from the Certified Nurse Assistant programs at IIM or Saint Paul College are often interested in continuing their education in the college's Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program. Achieving the LPN credential will allow them to advance their careers and increase their earning power.

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 4

WHAT IT IS: TEAS test preparation class; bridge and support classes to help immigrant students succeed in community college science courses

ENABLING POLICY: Minnesota FastTRAC

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Immigrant and refugee nonprofit organization; community college

FUNDING SOURCES: Various, including Minnesota FastTRAC; primarily private philanthropy for the two interventions that are the focus of this profile

LEARN MORE: www.iimn.org

Despite this keen interest from participants, the partner organizations found that many prospective LPN students were struggling to succeed in prerequisite classes and/or were unprepared for the required Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) entrance examination. Discouraged, some left the college before even beginning their LPN studies.

The Intervention

To better prepare participants for the transition from IIM's Medical Careers Pathway program to the credit-bearing healthcare programs at SPC, the partners identified two interventions they wanted to pursue:

- Provide an effective TEAS test preparation course.
- Implement bridge and support classes for the LPN prerequisite courses at Saint Paul College, with a particular emphasis on classes that have been a barrier to immigrant students' success: biology and psychology.

Bridge classes are defined as a 3-4 week pre class provided to participants before they start a college-level class.

Support classes are held in conjunction with regular subject area classes in topics such as biology or psychology. They are hour-long classes held just after the subject area class, during which participants can go over the material that was covered that day in the earlier class.

The Results

The first TEAS prep class was offered in Fall 2015. Twenty-eight students, three quarters of whom were immigrants, participated. The class met 13 times during the semester, for three hours per session.

Comparison of students' TEAS test scores pre and post class showed a marked improvement following their participation in the prep class. Results were particularly strong in science, where the overall average score rose from 35% to 63%. Two thirds of students who submitted their TEAS exam scores to the IIM team were admitted to the licensed practical nursing program.

The bridge and support classes have been even more successful, with students enthusiastically asking if similar resources are available for other subject area classes. The success doesn't come as a surprise to IIM Executive Director Jane Graupman: It's consistent with IIM's previous organizational learning. "[Years ago] we found that our students were struggling with the human body systems class – it's a gateway to any medical job you want. Our students were either failing it or getting a C," she explains. "We got [state] funding from Minnesota's FastTRAC to do a bridge class to human body systems, and then to do a support class afterward. Every single student who went to the bridge and support class got an A or a B in the [regular] class."

Intriguingly, it is not just immigrant students who see the value in bridge and support classes. "We also have American-born students who participate," says Graupman. "They tell us they could not have passed without them."

The Learning: Key Determinants of Success

Several factors have been particularly relevant to the success of the partners' efforts. They include:

- Prioritizing the navigator role. "IIM has always had a navigator" as part of its programs, says Graupman. Helping participants to navigate educational options, find support for life issues, and obtain employment have all been key navigator responsibilities. In IIM's partnership with Saint Paul College, helping students to figure out course sequencing and financial aid has been crucial to fostering their success. "We know that when people get in to hard classes, they have to scale back on their working hours so they can concentrate on their studies," explains Graupman. "So it's especially important that navigators can help them access scholarships to support them as they study."
- Leadership buy-in. The President of Saint Paul College is himself an immigrant, and a strong supporter of the College's partnership with IIM, says Graupman. "He totally gets it, he knows what we do and why it's important. But it's not just upper management," she clarifies. "I got to do a keynote address to the whole college. That was vital." Embarking on this type of partnership with a nonprofit community-based organization was a significant step for the college, she says, and it was important that staffers at all levels understood the impetus. "We're both serving New Americans, but our organizations have distinct areas of expertise and experience," she explains.
- Institutional expertise. Here, Graupman's own history at IIM played a role. As a young staff member, she pioneered the agency's first contextualized healthcare education program more than two decades ago. By the time the partnership with Saint Paul College came to be, IIM had a long history of successfully iterating effective program models. "In the nonprofit world, we love pedagogy," says Graupman. "We're always tinkering with it – are my students getting it? Do I need to change things?"
- Enlightened self-interest. Getting partners to the table isn't just about having a common sense of mission, collective organizational priorities, or even shared students. Potential partners often need to see how collaboration can help them meet requirements or mandates they already face. In this case, student retention was a compelling factor for the college, says Graupman. "They were already focused on how to help students persist and graduate successfully, and we were able to make the case for how our partnership could help improve retention rates."

The Next Steps

The partners are already exploring ways to deepen and extend their collaboration, including via:

Adding additional classes: IIM staff are now talking to Saint Paul College staff about developing bridge and support classes for other subject areas where immigrant students may face challenges, including dosing and English composition.

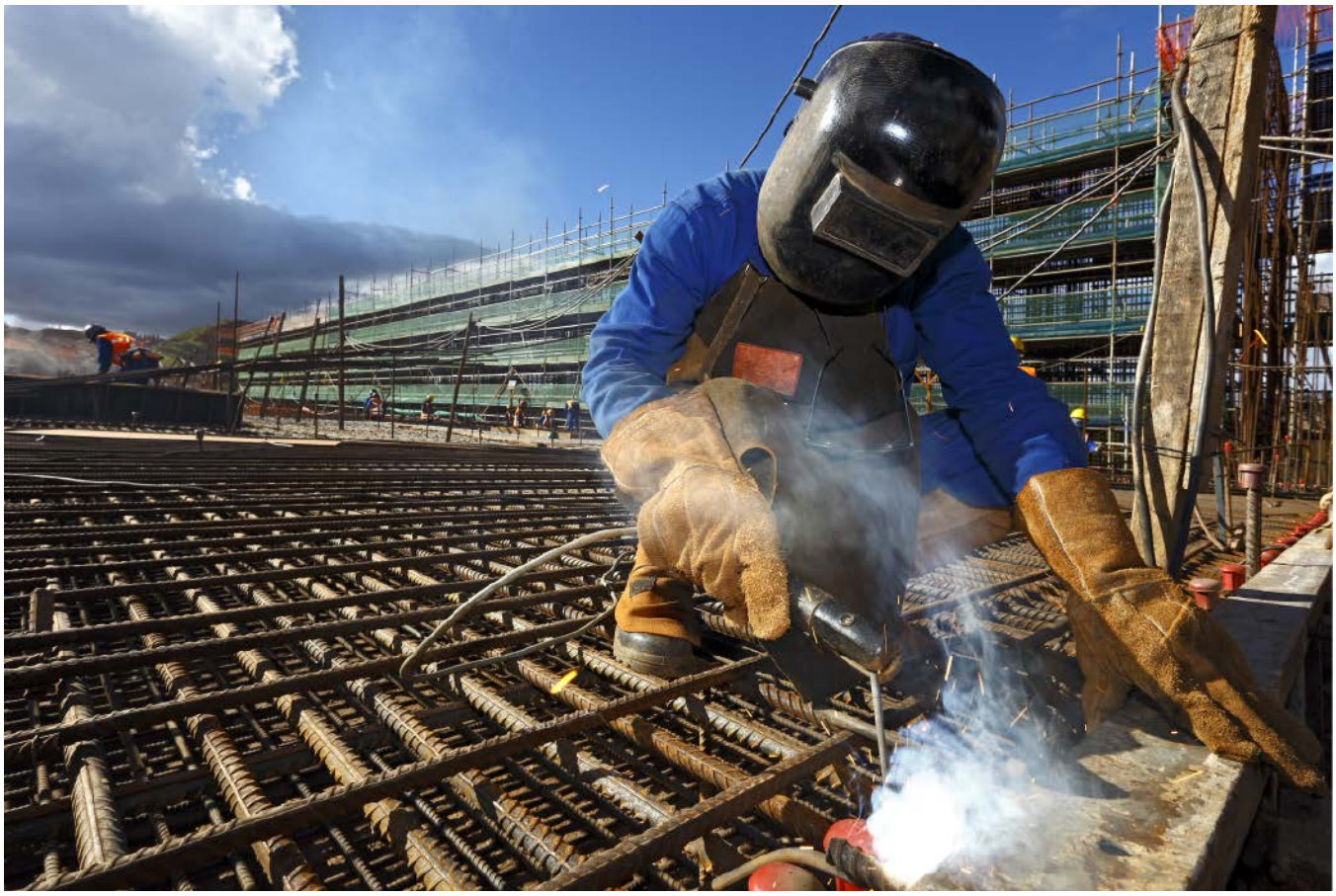
Strengthening departmental connections: The IIM team is also working to build on Graupman's earlier keynote address to ensure that each of SPC's relevant departments are familiar with the partnership. "Just this week, we sat down with the nursing department to explain what we're doing with the college," says Graupman. "It can be hard in a big institution, because sometimes the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing." While such focused outreach can be time consuming, the payoff is significant as additional college staff members become familiar with and enthusiastic about the partnership.

Building new connections: In 2015, Graupman was invited to join the board of the Friends of Saint Paul College Foundation. Her new role further solidifies the connections between SPC and IIM.

Enabling data sharing: "We're talking about how to have a data-sharing agreement that protects students' privacy," says Graupman. "We want to be able to follow our students and see how they do over the long term," after they graduate from IIM's services. "The data piece is important," she adds, "I would recommend that anybody who is contemplating a project like this think through what data they're going to want to have access to, and get the agreements in place."

Read more about the IIM-SPC partnership.

The IIM-SPC collaboration was supported in part via the Building Community Partnerships to Serve Immigrant Workers *(BCPIW) initiative, convened by the National Council for Workforce Education and funded by the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*



EXAMPLE 5: Blending Employer & Worker Investments to Foster Upskilling in California

This profile delves into the world of labor-management partnerships. This longstanding model is typically funded through collective bargaining agreements agreed upon by companies and their union workforce. Equipped with this ongoing funding stream, labor-management partnerships are then free to develop targeted training for incumbent workers – and sometimes for their families and broader community members. While this example focuses on janitorial workers and ESL, other labor-management partnerships have tackled industries such as healthcare and training ranging from reading and math to technical skills to occupational safety.

Picture an immigrant woman working as a janitor. Given her busy schedule of work and family responsibilities, she's not able to attend English classes, so she has been assigned to a night shift, where her lack of fluency isn't an issue.

Now imagine that the worker belongs to a union – and that her union contract allows for small deductions from her wages to be combined with employer contributions to fund English language classes that she can attend on the job.

That's a labor-management partnership, or LMP. In this case, it's Building Skills Partnership, which trains roughly 5,000 workers a year. Building Skills Partnership works with more than 100 employers and has a half dozen locations across California, including Los Angeles, Mountain View, Oakland, Orange County, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Jose.

There are dozens of LMPs across the United States. Many are decades old, and they range in size from the modest to the gigantic. Typically, LMPs are established as an outgrowth of collective bargaining agreements. Agreements generally stipulate that employers will make ongoing contributions (based on a percentage of their payroll) to support worker training, and that workers will accept an incrementally lower wage in exchange for the ability to access that training.

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 5

WHAT IT IS: Vocational ESL and job skills program

ENABLING POLICY: Taft-Hartley Act

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Business; labor union; training fund

FUNDING SOURCES: Employer/employee contributions per collective bargaining agreement; private philanthropy; public contracts

LEARN MORE: www.buildingskills.org

A Menu of Training Options

BSP offers workers a wealth of different types of training opportunities, including computer literacy, VESL, financial literacy, health and wellness, and civic engagement and citizenship.

BSP's pioneering Green Janitor Education Program provides hands-on training in energy management and green cleaning. Janitors certified through this program become equipped to help their buildings to meet LEED sustainability standards for ongoing operations and maintenance.

But perhaps BSP's hallmark is the ADVANCE program, which blends VESL with job skills in a curriculum that ranges from 50-100 hours depending on the level of intensity required.

Key Elements of Program Design

Building Skills Partnership tailors its training programs to fill gaps in each local area's array of existing adult education and training options, explains development manager Luis Sandoval. "We serve a real niche for this particular workforce [of janitors and other building service workers]. They're not able to access traditional educational institutions because often they're working late at night and throughout the night."

Between 40 to 50% of BSP's training programs are provided onsite at the employer, says Sandoval. "The gold standard is if the employer provides paid release time" to encourage employees to participate in classes, he says. "Ideally, it's an hour of paid time at the beginning of their shift."

BSP has found that classes have better attendance and participation, and employers themselves are more invested, if paid release time is provided. In cases where employers do not provide paid time off, classes are typically held during workers' meal breaks or before the beginning of their shift to maximize participation.

In order for this model to succeed, BSP has to find educators who are willing to teach at unusual hours, including as late as 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening. Often, they do so by recruiting seasoned educators who have expertise in serving working adults. "We have the same qualifications standard for our instructors as the community colleges do," explains Sandoval. "Many of our instructors are themselves former community college or adult school instructors."

Meeting Participants' Needs

Paying close attention to workers' specific skill-building and other needs is crucial in designing successful programs, says Sandoval. "After starting with ESL classes [years ago], we've continued to add more services. Our goal is to be holistic in serving our members and their families."

That extends to BSP's eligibility requirements, which differ depending on which funding stream supports the training program. Training that is funded via employer contributions is open to members of Service Employees International Union – United Service Workers West (SEIU–USWW) including incumbent workers as well as individuals not currently working.

Approximately 70% of the union's members are women, and the overwhelming majority are immigrants.

Because BSP itself is a nonprofit organization, it is also able to draw on public and philanthropic resources to provide additional training and services to these workers and their families.

Providing Opportunities for Employers

Training programs aren't just about the workers who participate in them. Employers can also gain – and not just because of a better-educated workforce. "It's important to highlight the value that employers see within these programs," says Sandoval. "Employers realize there's inherent value in providing training at the workplace and outside the workplace, but they don't necessarily know how to go about it."

Having a labor-management partnership such as BSP provides a natural on-ramp for employers who want to invest in workers' skills. Programs can also create opportunities to foster connections between janitorial workers and others in the company. At some locations, BSP matches training participants with employees from elsewhere in the company, who provide supplementary individual tutoring in English or computer skills.

"We still have professional teachers in the classroom," explains Sandoval, "but the one-on-one tutoring gives workers a chance to interact with people who have other positions in the corporation, and vice versa. It's a two way process of building cultural awareness and making connections."

Some BSP employer partners have gone even farther, by supporting BSP's scholarship fund to help workers and their children pursue college education.

Gauging Impact

BSP uses widely respected standardized assessments, such as the CASAS exam, to measure workers' growing English proficiency. Administering both pre- and post-tests allows the program to assess training participants' skill acquisition over time.

Other outcomes are more tangible. "At some sites, employers have agreed to provide a wage increase for janitors who go through the program," explains Sandoval. "Other times, employers have agreed to provide help in paying for citizenship applications [for immigrant employees]."

Because most workers have a union contract, their promotions are not directly tied to training. Nevertheless, Sandoval says, BSP training can have a substantial impact on participants' income and quality of life. "If you think about an immigrant janitor," he says, "if her English improves, she can be promoted from the night shift to day work. That can have a huge impact: Maybe a $2 or $3-per-hour wage increase, plus the ability to be at home in the evenings to help her children with homework and just enjoy family time."

EXAMPLE 6: *New York's DACA Initiative Affirms the Importance of Adult Education*

The launch of the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program for undocumented immigrant Dreamers in 2012 spurred a host of initiatives designed to help young immigrants apply for DACA status. While many of these initiatives focused primarily on legal services, New York City took a different approach, working to provide on-ramps to adult education for potential DACA applicants who could not otherwise meet the program's educational requirements.

Results from a two year, $18 million New York City Council initiative to serve young undocumented immigrants have wide ranging implications for similar efforts in the future.

Announced in the summer of 2013, the initiative was unprecedented in scope and ambition. It sought to reach undocumented immigrants who were potentially eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA)* and provide them with access to adult education services and reputable legal assistance. In the process, it funded a dramatic expansion of adult education class slots in New York City, creating approximately 6,000 new seats.

Findings from the initiative emphasize that adult education providers were crucial partners. Not only did adult education programs provide a safe space for potential DACA applicants to self-identify as eligible, they also helped to spark participants' interest and ability to pursue their broader educational and vocational aspirations, beyond attaining high school equivalency.

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 6

WHAT IT IS: Adult education, legal services, and outreach initiative

ENABLING POLICY: New York City Council appropriations; DACA program

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Adult education providers; nonprofit legal services providers; community-based organizations

FUNDING SOURCE: Municipal appropriations

LEARN MORE: www.thenyic.org

"From the outside, it's easy to think of DACA simply as a legal services puzzle," says Betsy Plum of the New York Immigration Coalition, one of the initiative partners. "The assumption is that if you just connect individuals to a reputable legal services provider and help them get a work permit [via DACA], their problems are solved. But what we found is that is not true – especially for the population we were trying to reach."

That population, she says, was relatively older, more likely to have been out of school for some years, and to have acquired family and work responsibilities that made it harder for them to pursue education.

Using Data to Target Services

The New York initiative initially identified its target population by analyzing data on the city's pool of potentially DACA-eligible individuals. The analysis estimated that there were 16,000 individuals who would be eligible for DACA if they met the program's educational requirements. The results convinced initiative partners to go beyond traditional avenues of outreach and place special emphasis on reaching potential candidates who had never attended U.S. schools, or who had dropped out.

(Nationally, analysis by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute shows that younger people are far more likely to have applied for DACA. Among the population of DACA-eligible individuals, an estimated 48% of those ages 15-19 have applied, compared to just 19% of those age 25 and older. Other research has suggested that the youngest DACA recipients have an easier path to obtaining status, often because they learn about the program while they are still high school students. In contrast, locating and communicating with older DACA-eligible individuals – who may have been away from the classroom for years – has proven a tougher challenge.)

Who Was Served

New York's initiative targeted individuals who were:

- Undocumented immigrants aged 15 to 30 years as of June 15, 2012
- Currently eligible for DACA *or* potentially eligible for DACA if they achieved school enrollment**

As noted above, the initiative placed a specific emphasis on reaching people who had dropped out of high school or who had never attended U.S. schools.

Understanding the Program Components

The initiative used a three-pronged approach: outreach, adult education, and legal services.

- **Outreach** was carried out through community-based organizations that were distinct from traditional service providers such as cultural organizations, financial literacy and empowerment organizations, and groups that worked with day laborers or restaurant workers. Each of these partners had long-established roots in immigrant communities, and was able to provide participants with referrals to legal services and/or adult education providers, as appropriate.
- **Adult Education** partners were charged with enrolling interested individuals in qualifying educational programs. Importantly, adult educators were *not* asked to screen participants for DACA eligibility. Rather, they were given short multilingual videos describing DACA (developed by initiative partner NYIC) that they could show in the classroom, thus allowing students to self-identify and seek referrals to legal service providers.
- **Legal Services** were provided by nonprofit legal service providers. These providers determined participants' eligibility for DACA and assisted them in filing the necessary application paperwork. Funds from the initiative were also available to help applicants pay the U.S. government's $465 DACA application fee. Approximately half of the 4,000 participants who received legal services successfully received DACA status, while more than 1,000 individuals turned out to qualify for other types of immigration status.

How it Was Funded

Funding for the initiative totaled approximately $18 million over a two year period (FY 2014 and 2015). Funds were allocated by New York City Council and distributed as follows:

- $13.7 million to NYC Department of Youth & Community Development to subcontract to community-based organizations for outreach, legal, and adult education services
- $4.3 million to the City University of New York (CUNY) for direct provision of adult education services and professional development

Key Lessons

In total, the program provided educational services to 8,000 participants, and immigration legal services to 4,000 individuals. (The numbers are not mutually exclusive because some people received both services, while others only needed one type of assistance). Among those receiving legal help, 2,000 individuals successfully attained DACA status.

"The initiative really brought home that the episodic interaction model is not effective for this population," says Plum of the NYIC. "You can't just hold a one-time clinic or outreach event and expect people to get everything they need. You have to go for depth rather than scale."

This type of a systemic approach is not only of value for DACA now, but also for other potential immigration initiatives in the future, says Plum. The Supreme Court is expected to rule this spring on the Obama administration's proposed expansion of the DACA program and launch of a new Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) program. Meanwhile, immigration reform legislation awaits a window of opportunity in Congress.

Any future program – whether executive or legislative – would likely affect a far greater number of immigrants. That reality makes advocates like Plum keenly aware of the "dry run" that DACA initiatives represent. She hopes that the lessons learned in New York will be applied nationally.

In particular, Plum says, adult education must be front and center. "Literacy providers are crucial because they see people repeatedly," she explains. "They can build trust in the classroom over time." Adult educators can also help participants to develop and pursue longer-term educational and career goals.

Additionally, Plum says, the design of the initiative reflected the fact that participants have different educational levels, schedules, and ultimate educational goals. A one-size-fits-all class schedule would not have worked. Ensuring that providers had as much flexibility as feasible within systemic constraints to offer a variety of on-ramps for participants was crucial.

Prioritizing adult education equally alongside legal services can help to ensure that future cities embarking on immigration initiatives can achieve the greatest return on their investments, Plum adds.

"If the reason that a man hasn't applied for DACA is that he can't see how it will help him improve his economic circumstances or support his family, giving him access only to legal services isn't going to fix that," she explains. "The same goes for a woman who maybe has two kids and has been out of school for 10 years. Getting such individuals DACA is as much about getting them back in the classroom as anything else, and it requires understanding their priorities and articulating how adult education can help them achieve those goals."

"It's more than just getting a work permit. It's about equipping people to pursue their aspirations," says Plum.

For thousands of New Yorkers, the program accomplished just that.

**DACA status provides the recipient with temporary protection from deportation and a two year renewable work permit. Of the estimated 1.6 million potentially DACA-eligible individuals nationwide, approximately 700,000 have been granted the status to date.*

*** To see the full list of education and training programs that qualify a DACA applicant to be considered as "currently in school," see Question 33 of the USCIS frequently asked questions document.*

EXAMPLE 7: *Ready to Work: Seattle Creates New On-Ramp for Immigrant English Learners*

While Washington State has been nationally recognized for its pioneering Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) initiative for adult learners, this example looks at a population of English language learners who are not yet proficient enough to access the I-BEST program. Notably, the program benefitted from the leadership of Seattle's mayor and several city agencies, including the Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. It is supported in part by two significant national funding streams: WIOA and a Community Development Block Grant.

When a group of stakeholders in Seattle identified that low-level adult English Language Learners were often struggling to succeed in community college, they took action.

The group collaborated with Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, the Seattle City Council, and three city agencies – the Human Services Department, Office of Economic Development, and the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs – to develop a successful model for serving these learners that could be replicated.

After substantial research and development, the Ready to Work (RTW) program launched in 2015. RTW was created as a prototype model of English language acquisition, career development, and employment, offered in a community-based setting. The program's goal is "to empower and support immigrants and refugees in

QUICK FACTS: EXAMPLE 7

WHAT IT IS: Adult English language and job skills program

ENABLING POLICY: WIOA; Community Development Block Grant

KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Municipal agencies; adult education providers; community-based organizations; community colleges; businesses

FUNDING SOURCES: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG); WIOA; Washington state adult education funds

LEARN MORE: www.seattle.gov/iandraffairs/RTW

overcoming barriers on their journey to economic stability, quality jobs and integration into life in Seattle." One of the key features of RTW is its commitment to track participants' progress over a longer time frame than conventional funding streams typically allow.

What It Is: Program Details

Ready to Work combines ESL classes with computer literacy instruction and case management to help immigrants gain job readiness skills and take steps toward economic self-sufficiency.

Classes meet four days a week, three hours a day, for a total of 12 hours per week. Instruction is provided by two Seattle Colleges and Literacy Source (a community-based adult education provider). The initial program design also includes:

- Managed enrollment; new participants can join the class only during quarterly enrollment periods
- Variable length of participation; learners may stay in the class for a few weeks to 6 months or more, given continued progress
- Community-based learning; classes are held onsite at the non-profit Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) and at South Seattle College
- Activities integrated into curriculum; for example, field trips and guest speakers are pre and post taught
- Regular digital literacy; learning opportunities are provided daily to participants

RTW also includes several notable features that go beyond English language instruction, says Glenn Scott Davis, who serves as program and policy specialist for the city's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA). These features include:

Case Management Navigation and Support. Each quarter, participants receive an average of 10 hours of case management and $250 in support services from ACRS (e.g., discounted public transit passes; gas or grocery cards). "This is an advantage of housing the program at a multi-service nonprofit organization such as ACRS," says Davis. "Case managers can integrate a multitude of services on site." The case managers also help learners to navigate to their appropriate next-step placement at Seattle Colleges or in other education and training programs. Continued case management is available to participants as an ongoing support system even after they graduate from RTW classes.

Workshop Thursdays. These regularly scheduled events include field trips to cultural resources such as the Seattle Art Museum and public libraries; visits to area employers such as Nordstrom, Starbucks, and the PCC grocery chain; and visits to pre-apprenticeship programs. On other Thursdays, guest speakers visit the classroom to help participants learn about opportunities for job training as home care aides and child care assistants; improve their financial literacy; and find out about childcare resources. Human Resources staff from industry partners also conduct mock interviews to help participants prepare for the job market.

Contextualized instruction. "[Classes] focus on contextualized learning, with a lot of visual aids and group work," says Davis. "It's not necessarily [industry specific], but career development starts from the very beginning [of the program], and we expose people to a wide range of careers." Teachers and case managers help participants gain a deeper awareness of their existing talents and strengths – a fundamental building block of a self-directed career plan.

Who Is In the Classroom? About the Participants

RTW's target audience is adult English language learners who are seeking initial employment or a better job. Participants typically score at the lowest levels (1-3) of the National Reporting System for adult education. In addition, participants' literacy and communications skills even in their *first* language vary widely.

Among participants to date, the top countries of origin are Ethiopia, Vietnam, China, and Mexico. Fully two-thirds (67%) of participants have less than a high school diploma, including 28% who have not attended high school.

In order to reach potential participants, RTW works with a wide range of community partners to publicize the program and its eligibility criteria.

Multilingual outreach flyers are available in Chinese, English, Somali, Spanish, Vietnamese and other widely spoken languages.

Participants are referred through numerous avenues, including ethnic- and community-based organizations, ethnic media, and other service providers.

All Together Now: Program Partners

In addition to the Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, RTW's lead partners include: HomeSight (a nonprofit community development corporation), ACRS, Literacy Source, and two Seattle Colleges (South and Central).

Nearly two dozen other organizations, including city agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, and businesses, serve as recruitment, referral or employment partners for the program.

"The intent of Ready to Work was never to compete with existing adult education programs, but to demonstrate the efficacy of a focused, community-based model that can be replicated on a larger scale to collectively produce better outcomes for learners with lower levels of English," says OIRA's Davis. "What we're doing is developing organic ties between the RTW program and those next-step trainings – not just at college, but also community-based and industry-based short-term trainings – that can help people get quality jobs sooner rather than later."

RTW has been deliberate in building its initial partnerships with business. "We have started the process of cultivating targeted relationships across sectors with quality employers," says Davis. "That way, even if people end up in a job that [has a lower starting wage], it will have other benefits and a work culture that is supportive of ongoing learning and mobility."

Paying For It: The Funding Source

The city is using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to initially support RTW, with the nonprofit HomeSight serving as the project's fiscal agent. These funds are distributed through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to communities around the country. They are flexible in design and can be used for a wide variety of activities, including employment and training services for people with low and moderate incomes.

Other funding sources for RTW include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I funds from the Workforce Development Council, and Washington State funds for adult education through the Seattle colleges.

The Broader Context: Using Municipal Priorities as a Springboard

While many cities receive CDBG funds, relatively few have used them for programs serving jobseekers with limited English skills. One factor in Seattle's approach is its ongoing Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), the City's commitment to eliminating racial disparities and achieving racial equity.

"The City requires all of its programs to use the racial and social justice toolkit," explains Davis. "It really helped us be able to define and talk about the Ready to Work program...we aren't [just] looking at this in terms of access or opportunity, but in terms of equitable outcomes."

In part, RTW was born out of the recognition that "what transforms people's lives in the short term is a really good learning experience and a really good job experience," adds Davis. "One of our core goals is to empower participants as self-directed learners who can make informed decisions . . . which is key to attaining economic stability and full integration into the life of Seattle."

Measuring It: An Outside Evaluation

Early results from RTW are strong, says Davis: "Our attendance, retention and completion rates are very high - we think that shows what people are getting out of the program."

But RTW isn't relying on anecdotal findings or even traditional program output data to prove its value. Rather, OIRA has contracted with the well-known firm RTI International to conduct an in-depth third-party evaluation of the program.

Key outcomes being tracked include:

- **Language Skills:** Continued level gains; progression in English skills
- **Participation:** Attendance in classes and workshops; quarterly course completion and attrition rates; advancement in next quarter RTW classes and higher level non-RTW programs
- **Employment and Self-sufficiency:** Initial and second job placements; progression to self-sufficiency; and retention and advancement
- **Educational Advancement:** Advancement to and progression in next-level courses and/or programs and beyond

- Continuing Participation in English Language Acquisition: Finding ways of engaging employed RTW grads in ongoing English language learning

"A big challenge for so many adult ESL programs is the lack of long-term tracking [of participant outcomes]," says Davis. "So that is what we're attempting to do here. We want to track the longer term impact of our investments in RTW and determine the efficacy and replicability of the model in Seattle and elsewhere."

The RTI report is expected to be released in Summer 2016.

Next Steps: Learning and Looking Forward

While the RTW program is still in its initial phase, Davis and his colleagues have already begun to identify early lessons. A particular area of focus has been how to ensure that participants have a smooth and successful transition to their next educational or vocational step.

A key challenge is that while participants may have the desire to seek ongoing education and training following the RTW program, most have an urgent need to find employment. "We look for the best possible immediate job options," says Davis. Complicating factors, he explains, is that desirable pre-apprenticeship programs in construction and childcare certification require higher levels of English proficiency. "Our ACRS case managers work with college staff to smooth the transition and place learners in the most appropriate next-level ESL class for their particular goals," he says.

Another major learning from RTW thus far is that immigrant English language learners follow a variety of paths to economic stability. One size does not fit all – nor should it, according to Davis.

In particular, while RTW serves participants who are pursuing educational paths leading to college certification (and eventually to the quality jobs that require those certifications), as well as participants who were professionals in their home countries and seek to return to professional jobs, the program also recognizes that the needs of other participants who are not yet equipped to take those paths.

Going forward, Davis says, RTW will be digging deeper into the question of how to most effectively facilitate learners' transitions to short-term, industry-focused skills training programs with strong English language supports that can lead to a quality working-class job. "Where such programs do not exist, OIRA will work with colleagues in the city of Seattle and with our key community, adult education, college, workforce development, and employer stakeholders to nurture new programs," he says, "in order to provide these participants with equitable pathways to quality jobs."

In the months ahead, Davis and his colleagues will be tackling these and other questions – including big-picture questions around supportive services, social benefits, and job-creation/job-quality strategies. These structural questions go beyond any single program or institutional actor, and Seattle is looking across the country for ideas to inform its efforts, including to New York City's Career Pathways initiative.

Tackling structural challenges is nothing new for Seattle, of course. From the citywide Race and Social Justice Initiative to the much smaller RTW program itself, city officials and stakeholders are using a fresh lens to examine long held assumptions. The picture looks promising.

CONCLUSION

Cross-Cutting Lessons about Effective Programs

Looking across the programs profiled in this report, there are recurring themes that suggest important considerations for others seeking to design and implement immigrant workforce programs. Below, selected themes are analyzed.

- **The program provides demand-driven, evidence-based training.** Not included in this report are programs that lacked a clear connection to local employer demand. Rather, the focus is on providers that thoughtfully considered the needs of their local labor market, and developed training programs that prepared participants for jobs that exist in their communities. Numerous prior studies have affirmed the importance of verifying labor-market demand, and of building strong relationships with local companies to benefit from their input on training program curricula and design. These factors are perhaps even more important for programs serving immigrant jobseekers, who may be especially reliant on structured pathways to employment due to their lack of U.S.-based social capital.
- **Partnerships involve complementary relationships built over time.** There is a considerable time investment necessary to overcome partner organizations' skepticism and/or lack of knowledge about each other's expertise. Effective partnerships draw on the strengths of each partner while respecting their distinct capacities. This is particularly important as programs seek to serve new populations – such as day laborers – and/or to establish new pathways that enable participants to progress from community-based settings to higher education institutions.
- **Deep engagement enables system alignment and joint advocacy.** While it is possible for programs to have episodic or relatively superficial relationships with some partner organizations, the deeper engagement is crucial for providers to go beyond simply implementing a program. Developing more robust collaborative relationships can help partners to identify and address areas where alignment across systems can be improved – as in the Minnesota case described above – as well as to uncover areas where partners may wish to engage in joint advocacy directed at policymakers. In addition, more substantive partnerships can provide the formal framework necessary for partners to share data – with appropriate privacy safeguards in place – and identify potential bottlenecks or springboards that are affecting immigrant workers' progress.
- **Partners make visionary use of opportunities afforded by public resources.** Many of the public funding streams that help to support programs profiled here – WIOA, TANF, SNAP E&T, Community Development Block Grants – are widely available to communities across the United States. However, as the examples demonstrate, making use of these funds to effectively serve immigrant workers requires a substantial investment of time and thought, combined with a compelling vision, political savvy, and smart use of partnerships. In particular, there were striking examples of programs that capitalized on existing municipal or state frameworks – such as Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative and Minnesota's FastTRAC career pathways initiative – as both structure and catalyst for their own efforts.
- **Effective programs capitalize on policy developments at the national level.** Even when federal programs do not provide funding – as in the case of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – savvy program developers can use the implementation of new policies as an opportunity to support immigrant skill building. In the New York City example profiled in this report, city leaders seized the opportunity presented by DACA to increase municipal investments in adult education and related services. In doing so, they helped position city residents to be better able to take advantage of DACA's opportunities, while also making a strong statement about the importance of investing in adult education and training infrastructure.

- **At least one partner organization has established roots in the community, and has earned the trust of the people to be served.** Over and over again, the importance of trust in creating the environment necessary for a flourishing program was mentioned. Workforce providers who seek to serve immigrant participants must be able to communicate the value of their program to potential participants, and must be able to respond effectively to the questions, fears, and suggestions of their target audience. Providers who struggle with outreach and recruitment may later struggle to track down participants to collect outcome data, and may ultimately find it challenging to convince their program graduates to participate in policy advocacy to help sustain the program.

There were also two themes that brought home a more sobering reality.

- **Patchwork funding is often fragile and unpredictable.** While many of the program providers were ingenious in their ability to assemble multiple sources of funding, there were challenges of unpredictable funding streams. Often, impressive, successful programs were seeded through one-time philanthropic or other investments, but struggled to locate an ongoing mechanism to sustain their valuable work. Even in cases where local partners had successfully braided together funding streams, the status quo was often tenuous and sometimes dependent on the actions of actors outside the traditional avenues of advocacy.
- **Invisible subsidies mask unsustainable models.** Closely related to the issue described above, almost every provider described a reality where impressive results occurred in part because of a person or organization who was quietly subsidizing the program through their extra time, expertise, or even other funds. While each example was an admirable example of dedication to mission and/or to immigrant communities, the ubiquity of these cases is a source of concern. Successful program models should not depend on the personal commitment of an individual or the generosity of an organization. This finding further emphasizes the importance of data informed advocacy to encourage the adoption of public policies that can meaningfully support these valuable, under-resourced efforts.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Ensuring that immigrant workers are equipped to help close the middle-skill gap and achieve economic success requires applying a big-picture perspective to issues that go beyond a single program or organization. Individual programs, no matter how innovative or well-executed, are not sufficient to significantly improve immigrants' access to skill-building opportunities. Bringing promising efforts to scale requires adopting and fully implementing policies that facilitate effective programs and services, and investments that can sustain them.

To this end, NSC has identified a series of policies that can support the advancement of working adults and youth, including immigrants. These *skills equity* policies may originate at either the federal or state level. Critically, however, the ultimate authority for implementing them rests with states. Consequently, forward-thinking state leaders and advocates have significant power to shape their states' approach to these important policy tools.

Highlighted below are a handful of specific policies, many of which facilitate the innovative programs described earlier in this report. In the coming months, NSC will build on this report with a robust set of additional materials: In Fall 2016, NSC will releasing a first-ever 50-state scan of select skills equity policies, as well as toolkits for advocates who wish to advance such policies in their own states.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Reauthorized by Congress in 2014, WIOA provides more than $3 billion in federal funds to support states' job training, employment, and adult education services. Among WIOA's priority populations are individuals with low basic skills in spoken English, math, or reading. Title I (workforce) services are open to immigrants who have legal work authorization, while Title II (adult education) does not set restrictions on the immigration status of participants.[7]

WIOA funds can be used to support skill-building programs for immigrants, as in the case of the Seattle Ready to Work program described above. However, to date the legislation has been under-utilized in this respect. For example, national figures show that just 1.5% of individuals served by WIOA Title I training funds have limited English skills.[8] Advocates interested in boosting WIOA services for eligible immigrant participants can begin by reviewing

their state's WIOA implementation plan, a public document that is typically available through the state workforce board or labor department. Extensive resources on the opportunities presented by WIOA are available on NSC's website.[9]

SNAP Employment and Training

While every state is mandated to have a SNAP E&T program, states are not required to make the program available to all food stamp recipients, and so the scale of these programs varies dramatically by state. Some states serve only a few hundred participants, while others serve many thousands. The largest and most ambitious of the SNAP E&T programs is Washington State's Basic Food Employment and Training program. As spotlighted in the profile on the electronics assembly training program, Washington has worked to strategically align its state and other investments in order to draw down federal matching funds from SNAP E&T. Importantly, these so-called "50/50 matching funds" are *uncapped* at the federal level, allowing states to be reimbursed for unlimited qualifying expenses as long as states can demonstrate a 50% match from non-federal funds.

Immigrants may participate in SNAP E&T programs provided they are food-stamp eligible[10] and meet standard state-specific eligibility requirements. Advocates can learn more about how states have used the SNAP E&T program, as well as recent technical assistance initiatives for states interested in expanding SNAP E&T, on NSC's website[11] and via NSC's publication *Building Skills through SNAP E&T: Recommendations from Lessons Learned in Four States*.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

This federal policy provides income support and related assistance to very low-income parents. While TANF funds can be used for education and training, its emphasis since the 1996 welfare reform law has been on "work first" policies. Today, the amount of federal TANF dollars spent on work-related activities (including education and training) stands at just 7% nationally.[12]

The 1996 law forbids undocumented immigrants from accessing TANF funds, and restricts the ability of most legally authorized immigrants to access TANF during their first five years in the United States.[13] However, some populations – such as refugees, as highlighted in the Seattle electronics assembly program above – may access TANF without regard to the five year waiting period.

Advocates interested in supporting federal advocacy to improve TANF recipients' access to education and training may contact NSC for information on policy advocacy opportunities. Advocates interested in exploring their state's current use of TANF funds may wish to begin with public documents available from their state's department of human services or equivalent.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

Federal CDBG funds are distributed as formula funds to more than 1,000 cities and smaller localities nationwide. Designed to address needs facing low and moderate income individuals, the funds can be used for job training under certain circumstances. In addition, CDBG funds are the only type of federal funding that – when invested in skill building for SNAP recipients – are eligible to be part of the 50% matching funds for SNAP E&T.

Advocates interested in learning more about CDBG funds in their communities can refer to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development listing of CDBG program contacts at www.hudexchange.info/grantees/.

Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act)

As the primary federal funding source for secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) programs, the Perkins Act supports the development and implementation of high quality programs that combine rigorous academic content with occupational skills training. Perkins Act funding allows states to adapt existing CTE to the needs of industries that are driving regional economies and keep pace with the technologies of today's workplace.

While data on immigrant participation in Perkins Act programs is not available, data does show that there are more than 515,000 limited English proficient Perkins participants at the secondary level, and just over 170,000 at the postsecondary level. Advocates interested in learning more about Perkins Act programs can view state data profiles and obtain contact information for their state director of CTE.

Flexible Tuition Assistance

Some programs have successfully used Pell Grants to serve individuals who are developing basic skills while pursuing workforce training. However, individuals who are enrolled less than part-time, or enrolled in certain certificate or noncredit occupational courses, may not qualify for traditional financial aid. To address this issue, several states have enacted financial aid policies to support postsecondary training that is not eligible for Pell Grants. These policies provide flexible tuition assistance that works for working learners. Often, policies focus on high demand occupations or have other criteria to ensure that recipients are pursuing meaningful training that will hold value in the labor market.

For example, the Iowa GAP Tuition Assistance Program (Chapter 260I, 2011) provides need-based assistance to enable completion of continuing education certificate training programs for in-demand occupations. The Georgia HOPE Grant and Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant helps cover tuition for any GA resident enrolled in technical certificate or diploma programs, regardless of number of credit hours; other grants are available to HOPE grant recipients in particular occupational programs to cover tuition, fees, and other education-related expenses.

State Career Pathways Initiatives

While WIOA has recently codified the definition of career pathways in federal law, several states had previously enacted pioneering policies that facilitate individuals' progress along learning pathways. One such example is the Minnesota FastTRAC initiative, referenced in the Minnesota profile above. This nationally recognized career pathways model is funded primarily by state workforce funds. It is an innovative strategy that integrates basic skills education, career-specific training, and support services to meet the needs of working adults. Minnesota FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway programs are operated by local partnerships of workforce development, human services, and Adult Basic Education providers and Minnesota state colleges and universities. The programs align foundational and occupational education with career navigation services so low-skill, low-wage adults can obtain credentials with regional labor market value and find living-wage employment. Advocates interested in learning more about the Minnesota program can refer to the state Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) website.

Stakeholders who are interested in advancing state or federal policies to support immigrant skill building are encouraged to contact NSC to learn about current opportunities for engagement in policy development and advocacy.[14]

ENDNOTES

[1] NSC analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2012 and American Community Survey data, 2012.

[2] Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau/American Community Survey 2014 data.

[3] Ibid. Note that the population of individuals with limited English skills also includes U.S.-born individuals, most notably some people who were born in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.

[4] Refugees, who comprise a small fraction of the U.S. foreign-born population, receive employment services via the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Refugee Matching Grant Program and related activities.

[5] WIASRD Data Book, Program Year 2013-14; Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau/American Community Survey 2014 data.

[6] U.S. Department of Education, National Reporting System for adult education. Program Year 2014-15 data.

[7] Non-immigrants who are present in the U.S. on student visas (that is, international students who are supposed to be attending U.S. colleges) are ineligible for adult education services. In addition, two states – Arizona and Georgia – have restrictive state-level laws that prevent undocumented immigrants from accessing Title II adult education services.

[8] WIASRD Data Book, Program Year 2013-14.

[9] See: www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/workforce-innovation-opportunity-act-implementation

[10] However, note that the participating adult must be food-stamp eligible. Thus, immigrant parents in a "child-only" food stamp case are not eligible to participate in SNAP E&T.

[11] See: www.nationalskillscoalition.org/federal-policy/snap-employment-and-training

[12] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, TANF and MOE Spending and Transfers by Activity, FY 2014.

[13] Some states have chosen to use state funds to provide TANF benefits to otherwise-eligible immigrants during their first five years in the U.S..

[14] In addition, specific recommendations for funders who wish to support immigrant workforce issues are provided in NSC's 2015 brief In the Meantime: How to Support Immigrant Skill Building While Waiting for Federal Action on Immigration.

ABOUT NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

National Skills Coalition is a non-partisan, broad-based coalition of employers, unions, education and training providers, and public officials working toward a vision of an America that grows its economy by investing in its people so that every worker and every industry has the skills to compete and prosper. We engage in organizing, advocacy, and communications to advance state and federal policies that support these goals – policies that are based on the on-the-ground expertise of our members.

National Skills Coalition was founded in 1998 as The Workforce Alliance in response to a series of federal policies that signaled the end of national investments in the skills of America's workers at a time when skill gaps were growing in key U.S. industries. Since then, we've demonstrated that investments in skills work. We've shown that diverse stakeholders can find agreement around specific reforms that will improve a variety of workforce education and training policies. And we have documented that the American public is strongly supportive of a deeper investment in the skills of America's workers. We continue to mobilize support for a new national skills agenda that cuts across public policies, and simultaneously serves a wide range of U.S. workers and industries.

National Skills Coalition is governed by a Board of Directors and advised by national advisory panels drawn from the ranks of business, labor, community colleges, community-based organizations, and the public workforce system.

More than 8,000 members, representing more than 3,000 organizations in all 50 states, comprise the broad-based membership of National Skills Coalition.

Learn more at www.nationalskillscoalition.org.

NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. **A strong economy.**

NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
1730 Rhode Island Avenue NW
Suite 712
Washington DC 20036
Phone: 202.223.8991
Fax: 202.223.8354
info@nationalskillscoalition.org
www.nationalskillscoalition.org