

# **The Integration of Immigrants in the Workplace**

**Institute for Work and the Economy**

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## **Executive Summary**

This project addressing the challenges of integrating immigrants in the workplace was conceived as a result of a plenary session at the 2003 Workplace Learning Conference on the same topic. That session revealed deep-seated frustration among workforce professionals who reported that very little appeared to be available to them with respect to policies and practices that had been shown to be effective in integrating foreign-born workers in American workplaces. At first, we thought that the source of this frustration was an ineffective system for disseminating information. And, to a fair degree we found that we were correct. However, as we investigated further, we learned that there are significant areas where the research is simply suggestive of good practices and other areas where there is no serious research at all – especially in the context of the United States. We also learned that although immigrants comprise a significant part of the backbone of the American labor market, they also are viewed as being a special population that is out of the mainstream. Consequently, human resources professionals, labor activists, community organizers, educators, political leaders and policymakers, and workforce professionals had few, if any, opportunities to discuss and learn about effective strategies, policies and practices at conferences held at their associations.

Clearly, no single project is able to fill the gap in knowledge in how foreign-born workers are integrated successfully into the workplace. First, the issues are extraordinarily complex in terms of the social, cultural, educational, motivational factors of immigrant groups, and in terms of systems that serve as bridges into the workplace and the community. Second, American attitudes and policies towards immigrants in the workplace are both ambiguous and ambivalent, resulting in highly localized initiatives – often at the scale of actions taken within the four walls of a business. In regulated occupations such as nursing, policies and practices vary state by state, and often, community by community. Finally, federal, state and local policymakers base their visions of a workforce development system on models that assume that the coming generations of workers in the United States will be born and educated here despite overwhelming evidence demonstrating that growth in the workforce depends substantially on migrations of foreign-born workers. A change to models that account for multiple pathways, both foreign and domestic, into the U.S. workforce would require a fundamental shift in what we imagine will be the faces of American workers.

This exploratory initiative on the integration of immigrants is an effort to help human resources professionals, community activists, educators, labor activists, and professionals in the public workforce system seek and develop solutions to real-life challenges of integrating immigrants in the workplace. Our primary objective was to illuminate policies, practices and processes that lead to the successful integration of immigrant workers. An early review of the literature – both popular and academic – showed that the processes for effective immigrant integration are, for the most part, simply taken for granted in the United States. However, we also noted that immigrants are finding their own way and advancing

in the workforce, although facing both delays and obstacles in the process. This suggested that employers, workers and communities have both formal and informal processes supporting integration. Therefore, we concluded that a reasonable early step to the development of more formal policies and practices was to describe with what actually was occurring in the field.

Effective immigrant integration at the workforce level requires a level playing field for all workers and businesses established through a series of thoughtful and explicit policies and practices by each of the key stakeholders. Immigrants are a significant part of a rapidly growing number of labor markets. Their integration needs to be a major component of an area's workforce strategy, whether it is aimed immediately at high wage – high skill labor or initially at lower skilled workers that are afforded opportunities to pursue career pathways leading to high skill jobs. However, integration is not in itself an achievable endpoint, but an organic, highly local, two-way process engaging all key actors in a community. Therefore, it needs to be monitored and adjusted constantly to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

A fundamental premise of this project is that in order for an integration strategy to be considered successful, it must achieve that success simultaneously at three levels:

- The **employer**: immigrant workers must be able to function safely, effectively, and efficiently in the workplace, and add value to enable the employer meet competitive challenges
- The **worker**: immigrant workers must become self-sufficient and be afforded a fair opportunity to fulfill career goals and grow wealth
- The **community**: all members of the community, especially low-wage workers, must justifiably believe that they are functioning on a level playing field and that services and opportunities are being distributed fairly and equitably. In addition, in order for integration to be successful, the community as a whole must grow socially, culturally and economically as it faces up to the challenges of greater diversity.

Generally, all policies and practices, public or private, should be aligned with seven basic lessons that emerge clearly from our exploration:

- **Lesson 1:** True integration occurs only if it is successful for the employer, worker, and community
- **Lesson 2:** Strategies directed explicitly at immigrants must be components of a broader range of initiatives that support the entire workforce
- **Lesson 3:** Workers with valid foreign credentials and proven competencies must be afforded reasonable opportunities to pursue careers in their fields
- **Lesson 4:** Adult education is on the front line for meeting the needs of immigrant workers

- **Lesson 5:** Concerns about the effects on wages and working conditions are first addressed through fair application of existing labor laws
- **Lesson 6:** Effective immigrant integration policies and programs are fundamentally local and state based and must engage all parts of the workforce system
- **Lesson 7:** Integration is a long-term process requiring continuous measurement and improvement.

## Introduction

This project addressing the challenges of integrating immigrants in the workplace was conceived as a result of a plenary session at the 2003 Workplace Learning Conference on the same topic. That session revealed deep-seated frustration among workforce professionals who reported that very little appeared to be available to them with respect to policies and practices that had been shown to be effective in integrating foreign-born workers in American workplaces. At first, we thought that the source of this frustration was an ineffective system for disseminating information. And, to a fair degree we found that we were correct. However, as we investigated further, we learned that there are significant areas where the research is simply suggestive of good practices and other areas where there is no serious research at all – especially in the context of the United States. We also learned that although immigrants comprise a significant part of the backbone of the American labor market, they also are viewed as being a special population that is out of the mainstream. Consequently, human resources professionals, labor activists, community organizers, educators, political leaders and policymakers, and workforce professionals had few, if any, opportunities to discuss and learn about effective strategies, policies and practices at conferences held at their associations.

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This exploratory initiative on the integration of immigrants is an effort to help human resources professionals, community activists, educators, labor activists, and professionals in the public workforce system seek and develop solutions to real-life challenges of integrating immigrants in the workplace. Our primary objective was to offer a framework supporting the development of policies, practices and processes that lead to the successful integration of immigrant workers. An early review of the literature – both popular and academic – showed that the processes for effective immigrant integration are, for the most part, simply taken for granted in the United States. However, we also noted that

immigrants are finding their own way and advancing in the workforce, although facing both delays and obstacles in the process. This suggested that employers, workers and communities have both formal and informal processes supporting integration. Therefore, we concluded that a reasonable early step to the development of more formal policies and practices was to describe with what actually was occurring in the field.

Generally, much of the effort in the U.S. appears to focus on basic needs: such as education and health care. Ironically, although work is a primary driver for international migration, all levels of government appear to be much slower to respond to the workforce challenges. We can speculate as to the reasons why the United States has pursued generally a laissez-faire approach to immigrant policy as it pertains to the workplace. Two reasons offered are that immigration has been confined historically to gateway cities that have developed informal integration processes and that immigration policy is largely family-based as opposed to skills-based. However, recent waves of immigrants in nearly unprecedented numbers and across jurisdictions has prompted a realization at all levels that effective integration does not simply “just happen.” Communities of all sizes and types are experiencing for the first time in generations an influx of newcomers speaking languages other than English, with long and rich cultures, unfamiliar customs, and religions that differ from traditional Judeo-Christian practices.

Our report makes a broad sweep of all immigrants regardless of skill, country of origin, gender or religion. We give special attention, however, to immigrants in low-wage jobs. We also assume that some things are working well – that employers, community organizations, unions, faith-based organizations, immigrant-serving groups, educational institutions and public workforce systems are finding ways of bringing immigrants into the workplace that are profitable to businesses, lead to successful careers for the immigrants and that result in well-functioning communities. We recognize those practices and policies that are noteworthy and are worth exploring. However, we make no assertion as to whether something is “best” in its class.

We draw our lessons from the Chicago metropolitan area, from other parts of the nation and, to a more limited extent, from around the world. In the Chicago metro area, we heard from immigrant advocates, business managers, union activists, educators, job trainers and community activists at seven community forums. We also had many one-on-one conversations with leaders of immigrant-serving organizations across many ethnicities and religions, informal meetings with immigrants in coffee shops and in classrooms, and interviews of local experts. We also mined the available literature on the U.S. and, to a more limited extent, on Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. We tapped the knowledge and experiences of a cross-section of the leading experts in workforce development and immigrant integration. This was accomplished through interviews with experts on immigrant policy and a two-day, in-depth benchmarking and discovery forum attended by a broad mix of experts on immigrant integration and on workforce development.

This report addresses our primary objective. However, throughout the project we pursued a second objective: to encourage others to develop their own resources, policies and programs supporting better integration of immigrants in the workplace. As a result, we openly share all products from this project through the Institute's website, presentations, public forums and through a blog. These products include:

- A practical guide to what the literature tells us about effective policies and practices in the workforce integration of immigrants
- All working documents and summaries from the community forums, meetings with the leadership of immigrant serving organizations, and the results of the benchmarking and discovery forum
- A metro-wide forum that publicly explored what we have found to be the critical issues of workforce integration:
  - English language acquisition, jobs skills training and immigration status
  - Credentials, certification and skills recognition, and entrepreneurship
  - Community integration and jobs competition
- A “roadmap” that workforce boards, community organizations, local education systems, immigrant-serving organizations, labor unions, and policy makers at the local, state and federal levels may use as a strategic planning guide
- A bibliography of the current literature
- Important source materials and links to organizations that have valuable resources on immigrant integration policies and processes
- A blog encouraging an exchange of views on various integration topics.

Finally, this report focuses exclusively on the issues of integration – what can and should be done to ensure the successful participation of immigrants in the workforce. It makes no comment on immigration policy. However, we believe that efforts leading to the successful integration of immigrants in the workplace can constructively inform the development of immigration policy.

The project on the integration of immigrants in the workplace was helped in innumerable ways during the course of the previous twelve months. We are sincerely thankful to the project funder, The Joyce Foundation, especially Jennifer Phillips, the project advisory committee, the participants in the Benchmark and Discovery Forum, the participants in the seven community forums, the many people interviewed for this project, the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago and Northern Illinois University, notably John Lewis and Lisa Bergeron.

The Institute for Work and the Economy project team takes sole responsibility for the outcomes of this project and the opinions expressed through this final report, the roadmap, presentations and publications. The people and organizations making contributions to this project represent a diverse range of opinions and positions, so our results cannot be construed as a consensus position and they may

not be inferred to be the positions or opinions of The Joyce Foundation, Northern Illinois University or anyone else helping in this project.

The following individuals provided invaluable guidance and assistance. They are listed without their organizational affiliations since some participated in the project outside their official roles.

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## Seven Lessons on Successful Integration

Effective immigrant integration in the workforce requires a level playing field for all workers and businesses established through a series of thoughtful, explicit policies and practices by each of the key stakeholders. Immigrants are a significant part of a rapidly growing number of labor markets. Their integration needs to be a major component of an area's workforce strategy, whether it is aimed immediately at high wage – high skill labor or initially at lower skilled workers that are afforded opportunities to pursue career pathways leading to high skill jobs. However, integration is not in itself an achievable endpoint, but an organic, highly local, two-way process engaging all key actors in a community. Therefore, it needs to be monitored and adjusted constantly to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

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- **Lesson 7:** Integration is a long-term process requiring continuous measurement and improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This report is organized along each of these lessons. At the end of each lesson we present a checklist of policy and practice options that may be undertaken by key stakeholders.

## **Lesson 1: True Integration Occurs Only if it is Successful for the Employer, Worker, and Community**

A fundamental premise of this project is that in order for an integration strategy to be considered successful, it must achieve that success simultaneously at three levels:

- The **employer**: immigrant workers must be able to function safely, effectively, and efficiently in the workplace, and add value to enable the employer meet competitive challenges
- The **worker**: immigrant workers must become self-sufficient and be afforded a fair opportunity to fulfill career goals and grow wealth
- The **community**: all members of the community, especially low-wage workers, must justifiably believe that they are functioning on a level playing field and that services and opportunities are being distributed fairly and equitably. In addition, in order for integration to be successful, the community as a whole must grow socially, culturally and economically as it faces up to the challenges of greater diversity.

The consequences of this approach are profound. First, it requires a holistic approach by policymakers and practitioners. It suggests that initiatives should be evaluated in terms of both their intended and unintended consequences. For example, a local hospital may work with a local workforce agency to recruit and hire Polish language health care workers because a significant proportion of its patients are native Polish speakers. However, the unintended consequence is that non-Polish speaking health care workers feel excluded.

Second, it requires a long-term view of the roles of immigrant workers in the local economy and includes them as part of the general workforce. It supports early investment in English for speakers of other language (ESOL) and vocational English as a second language (VESL) as a fundamental component of every integration initiative. These investments can be made on the strength of the resulting economic returns as measured by improved productivity, business performance, and the supply of competent, skilled workers.

Third, it points out that the workplace and community as a whole will change as a result of greater diversity, just as immigrants have to adapt to their new circumstances. Clearly, foreign-born workers unfamiliar with American conventions need to adapt to their new circumstances. However, other workers and business management can benefit from the added energy or new ideas immigrants may bring to the workplace. In addition, adjustments made to training programs in order to accommodate the learning requirements of a more diverse workforce will often be beneficial to all workers by making the training more individualized to each set of needs.

This approach also creates many challenges. There is little research on the motivations of employers to hire immigrant workers, to train them, and to provide opportunities for advancement. Much has been written in the press about

employers viewing immigrants as cheap labor. However, the literature on immigrants who remain engaged in the workforce for several years suggests that there is a strong pattern of advancement and wage growth for some. In fact, anecdotal evidence from our community forums and conversations with immigrants and immigrant-serving groups describe a broad variety of behaviors. On the one hand, one Chicago food manufacturer cited specific policies and programs that advance all workers while attending to the specific needs of immigrants in terms of English-language acquisition and basic skills. In contrast, several Mexican immigrants described what they believed to be two-tiered systems at their former employers where non-Latinos were given preferential treatment in advancement, wages and hours.

Risks and benefits also relate to the question of motivation. Some employers consider immigrants represent increased cost and risk by regarding training in English and basic skills as an added burden or a subsidy for their competitors. They fear that immigrant workers in whom they have invested will find work elsewhere if they become too skilled and can function effectively in an English-speaking environment. Indeed, this is not unique to immigrants. There has been considerable debate within firms regarding the risk that training investments may benefit their competitors. Also, immigrants who are seasonal workers raise other questions regarding the returns that an employer may receive on their training investments. Finally, the apparent difficulty in validating the credentials of those educated or trained outside of the U.S. coupled with general confusion on immigration law contribute to the view that hiring immigrants bring added risk. Nevertheless, some employers regard immigrants as their conduit to new markets and an expanded labor market. They may willingly take on the costs of training as means to a broader end.

When taken at face value, these issues raise legitimate questions about shared responsibilities and about the roles that employers, immigrants and society each have with respect to integration. There are several strategies that may be used by employers to minimize costs and thereby reduce the perceived premium of employing immigrants.

Four of the more *shortsighted* approaches are:

- Operate bilingually and not require English at all. While this may succeed in terms of the employer's immediate needs and provide early employment to an immigrant worker, it significantly limits the upside value of the worker for the employer and isolates the immigrant by reducing access to public services and higher skill – higher pay jobs
- Vary the wages and working conditions so that immigrants receive less money and work in less desirable circumstances. While this also may succeed on the company's balance sheets, the immigrants suffer by being treated unfairly, native born workers suffer because they cannot compete for these jobs under those conditions, and scrupulous employers suffer because they are put at an unfair disadvantage by the employers who do not play by the rules

- Shift the burden onto the immigrant worker. However, people with poor familiarity with public systems and American culture, and with the least resources in terms of both disposable income and time are asked to carry the greatest burden.
- Shift the cost of integration to society as a whole. This is somewhat consistent with the workforce development policies and programs already in place for the general population of low-skilled workers. But, it shares the same problems of declining resources. It also begs the question as to whether the employer is, in effect, receiving a subsidy by having government take over responsibility for training.

A more robust approach is one that distributes the responsibility across all three groups. It is reasonable to argue that employers reap early benefits by providing training in basic and occupational skills to its workforce. Important issues such as accident prevention, work quality, and overall performance are addressed more effectively if all workers operate in the universal workplace language of English and are well trained. It is also reasonable to expect that immigrant workers will make additional sacrifices to improve opportunities for themselves and their families. A common message from immigrants and immigrant groups throughout this project is that working age arrivals to the U.S. want to learn and earn a living. Finally, the community must recognize that all risks cannot be placed entirely on businesses and immigrants. The community receives broad value from an educated and skilled immigrant workforce that goes beyond the value received by an individual employer. Likewise, the fiscal, cultural, and civic contributions of immigrants are significant – and can be made more significant if they are secure economically. Therefore, it is appropriate for the community to make available resources that support greater integration and remove barriers.

It appears that the most explosive issues are at the community level. First and foremost are the concerns that immigrants are: a) driving down wages for low-wage workers; b) taking jobs away from native-born workers; c) diverting scarce training resources from needy native-born workers; and d) not concerned about becoming functioning members of the workplace team, much less the community as a whole. While these issues are part of the debate on immigration policy, they are also issues that may be addressed through effective immigrant policies.

At the most fundamental level, these issues are all about the *reality and perception* of a level playing field. Although the evidence is at best inconclusive about the effects of immigrants on area wages and working conditions, the perception is that immigrants compete unfairly for low-wage jobs because of their apparent willingness to accept substandard wages and working conditions.

An effective counter to this is to empower low-wage – low skill workers and level the playing field. Such a strategy restores the “floor” for all workers by making it possible for them to earn decent wages and under proper conditions. A recent presentation by the head of a Service Employees International Union local in New York at a conference sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York described significant differences in wages and working conditions for unionized

versus non-unionized immigrant workers. Similarly, a presentation at this project's metro-wide forum by Michele Wucker of the World Policy Institute at the New School also described the improved wages of immigrant workers who are organized. This also is the premise of an experiment in cooperatives for California farm workers who are organizing as limited liability corporations.

Another step is to bridge language and cultural and religious differences so that no one community is isolated from the other. Discrimination clearly breeds misunderstanding and distrust. Competition for scarce resources also causes one group to demonize another. However, progressive leadership at the neighborhood and community level can address these issues effectively. For example, community efforts in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood (predominantly low income African American) and in the adjacent Little Village neighborhood (predominantly Mexican immigrant) have helped to bridge misunderstandings and avert a major rupture over the a new, state-of-the art high school attended by students from both communities.

Finally, public resources must be distributed fairly, equitably, and transparently. It is not enough to be fair and equitable, it has to be seen and accepted as being fair. There certainly are circumstances where one group is targeted for some special services (e.g., classes in English for speakers of other languages). This is acceptable as long as these special investments are balanced by other initiatives that are available to all. However, closing a program serving one group in seeming favor of another can be controversial and disruptive, regardless of the merits. Such a decision needs to be taken with care and either new resources or substitutes may need to be found.

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Incorporate immigrant workforce integration as a key component in policies and programs promoting the growth and advancement of the American economy
- ✓ Promote the integration of ESOL/VESL programs with basic skills training
- ✓ Encourage broader policy discussions on shared responsibilities and about the roles that employers, immigrants and society each have with respect to integration

State

- ✓ Incorporate immigrant workforce integration as a key component in policies and programs promoting the growth and advance of the state economy
- ✓ Develop and implement state policies and policies promoting immigrant workforce integration
- ✓ Promote the integration of state ESOL/VESL programs with basic skills training
- ✓ Support and facilitate community dialogues on workforce integration of immigrants
- ✓ Facilitate local demographic, labor market and economic data products and services

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Initiate community dialogues on workforce integration of immigrants
- ✓ Expand and improve access to basic workforce development services to immigrants
- ✓ Analyze local demographic, labor market and economic trends
- ✓ Establish policies on the fair, equitable and transparent distribution of resources
- ✓ Establish community metrics for determining success experienced by employers, immigrant workers, and the community

Business, community and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Participate actively in the development of immigrant workers in the context of a comprehensive workforce development effort involving all workers
- ✓ Participate in community dialogues on workforce integration of immigrants
- ✓ Business groups: Provide support and services to member businesses regarding effective practices and policies
- ✓ Community and faith-based groups, unions: Support the development of local immigrant leadership and advocacy groups

Education and training

- ✓ Expand ESOL/VESL training and integrate with adult basic skills training and education
- ✓ Support innovation in curricula and delivery models
- ✓ Expand access to adult basic education
- ✓ Integrate immigrants into workforce development training programs



## **Lesson 2: Strategies Directed Explicitly at Immigrants Must Be Components of a Broader Range of Initiatives that Support the Entire Workforce**

The “eureka” moment of this project occurred at the Benchmark and Discovery Forum in November when all came to the collective realization that immigrant integration in the workplace should not be regarded as separate policies and programs. The more realistic approach is *convergence*: merge programs for all adult learners at the occupational development level – the point just beyond functional English and basic skills. The group reasoned that such an approach would blur and make irrelevant the distinctions between native-born and foreign-born learners. The benefits are improved conservation of resources, less competition between groups, gains in the overall delivery of occupational skills training, better integration of immigrants in the workforce system, and a higher likelihood of improved wages and occupational success for the immigrant worker.

Clearly, there are elements of immigrant integration that are unique and not issues for the general workforce. English acquisition is one such issue for immigrants who arrive in the U.S. and speak little to no English. However, English proficiency is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success. It is a foundation skill, similar to other basic skills including those in reading and basic mathematics. As such, they are required for success but are not determinative of success.

Given the great diversity of immigrant populations, even among those from a common country of origin, the processes for acquiring these foundation skills may be somewhat individualized to the adult learner. As a result, these processes become unique components of immigrant policy. But, once these foundation skills are achieved, success in work requires that the worker is able to do something and that something is defined by occupational skills. It is here that native-born and immigrant workers share a common set of needs and can be served together by the workforce system. Therefore, the following takes us through both stages: the acquisition of foundation skills and the merger of workforce programs and policies around occupational skills.

### ***The Basics: English Language Acquisition and Basic Skills***

Due to high rates of immigration, limited English proficient (LEP) individuals are a large and growing segment of the U.S. population. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 14 million or nearly 9.5 percent of all working-age adults between the ages of 18 and 55 in the United States either did not speak English at all or spoke it less than “very well,” and 89 percent of the LEP population was foreign born.<sup>2</sup> Studies indicate that the overwhelming majority of LEP immigrants are highly motivated to learn English, but demand far exceeds the supply of English classes.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census 2000 Supplementary Survey Summary Tables

The majority of limited English-speaking immigrant adults are of Mexican origin (56 percent), speak Spanish (75 percent), have nine or fewer years of education (50 percent), and 64 percent have less than a high school degree. Only 18 percent have any post-secondary education. Sixty two percent have minor children in the home. Nearly 60 percent arrived in the United States in the last ten years.<sup>3</sup>

Limited English proficiency remains a critical challenge facing immigrants in the labor market.<sup>4</sup> It constrains their employment prospects and earnings. Immigrants' growing numbers and their pivotal role in the economy create a compelling demographic, social, and economic imperative to expand their opportunities to improve their English skills.<sup>5</sup> Research conducted in New York City and Los Angeles finds that limited-English proficient immigrant families are more likely to earn significantly lower wages, experience higher rates of unemployment, and live in poverty than English-proficient immigrant families. They are also nearly twice as likely to be undocumented as other immigrants.<sup>6</sup> In both cities, about half of all families headed by adults who spoke no English experienced food insecurity.

Limited English proficiency also places barriers to broad community participation. A recent comprehensive report on English language acquisition states that, "In addition to eroding immigrant family strengths, limited English proficiency can isolate immigrant families from the larger community, preventing them from interacting with American-born neighbors, engaging in civic life, and becoming integrated into their new community."<sup>7</sup>

### *The financial impact of limited English*

English language proficiency plays an important role in increasing immigrant earnings, employment and opportunities for advancement. One study found a difference of 46 percent between the wage rates of immigrants who speak English and those who do not. After adjusting for other socioeconomic factors including education and work experience, English-speaking immigrants earned 17 percent more than non-English speaking immigrants.<sup>8</sup> Gonzalez found that immigrants and refugees who are fluent in oral and written English earn about 24 percent more than those who lack fluency, regardless of their qualifications.<sup>9</sup>

Other studies have found that non-English speakers are "pushed down" the occupational ladder compared to English speakers with the same socioeconomic characteristics. As much as half of the relative wage growth experienced by

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Note: The U.S. Department of Labor commissioned a Special Tabulation of Census 2000 Data of Limited English Proficient Adults. This tabulation may be obtained at <http://www.doleta.gov/reports/CensusData/download.cfm>. The data are summarized at national and state levels and are available generally at the level of individual workforce investment areas. The special tabulation includes information on the social and economic characteristics of the LEP population, including educational attainment, foreign born by year of entry, employment status, occupation, income in 1999, poverty status in 1999, and linguistic isolation.

<sup>5</sup> Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>6</sup> Capps, Ku and Fix 2002

<sup>7</sup> Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>8</sup> Chiswick and Miller 1992

<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez 2000

immigrants in the first 20 years after arrival may be attributed to gains from learning the English language.<sup>10</sup>

Programs designed to improve English language skills can help reduce the economic disparity experienced by families with limited English-speaking adults. However, the extent to which improved English skills lead to better paying jobs depends in large part on the level of education. Research shows that learning to speak English fluently results in a 76 percent jump in earnings for immigrants with more than 12 years of education, compared to only a four percent increase for workers with fewer than eight years of education.<sup>11</sup>

The ability to combine English proficiency with other skills that employers desire increases the earning power of well-educated immigrants. However, learning English will not necessarily increase the earnings of less-educated immigrants who make up the majority of the limited English-speaking adult population if they still lack the basic literacy and math skills needed to succeed in the U.S. workplace.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of basic skills, more than 40 percent of non-citizens have less than a high school education.<sup>13</sup> However, 12.5 percent of immigrants have master's degrees.<sup>14</sup> This disparity requires that ESOL and integrated training programs target training curricula to these two widely differing audiences of LEP immigrants.

### *Effects of linguistic concentrations*

Whether non-English speaking workers are concentrated in occupations or neighborhoods also affects wage gains that otherwise are associated with English fluency.<sup>15</sup> The economic returns of English proficiency are generally lower in occupations that already have high concentrations of LEP workers.<sup>16</sup>

Two reasons may account for this effect. Many occupations filled by high levels of LEP workers offer limited promotional opportunities. These include jobs in agriculture or those involving manual labor pay low wages, even in supervisory positions.

Second, where many employees in a workplace share a non-English language, English skills are valued less by employers since English is not needed for communicating with co-workers. Similarly, an immigrant who lives in an area where many others speak the same non-English language will experience on average a smaller wage increase after acquiring English fluency relative to an immigrant who resides in a neighborhood where the primary language is different from his or her own. One study suggests that an immigrant worker fluent in

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<sup>10</sup> Fremstad 2003

<sup>11</sup> Mora, Maria. 2003. An Overview of the Economics of Language in the U.S. Labor Market: Presentation Notes, Denver, CO: American Economic Association Summer Minority Program. [http://www.econ.duke.edu/smpe/pdf\\_files/MORA2.pdf](http://www.econ.duke.edu/smpe/pdf_files/MORA2.pdf). (in Martinez and Wang 2005)

<sup>12</sup> Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey. March 2000 in NILC 2003

<sup>14</sup> National Immigration Law Center 2003

<sup>15</sup> Gonzalez, L. 2004

<sup>16</sup> Chiswick, Barry and Paul Miller. 2002 in Martinez and Wang 2005

English and living in a language diverse area receives a 19 percent gain in income compared to an 11 percent gain for a comparable worker who lives in an ethnic enclave.<sup>17</sup>

Services for English language learners include components such as English for speakers of other languages instruction,<sup>18</sup> native language services, bilingual services, vocational and pre-vocational ESL (VESL) training, workplace ESL training, English and Spanish GED preparation, academic content and skills preparation, functional or life skills preparation, citizenship and civics education, displaced workers training, and family literacy classes.<sup>19</sup>

While many employers may resist offering training due to scheduling issues, cost, perceived lack of benefit to the company, and a sense that teaching their employees English is not their responsibility<sup>21</sup>, a recent survey of manufacturing employers conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers' Center for Workforce Success found that a majority of employers provide specialized on-the-job resources for their immigrant workers, including job-related training material, English as a second language classes, bilingual training and job-specific English instruction.<sup>22</sup>

The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute recently completed a study of eight ESL programs across sectors that identified six areas that appear to present the greatest challenge to training programs that serve limited English proficient workers:

- Learner assessment tools and utilization of assessment results
- Participant data tracking and evaluation
- Curriculum development
- Staff development
- Funding, and
- Issues of equity and equality on the job.<sup>23</sup>

Both employer and the employee receive the benefits of improved language skills on the part of the worker. The final report to the Department of Education on the National Workplace Literacy Program found that employers reported improved

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<sup>17</sup> Gonzalez, 2004; Chiswick and Miller, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are used interchangeably depending on the context; e.g., a referenced report may use ESL. Our preference is ESOL.

<sup>19</sup> Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), *Adult ESL Language and Literacy Instruction: A Vision and Action Agenda for the 21st Century*, October 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Miriam Burt, "Issues with Outcomes in Workplace ESL Programs, National Center for ESL Literacy Education," Submitted to US Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education and The Institute for Work and the Economy, January 6, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> National Association of Manufacturers and the Center for Workforce Success, "Closing the Immigrant Skills Gap: A Report on Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Manufacturing Sector" (Washington, DC: Center for Workforce Success, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> AFL-CIO Working for America Institute, "Getting to Work: A Report on How Workers with Limited English Skills Can Prepare for Good Jobs" (Washington, DC: AFL-CIO, 2004).

attendance, better production, greater job retention, and improved quality control after employees participated in an integrated job training and language acquisition program. Employees reported improvements in job security, more opportunities for job advancement and an increased ability to participate in community and society.<sup>24</sup> In addition, participants at the Benchmark and Discovery Forum and at each of the seven community forums conducted in conjunction with this project ranked English language literacy a necessary condition for successful employment.

In light of limited state and federal funding, the demand for such classes far outstrips the supply.<sup>25</sup> For example, in 2005, the Massachusetts Department of Education reported that more than 18,000 residents were on waiting lists for ESL classes; the average wait is six months to two years.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, federal and state funding for English acquisition programs have not kept pace with the growth of the LEP population. Many of these programs continue to only teach immigrants very basic skills, or what some have characterized as “survival English,” often with the goal of pushing participants into the workforce as quickly as possible.

Employers are increasingly filling the gap left by the public training system. According to one private training provider servicing companies, “I think [employers] are realizing they need to help these folks be successful because they are the future of the industry.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> NILC 2003

<sup>25</sup> Wrigley, Richer, Martinson, Kubo, and Strawn, 2003

<sup>26</sup> Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>27</sup> Garay 2005

## Components of Successful ESOL and VESL Training<sup>1</sup>

### Identify needs and define objectives

- Conduct outreach to recruit participants, decide on training providers and leverage resources
- Tailor the content of English language instruction and occupational training to the requirements of specific jobs. This permits faster and successful job placement, retention and advancement.

### Link to advancement

- Actively promote skill enhancement opportunities and link them to increased wages and advancement within the company
- Provide opportunities to use English on the job.

### Incorporate flexible delivery

- It appears that attendance in VESL programs is higher in programs held during work time. Classes ideally should be offered at the work site, during work hours.
- Provide flexible options, such as workshops; distance-learning via video and other media; and small-group sessions with a special focus

### Use qualified staff

- Program staff should be highly qualified and adequately compensated. National, state, and local standards are available for (optional) certification and credentialing of teachers and administrators
- Use local ethnic and cultural societies to advise and provide help.

### Consider innovative delivery methods

- Consider using picture boards in the workplace as a communication tool for workforces that speak multiple languages

<sup>1</sup> These are components of successful ESOL and VESL training derived from various sources including the National Manufacturers' Association, Working for America Institute, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, National Immigration Law Center, Miriam Burt, Richard Lewis, Robert Paral, Tia Elena Martinez, Ted Wang, Heide Spruck Wrigley, Elise Richer, Karin Martinson, Hitomi Kubo, Julie Strawn

- Explore the use of technology as an integral part of the instructional program.

### Involve all stakeholders in program design

- Employer stakeholders include the chief executive and operating officers, human resource personnel, and direct supervisors of the workers
- Worker leaders need to be involved as well – if not directly in the classes, as least as advocates to encourage others to attend
- Involve the learner in program design and instructional approaches
- Educate everyone about the process of learning a second language. It is difficult for the majority of people in this country to appreciate the difficulty of learning and using a second language.

### Align curricula with goals and context

- Curricula, materials, and instruction should context-specific and aligned with what adult English language learners need to know and be able to do.
- Literacy education in the native language of workers often facilitates the learning of English and develops proficiencies in both languages.
- In cases where learners have higher educational levels and work experience but simply lack proficiency in English, explore ways of improving the transition from ESL into other areas of education and training
- Offer short-term bridge programs that transition participants to job training and higher education more quickly.

### Have clear assessments and accountability measures

- Programs for English language learners should have in place an assessment and accountability plan that is consistent with program goals and learner needs and that supports learning and teaching needs
- Outcomes should be clearly stated at the outset of the course, monitored throughout the course, and then evaluated at the end. Program providers

must know what to measure, how to measure, or when to measure outcomes of the training

- When appropriate, offer short, highly focused classes with clearly stated, measurable, and attainable objectives
- Determine the appropriate relationship of English language education to job-related training.

### Utilize or hire support staff

- Consider using in-house, hourly employees as training assistants and to serve as interpreters for limited-English speakers
- Consider hiring a bilingual employment specialist to assist in recruiting and training employees
- Consider using retired employees to consult and train new employees and to enhance the skills of incumbent workers. In-house interpreters can translate during workshops and training sessions
- Institute a buddy system to help new immigrant workers integrate quickly. Margie McHugh, former head of the New York Immigration Coalition also offered ideas including English tables in company lunchrooms, and partner-mentor relationships within the workplace.

### Recognize the business advantage

- The NAM survey advocated for recognizing the value in making one's company a "learning organization"
- In today's economy, view multilingual and multicultural workers as an asset and competitive advantage.

### Understand the time investment

- Both employers and learners may have unrealistic ideas of the amount of time it takes to learn English. While research is limited regarding adults learning English, studies with children show that it takes 2-5 years to become socially adept in the second language, and 5-8 years to become academically on a par with native speaker

## **Basic Skills**

### *The Federal Workforce Investment System*

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaced the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in 1998 and provides federal funding for workforce development nationwide. The Act provides for

- Core Services, such as preparing resumes and reviewing local job announcements
- Intensive Services for adults and dislocated workers who need additional assistance to gain employment, such as personalized skills analysis, career counseling and in some cases, job readiness training, basic skills education or ESL
- Training Services for unemployed adults and employed adults whose income falls below self-sufficiency levels or those who require more training to qualify for a job.

In an effort to focus on the needs of immigrants, the Employment and Training Administration at the Department of Labor initiated programs to address the needs of LEP workers through the Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative (LEPHWI). The purpose of the initiative is to improve access to DOL employment and training programs. It also launched last year the New American Center demonstration pilots in Iowa and Arkansas to provide assistance with language and occupational training, resettlement, community service referrals and job placement with local area employers who are seeking skilled workers. It recently announced a study to help the leaders in the Employment and Training Administration deepen their understanding of LEP workers and their needs and preferences. It also has supported local and regional training initiatives reaching immigrant communities.

However, many immigrants and people with limited English proficiency may still face challenges in accessing intensive and training services under WIA. According to Newcomers in the American Workplace, many job training and placement programs are not accessible to or meet the unique needs of immigrant and other limited-English workers. One-stop centers and other publicly funded programs often have difficulty providing basic language access and culturally differentiated services.<sup>28</sup> LEP individuals can face barriers accessing the public workforce investment system, including low levels of English proficiency, low literacy in their native language, unfamiliarity with the U.S. employment system and lack of translators at service centers.<sup>29</sup> In addition, due to the influx of immigrants to a widening variety of non-traditional settlement areas, states and local workforce areas are faced for the first time with new and growing immigrant

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<sup>28</sup> Moran and Petsod 2004

<sup>29</sup> AFL-CIO

populations and are faced with new challenges in creating an infrastructure of workforce development services for them.<sup>30, 31</sup>

Even when immigrants are approved for training programs, outcomes that focus solely on employment and earnings may effectively exclude them from the system. For example, some one-stop areas attempt to meet their performance goals by emphasizing services to individuals most likely to succeed. Similarly, training providers may exclude LEP persons by imposing minimum participation requirements (e.g., 8th grade reading level) that many LEP persons cannot meet.<sup>32</sup> Finally, many silos characterizing the workforce system frustrate training providers who want to offer programs that integrate vocational training and language acquisition. They often face obstacles due to the lack of coordination between the workforce development system and the adult education system.<sup>33</sup>

### *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*

While most states allow limited English proficient persons to participate in ESOL classes, anecdotal and other reports suggest that access to these services is poor in many places. The federal law lists 12 allowable work activities. Although the list includes vocational education, job skills training, and education directly related to employment, it does not explicitly list English language training or ESOL. In addition, access to these programs is subject to further limitations in many states. In most cases, LEP learners must first meet their 20-hour per week work requirement before participating in ESOL. Yet, few states have created programs to support part-time work combined with language classes. As a result, non-LEP welfare recipients wishing to improve their language skills frequently cannot successfully coordinate class times, work schedules, transportation, and childcare.<sup>34</sup>

### *Bridge and Pathway Initiatives*

In recent years, Women Employed, the Chicago Jobs Council and the University of Illinois (UIC) Great Cities Institute have been in the forefront in the development of bridge programs aimed at filling the educational and training gap of adults who have reading and mathematical skills below the ninth-grade level:

Bridge training programs prepare adults who lack adequate basic skills to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and training, leading to career-path employment. Bridge programs seek to enable students to advance both to better jobs and to further education and training, and thus are designed to provide a broad

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<sup>30</sup> Wrigley, Richer, Martinson, Kubo, and Strawn, 2003

<sup>31</sup> Members of the advisory committee also noted that other barriers might include the use of English-based assessments, a tendency towards “work first” employment policies that ultimately limit the range of opportunities for immigrant, non-English proficient workers, and the misapplication of WIA rules.

<sup>32</sup> NILC 2003

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Immigrants and TANF: A Look at Immigrant Welfare Recipients in Three Cities, Karen C. Tumlin Wendy Zimmermann The Urban Institute



foundation for career-long learning on the job and formal post-high school education and training.<sup>35</sup>

These programs are not specific to low-skilled immigrant workers and are appropriate for adults beginning at the low-intermediate ESL level. The framework may be applied to initiatives supporting their successful transition into the workplace. They enable workers to achieve basic competencies in “communications, problem-solving, applied mathematics, technology applications and technical fundamentals taught in the context of problems and situations drawn from the contemporary workplace and postsecondary classroom.”<sup>36</sup>

Many non-English speaking immigrants lack fundamental literacy skills in their native language. While traditional language acquisition programs emphasize English immersion, emerging research suggests that helping LEP individuals develop native language literacy and other related skills may help facilitate English acquisition. One approach is to provide skills instruction in participants’ primary language. Improving participants’ native language literacy and other basic skills will not only make LEP individuals more employable, but it could also prepare them to learn workplace English.

An estimated 32 percent of adults enrolled in ESL programs lack literacy skills in their native language, and research suggests that these adults are slower in learning a second language than their literate counterparts. Martinez and Wang 2005 cite two relevant studies on the issue. First, Burtoff in “The Haitian Creole Literacy Evaluation Study” found that participants who received native language literacy instruction while learning English developed stronger literacy skills in English than those who only received English instruction, although the total number of instructional hours for the two groups were equal. Second, Robson in “Hmong Literacy, Formal Education, and Their Effects on Performance in an ESL Class” found that adults with minimal literacy in Hmong acquired English reading skills more rapidly than those who had no Hmong literacy.<sup>37</sup>

According to Wrigley et al, in some areas, programs that place less emphasis on English acquisition and provide native-language training in literacy, math, and job skills along with vocational English instruction can be useful for this population. Bilingual programs are more widely used in localities that have a primary non-English language shared by immigrants, and many employers can communicate with workers in this language. Increasing the literacy skills in an LEP adult’s native language through bilingual programs may have positive effects on English acquisition.<sup>38</sup>

Beginning in Chicago, the government of Mexico is supporting the creation of plazas comunitarias across the U.S. in partnership with community organizations such as Instituto del Progreso Latino, community colleges and secondary education systems. These community centers offer basic literacy education to

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<sup>35</sup> Bridge to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults: A Program Development Guide; Women Employed with Chicago Jobs Council and UIC Great Cities Institute, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Burtoff, M. 1985. and Robson, B. 1982. in Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>38</sup> Wrigley, Richer, Martinson, Kubo, and Strawn, 2003

Mexican immigrants who lack fundamental competencies in Spanish. In Chicago especially, this instruction is linked to a comprehensive bridge framework aimed at putting the immigrant worker on a successful career pathway.

## Bridge Programs: A Brief Description

### **Bridge Programs: What are they?**

Bridge Programs are designed to prepare adults without the requisite basic skills to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and training and career-path employment. These programs differ from traditional job training programs. They provide a broad foundation for career-long learning, both on-the-job and through formal postsecondary education and training, giving students a choice of directions and new opportunities.

### **Bridge Programs: Benefits**

Bridge Programs meet the needs of students, employers, educational institutions, and communities in the following in ways:

- They are designed for *individuals* who want to advance but lack the basic skills and knowledge for a career-path job. These students have below 9<sup>th</sup> grade literacy levels, either with or without high school diplomas or GEDs, and are unable to meet college entrance requirements. They may also be low-skilled incumbent workers and the unemployed.
- They serve *employers* that need qualified and motivated employees with the requisite skills and credentials and the capacity to continue to grow.
- Bridge programs build a pipeline of qualified motivated students for postsecondary educational institutions and improve student retention and completion rates.
- Bridge programs provide a framework for linking individual development services and community development functions and leveraging resources for greater impact.

### **Bridge Programs: Key Components**

- The curriculum is defined in terms of *competencies* needed to succeed in postsecondary training and jobs.
- Programs teach the basics of communication, problem-solving, applied mathematics, basic computer literacy, and technical fundamentals the *context* of workplace problems.
- Teaching methods integrate classroom instruction, reading, discussion, and especially, *learning by doing* through projects, simulations, and labs.
- Programs expose students to *opportunities and requirements of*

*employment and education* through visits with people in the field, job shadowing, and internships.

- Programs are *offered at times and places convenient to working adults* and use instructional methods and technologies appropriate for adult learners.
- Programs are *compressed* (generally averaging 10 to 20 weeks), allowing for quick completion
- Programs offer *support, career and educational advising, and job placement services*, including assessment, financial assistance, transportation, and case management.
- Bridge programs meet employer needs by involving them program development and delivery, as well as provision of equipment, internships, and jobs.

### **Bridge Program: Partnerships**

Because bridge programs involve a complex blend of functions, formation of partnerships is an effective strategy for creating the necessary capacity and leveraging resources. Partnerships can involve degree-credit and non-credit divisions within colleges, community organizations, adult education providers, employers, labor groups, one-stop career centers, and social service agencies. Specific roles may include recruitment, assessment, basic skills and language training, credit and certificate courses, case management and support services, job placement, and financial assistance.

### **Bridge Programs: Build on Existing Efforts**

Development of bridge programs begins with an analysis of the training and education programs and services that are already in place. These include adult basic education, ESL, vocational skills training, workplace literacy training, developmental education programs, and job search, workplace preparation, case management, advising, and financial assistance services. The core partners work together in reconfiguring programs and services to: meet the needs of their target population and local employers; strengthen relationships among the outcomes and requirements of each level of training

and job advancement; ensure the coordination of services and resources; and integrate basic and vocational skills with career and job awareness.

### **Bridge Programs: Two Levels**

There are two levels of bridge programs. *Higher-level bridge programs* prepare adults who have had some attachment to the labor force and average 7–8<sup>th</sup> grade literacy levels for advancement into entry-level skilled positions and into occupational certificate or associate degree programs. *Lower-level bridge programs* emphasize the teaching of basic skills such as reading, communication, and applied math in the context of developing job related skills such as customer service, data entry, machine operations and maintenance, or patient care. Common curriculum features of both levels include:

- Exposure to GED skills (as appropriate)
- Contextualized instruction in reading, communications, and math
- Strong emphasis on teaching test-taking skills
- Career exploration
- Critical thinking integrated into all lessons
- Emphasis on learning to manage work relationships, navigate support systems, and deal with personal issues (e.g., dependent care, transportation, domestic violence)

### **Bridge Programs: Funding Sources**

There are many existing resources that can be used and combined to fund bridge programs. Because at present there is no dedicated source of funding in Illinois, existing programs have been funded in a variety of ways, including through the development of pilot programs using more flexible workforce funds, obtaining foundation grants, and redirecting existing resources.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Source: Women Employed, June 2006

## ***Convergence: Making the Workforce System Work for All Workers***

Once immigrant workers are able to function within an English-language work environment and have acquired the necessary building blocks in basic and cross-function skills for more occupation-specific training, there is little need to establish separate, more advanced training opportunities for them. Ideally, the process of integration may begin as part of the training process where workers first learn the skills of their trades. It is in these training environments where people who are being trained also learn the cultures, conventions and operational structures of the industries in which they will work.

Although it seems sensible that all adult learners can be brought under a single occupational training umbrella, there are potentially some significant barriers. One possible barrier is the reluctance of a training institution and employer to accept the literacy, mathematical and other basic skills acquired by the immigrant at a foreign institution. Currently, there is no comprehensive and systematic crosswalk of the education systems between immigrant sending countries and the U.S. Therefore, there is no certain path for easily determining a U.S. equivalency to, for example, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics education in Poland. In contrast, Australia has developed a series of publications that provides such crosswalks.

An alternative is to adopt a competency-based strategy. Rather than base curricula in occupational training on a set of assumptions about the educational attainment of trainees, the training is pegged to the assessed competencies of the learner. Bridge programs, contextual learning strategies, strategies for combining ESL and occupational training, experiments in distance learning, and other innovations in training and education suggest that a competency-based training system may be feasible, with the greatest problem being scalability.

Another potential barrier to convergence is the diversity of policies around workforce development funding. Some programs are available to all immigrant workers regardless of status and length of time in the United States. Other programs are prohibited for workers who are not authorized to be in the U.S. Still others require that the immigrant be in the U.S. for a specified minimum number of years. States also impose their own restrictions on programs funded by state taxpayers. Some states, such as Illinois, impose few, if any, conditions related to immigration status. Others are attempting to put a hard line around services that are available to immigrants, even for those who are in the country with proper and currently valid documents. These distinctions create separate screening and monitoring protocols resulting in distinctly separate programs, program infrastructures and staffs teaching the same things to different audiences.

A third potential barrier is that the introduction of immigrant learners in training systems that have had few immigrants previously may cause some native-born workers in particular to worry that scarce training seats are being taken up by the foreign-born. Although a reason for program integration is to conserve resources, it may be perceived that an immigrant is taking up a slot previously occupied by a native-born worker. Leadership by decision-makers is required in order to make adequate resources available to both groups.

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Support convergence of federal workforce programs, especially at the occupational development level and, where practical, minimize inconsistencies leading to separate screening and monitoring systems
- ✓ Support research on the development of educational crosswalks between countries of origin of emigrating workers and the United States
- ✓ Support the development of competency-based learning systems

State

- ✓ Support convergence of federal and state-funded workforce programs, especially at the occupational development level and, where practical, minimize inconsistencies leading to separate screening and monitoring systems
- ✓ Support the development of competency-based learning systems
- ✓ Develop a comprehensive framework for a full array of workforce services available to immigrants
- ✓ Develop a comprehensible description of services available to immigrants and how they may gain access to them
- ✓ Monitor and examine the effects of linguistic isolation

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Develop and implement policies and programs that result in the transparent integration of services for immigrants and native born workers
- ✓ Recognize immigrants as key stakeholders in the development and implementation of workforce programs
- ✓ Monitor and examine the effects of linguistic isolation

Business, community and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Provide direct ESOL/VESL and basic skills training services to immigrants
- ✓ Discourage linguistic isolation while recognizing the importance of maintaining community identity and social support

Education and training

- ✓ Integrate ESOL/VESL programs with basic skills training for immigrants
- ✓ Expand ESOL/VESL training; develop innovative curricula and delivery models
- ✓ Expand contextual learning opportunities for simultaneously acquiring English and basic work skills
- ✓ Bring together immigrants and native-born learners into common workforce development training programs

### **Lesson 3: Workers with Valid Foreign Credentials and Proven Competencies Must Be Afforded Reasonable Opportunities to Pursue Careers in their Fields**

America's communities and businesses are facing unprecedented challenges as new immigrants enter the labor market. These new arrivals play critical roles in the economic destiny of our country. In order for the United States economy to prosper, we must both welcome skilled immigrants as well as permit them to use their skills and knowledge and optimize their contributions to the community and society.

The story of a cab driver with a Ph.D. is frequently recognized as an extraordinary waste of human capital. However, these situations, while dramatic, are not the whole story. Skilled workers and professionals whose qualifications are recognized in their home countries are often left with few opportunities to pursue their chosen careers in the United States. Illana Akresh, in her paper, *Occupational Mobility Among Legal Immigrants to the United States*, noted that within one year after receiving authorization to work in the U.S., fifty percent of immigrant workers experienced downgrading in their jobs when compared to the last jobs abroad. All too often, skilled workers are required to start their careers over, in low skilled, low-wage work. The question here is: How can they extend their skills, achieve new competencies, attain the required licenses and certifications and make connections to jobs for which they are qualified?

We believe that there are at least four sets of barriers that slow the integration of these workers. These barriers are generally within the policy and programmatic purview of states, local governments and educational and training institutions. This is especially the case with respect to occupational licenses that are within the exclusive jurisdiction of state governments. These barriers are:

- Interpretation and validation of academic, professional and work-related competencies and credentials
- Acceptance by employers of validated credentials and competencies
- Acceptance by state regulators of validated credentials and competencies, and
- Limited education and training targeted to bridging the gaps between what is validated and what is required for employment.

Immigrants do not all arrive in this country with low levels of education and skills. Data from 2001 indicate that 42 percent of current immigrants enter the United States with 12 or more years of formal education.<sup>40</sup> In some cases, educational levels of immigrants outpaces Americans: 63 percent of immigrants from Asia have 12 or more years of education compared to only 49 percent of native-born Americans.<sup>41</sup> However, many immigrants who arrive with good skills and education cannot translate these experiences into related employment. In a study based on the New Immigrant Survey, Jasso, Rosenzweig and Smith note

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<sup>40</sup> Light, 2001

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

that the data “suggest that labor market skills are imperfectly transferable across the U.S. border. The estimates indicate, moreover, that skill transferability varies by immigrant characteristics such as age, gender and exposure to the U.S.”<sup>42</sup>

In general, immigrants encounter difficulties associated with isolation and a lack of networks through which they may be made aware of job openings. They may be unfamiliar with American job search techniques. They may also need to acquire new skills, or update existing skills, or can be hindered by the need to certify, re-certify or gain licensure or credentials.

According to Upwardly Global, employers may lack the resources and knowledge to hire immigrants and can place many barriers in the way of those qualified immigrants seeking work, such as:

- Employers who overemphasize the importance of English (e.g., requiring flawless grammar for an accounting position)
- Recruiters who pass over a résumé because of a foreign-sounding name
- Interviewers who insist on conducting a phone screening (which almost always handicaps non-native English speakers)
- Employers who consider foreign universities and degrees to be invalid or inferior
- Employers who do not have the capacity to verify foreign credentials
- Employers who will not hire someone who does not have U.S. work experience
- Companies advertising that permanent residents or U.S. citizens only need apply (there are many immigrants or refugees who are work-authorized, but not technically permanent residents).

### ***Addressing the Challenges of Unrecognized Learning***

When job applicants: 1) possess credentials from foreign institutions with which the institution has no mutual recognition arrangement, or 2) they may have obtained learning through work and life that has not been formally recognized in a credential (also known as prior learning or experiential learning), there is no formal system in either the U.S. or Canada to assess and translate this to employers and educational bodies. While many institutions have developed their own mechanisms for dealing with these special circumstances, what seems essential is a system for assessment and accreditation.

Without the right credentials from educational, professional and trade regulatory bodies, immigrants often cannot work in their chosen profession or trade. As a result, they earn less, are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, and are less likely to receive promotions.

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<sup>42</sup> Jasso, Rosenzweig and Smith, “The Earnings of U.S. Immigrants: World Skill Prices, Skill Transferability and Selectivity.” Manuscript at: <http://nis.princeton.edu/papers.html>.

The failure of many occupational bodies to make appropriate assessments of prior learning does not necessarily reflect an intent to discriminate.<sup>43</sup> However, considerable expertise in comparative education, significant physical resource materials, and a familiarity and ongoing contact with international educational systems are all necessary to validate documents properly and make an accurate assessment of an individual's prior training. Inadequacies in each of these areas are frequently cited by licensing bodies as their reason for not evaluating prior learning either at all or in anything more than a cursory manner.

A systemic approach is needed to ensure that foreign-trained individuals receive fair and consistent assessments. In her report with the Maytree Foundation, *Fulfilling the Promise: Integrating Immigrant Skills into the Canadian Economy*, Naomi Alboim discusses the need for a 'systems approach' to facilitate the labor market entry of skilled immigrants in their field of expertise. Such a system would grant access for skilled immigrants to information, assessment services, expert advice, and bridging programs to fill identified gaps.

Failure to recognize credentials is also an issue in Australia which quantified the loss to their national economy, due to the non-recognition of foreign degrees, as ranging from \$100 million to \$350 million (USD) in 1990, representing 200,000 immigrants who failed to gain recognition and never returned to their pre-migration occupations.

In the United States, although the anecdotal evidence is clear that there are qualified, foreign-educated and trained workers who are persistently unemployed or underemployed, a threshold question is the scale of the mismatch between immigrants entering with professional skills and educations and their employment in the United States. Currently, there does not appear to be any published research that quantifies and characterizes foreign-educated professionals in the U.S. In an analysis conducted by the Institute for Work and the Economy using the 2004 Current Population Survey, the populations segmented by educational attainment of foreign born age 25 and above and entering the U.S. during the period 2000 – 2003 is 1.178 million with a bachelor degree and above and 1.631 million with some college education and above. Conservatively, Upwardly Global estimates that its more narrow target national market is comprised of approximately 240,000 people from developing countries arriving under the provisions of family reunification or as refugees or asylees and having a bachelor degree or above.

According to Ann Morse, Program Director for the Immigrant Policy Project at the National Conference of State Legislatures, attaining accreditation in certain states can be so arduous that immigrants travel to neighboring states to acquire accreditation. For example, foreign-licensed engineers cannot become recognized in Tennessee without providing a transcript directly from their university, which is not possible for immigrants from many countries. Therefore, many immigrants travel to Ohio to receive engineering licenses. Although Ohio and Tennessee have a reciprocal licensing agreement, Ohio requires only that immigrants are able to pass a test in order to become a U.S.-recognized engineer. The lack of

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<sup>43</sup> Andrew Brower, "Immigrants Need Not Apply" (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 1999).



documentation and research especially in the U.S. on these and similar problems is a roadblock to improving policy.

In addition, there is little beyond anecdotal information regarding the barriers encountered by foreign-educated workers and whether these barriers are unique to immigrants. Organizations that provide services to immigrant jobseekers report that employers appear to be reluctant to accept foreign credentials, may have prejudices regarding the quality of foreign education in general or with respect to a specific country or region of the world, and may make judgments about the professional competencies of foreign workers based on unrelated factors as proficiency in colloquial English as practiced in the U.S. However, these barriers may also be part of a pattern of discrimination experienced by other minorities that is persistent within an industry or business.

Finally, once the size and scope of the challenges with respect to education and skills recognition is established and licensing and credentialing practices are leveled, there often will be gaps between what an immigrant knows and what is required for a given occupation. The post-secondary education system operates primarily on the basis of two models: 1) classes offered in a course catalog with pre-established timeframes and with course pre-requisites, and 2) courses that are customized to the specific needs of the workers or prospective workers of a specific business or industry cluster. However, for many professional workers, including those educated in the U.S., the challenge is access to an on-demand service that addresses the missing competencies needed to obtain the necessary credentials. The characteristics of an on-demand service that meet the accreditation criteria for adult education providers, the size and scope of the market for this service, the technological, curricular and instructional hurdles for on-demand service, the cost and price sensitivity for this service, and faculty acceptance and participation in an on-demand training and education service are all issues that must be addressed in any strategy for meeting the educational and training needs of unemployed and underemployed professionals.

Ultimately, much of the response to the problem of unrecognized learning rests largely at the state and local levels. States clearly have the primary role with respect to licensed professions and occupations. State legislatures and regulators, in cooperation with state professional associations and unions, are responsible for defining competencies, establishing reciprocity with other states, conferring admission to a profession, and determining the fitness of members to remain in the profession. Consequently, an early step in improving the flow of foreign-trained workers into the workforce is to engage all stakeholders in an examination of possible reforms to the state law and regulations.

Employer attitudes towards foreign-trained workers are also addressed locally. Although executives at multi-national firms making hiring decisions take their direction from headquarters offices and their peers within the industry, most employment is still at medium to small firms. It is here that the people making the hiring decisions take their cues from the colleagues within the industry, people they meet at the local Rotary club meeting or who are members at the local chamber. For example, we learned that key elements of the Nashville business

community took the lead in charting out practical solutions for bridging misunderstanding.

There are actions that can be taken at the national and federal level. At the national level, professional organizations and industry associations can support the development of international credentials that ease the migration of workers across boundaries. The states through their associations may improve reciprocity and reduce inconsistencies across borders through model or uniform laws, intergovernmental agreements and interstate compacts. Associations serving post-secondary education may also develop initiatives to address training and education gaps.

At the federal level, workforce investment and education programs may play important roles in easing the integration of high-skilled workers who are in the country because of family ties. Also, the federal government may smooth the transition by:

- Supporting the development of a systemic approach for ensuring that foreign-trained individuals receive fair and consistent assessments
- Identifying and disseminating effective practices and policies
- Convening local and state policymakers and stakeholders and encouraging greater congruity in local and state policies and practices
- Recognizing the certified accomplishments of foreign educated workers in credentialing initiatives of the Department of Labor and other federal agencies
- Recognizing the competencies of foreign educated workers related to federal occupational licenses and certifications
- Supporting the development of international conventions on occupational certifications.

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Support the development of a systemic approach for ensuring that foreign-trained individuals receive fair and consistent assessments
- ✓ Identify and disseminate effective practices and policies
- ✓ Convene local and state policymakers and stakeholders and encourage greater congruity in local and state policies and practices
- ✓ Recognize the certified accomplishments of foreign educated workers in credentialing initiatives of the Department of Labor and other federal agencies
- ✓ Recognize the competencies of foreign educated workers related to federal occupational licenses and certifications
- ✓ Support the development of international conventions on occupational certifications
- ✓ Communicate the educational and training requirements of high demand occupations to foreign-educated workers contemplating emigration to the United States

State

- ✓ Revise state licensing laws and occupational credentialing regulations to improve recognition of relevant validated competencies of foreign-educated workers
- ✓ Establish greater consistency between states of licensing laws and occupational credentialing regulations, especially with regard to the recognition of relevant validated competencies of foreign-educated workers. This may be accomplished through intergovernmental agreements, reciprocal licensing agreements, model and uniform state laws and interstate compacts
- ✓ Establish common policies regarding English fluency with respect to regulated or credentialed occupations

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Assist foreign-educated workers in obtaining independent validation of the competencies using appropriate assessments and third party services (e.g., World Education Services)
- ✓ Establish networking and job fairs for skilled and professional trained immigrants
- ✓ Assist employers in developing and implementing culturally inclusive workforce policies and practices
- ✓ Provide technical assistance on other employment related issues

Business, community and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Establish networking and job fairs for skilled and trained professional immigrants
- ✓ Encourage training of human resources personnel and managers making hiring decisions on culturally inclusive interview techniques, on assessing the resumes and qualifications of foreign educated workers, and on methods for reliably validating foreign credentials
- ✓ Assist in developing and implementing culturally inclusive workforce policies and practices
- ✓ Provide technical assistance on employment related issues

Education and training

- ✓ Recognize and understand the local market for foreign educated adults
- ✓ Develop assessments that establish the gaps between what individuals know and what they are required to know for the occupation associated with their education
- ✓ Develop new on-demand training and education services and distribution models

## **Lesson 4: Adult Education Is on the Front Line for Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Workers**

The impending loss of skilled workers in the United States due to retirements from the baby boom generation will increase pressures on the U.S. to expand the flow of high skilled immigrant workers. However, efforts to expand that flow will face growing international competition for skilled workers as a result of the rapidly aging workforces of other developed countries in Europe and Asia, increasing demand for highly educated and skilled workers in the rapidly expanding economies of China and India, and efforts by all countries to staunch brain drain. Typically, the market responses to labor and talent shortages fall into four categories:

- Improve the efficiency and efficacy of internal training and education systems to move a higher percentage of new entrants to the workforce and low skilled workers already in the workforce into high skilled jobs. In terms of domestic U.S. policy, this approach is essentially the basis for educational reforms that have been debated and put into policies and programs over the last 30 years
- Acquire talent that already is in the labor market – either in the U.S. or abroad. An example of this approach is better recognition of the skills and credentials of foreign-educated workers already in the U.S. Another possible approach is to pursue a skills-based immigration policy and to move away from a family reunification policy
- Move the jobs offshore to have the same skilled functions be performed by qualified workers earning lower wages
- Reduce and change the work being done by humans by introducing new technologies. This may include “smart” systems that do the work previously done by humans or technologies that “dumb down” the work so that the human function requires fewer skills and less expensive labor.

In light of the flow of less-skilled or low-skilled workers, a fifth possibility emerges: meet some of the demands for all levels of skilled work by moving these foreign-born workers more rapidly into high skilled jobs. Such a strategy will add new pressures on domestic adult education systems to bridge both literacy and skills gaps faced by many of these workers.

The existing adult education system is now designed as a “second chance” system to domestic primary and secondary education programs. In light of the great variety of education experiences of immigrants, the system, however, may need to serve as the primary education system for those with few opportunities in their countries of origin.

Such a change will present profound challenges to adult education. Many attending the community forums held in conjunction with this project argue that the current system is inadequate for the task. They note that curricula, even those targeted to the needs of low skilled workers, are inadequate for people who are illiterate. They note further that funding for ESOL is insufficient to meet demand, that there is a shortage of qualified ESOL teachers, and that the ESOL curriculum

is often grammar-based and not targeted to the occupational context. In addition, adult education funds used for services targeted to immigrants may be the subject of audit exceptions and that other sources of tuition support for adult learners, such as Pell grants, are not generally available.

However, the U.S. has some competitive advantages, especially when compared to more rigid adult technical education systems in Europe and Australia. At a recent conference on immigration hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, one presenter observed that the U.S. makes it much easier than other countries for people to enroll in training programs, to move into occupations of their choice, and to switch occupations when their interests change or when these occupations are no longer viable economically.

The adult education system is making efforts to address the challenges posed by immigrants. Community colleges comprise a significant part of the delivery system for ESOL. In addition, community colleges may play an active role in the design and implementation of bridge programs. The City Colleges of Chicago, for example, is a major partner in bridge programs in neighborhoods across city.

Although these efforts are commendable and have achieved important results, the adult education as it exists today is not structured particularly well to support a sustained and growing effort. It is a second chance system that is being asked to deal with primary level problems. Short of remaking the adult education system – an impossibility in the near-term – the more practical available strategy is to engage local educational leadership and the community in the development of programs and policies that address immediate problems such as English language acquisition and specific industry sector initiatives that address a defined range of skills and educational issues.

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Support research on challenges to traditional adult education models
- ✓ Support research on innovative systems for serving low-skill, low-literate native born and immigrant workers
- ✓ Further support development of initiatives on rapid up-skilling and re-skilling of workers
- ✓ Improve flexibility of adult education funds with respect to services to immigrants
- ✓ Support research on leveraging possible competitive advantages of the U.S. model of self-directed adult education

State

- ✓ Identify and address barriers to adult education
- ✓ Support development of and implement new models or expansion of existing models in serving low skilled immigrants and other low skilled workers

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Address barriers faced by immigrants in accessing core and intensive services
- ✓ Integrate ESL/VESL with basic skills and occupational training supported through pre-employment services and individual training accounts

Business, community, and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Develop and promote the development of innovative adult education models
- ✓ Develop and incorporate new learning models and delivery systems in employer-based, apprenticeship and union training programs

Education and training

- ✓ Develop and implement new models or expand existing successful models in serving low skilled immigrants and other low skilled workers
- ✓ Integrate ESL/VESL with basic skills and occupational training supported through pre-employment services and individual training accounts
- ✓ Develop and sustain new partnerships with non-traditional training and education providers (e.g., *plazas comunitarias*)

## **Lesson 5: Concerns about the Effects on Wages and Working Conditions Are First Addressed through Fair Application of Existing Labor Laws**

In addition to creating new funding resources and services, the public system must meet head-on the conflicts over resources and services and concerns over wages and working conditions. These conflicts are occurring with increasing frequency between immigrants and low-income native-born workers, especially between immigrant Latinos and African Americans. There is a growing perception that resources are being diverted to serve immigrants at the expense of low skill, low-wage native-born workers. Also, many fear that the growing availability of immigrants to fill low skill jobs is pushing down wages and is leading to a deterioration of working conditions. Experts attending the benchmarking and discovery forum, several participants at the community forums, panelists at the session on building acceptance at the metro-wide forum, and members of the project advisory committee suggested that these issues may be addressed through improvements in and better integration of services to all low-skill, low-wage workers and through business and community driven efforts to improve overall wages and working conditions.

Highly competitive conditions through increased globalization, product and service substitutions, changes in technologies, and changes in consumer behavior put significant pressures on businesses to hold down wages and operating costs. At the same time, the U.S. and other countries with advanced economies have established floors in terms of wages and acceptable working conditions that address public attitudes about fair use of labor. Once these floors are breached and unscrupulous employers victimize low-skill, low-wage workers, the effects are felt by the workers employed by those businesses, other low-skill, low-wage workers in the same labor market, and by businesses that choose to play by the rules.

Regardless of federal immigration policy and whatever policy a community or state pursues with respect to unauthorized immigrants, the equitable and fair enforcement of laws and policies with respect to wages and working conditions will help to ensure fair treatment and prevent the exploitation of all workers. Consequently, all workers should be assured access to authorities charged with the responsibility of enforcing wage, hours, and safety laws. In addition, community and peer pressure should be brought to bear on employers that obviously exploit their workforce, especially immigrant workers who may not know or understand their rights. Finally, those communities that make available services irrespective of immigrant status should be careful to provide equal and fair access to these services to all residents.

Endeavors such as the Building New American Communities project point to the lack of a national immigrant integration strategy and the challenge communities face in trying to develop strategies of their own. This is particularly complicated by the growing dispersal of immigrant communities to states and localities with relatively little recent history of settling newcomers. While two thirds of all

immigrants still live in the traditional gateway states of California, New York, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois, the number of immigrants in these states grew by only 31 percent during the 1990s. In contrast, the number of immigrants in the ten states with the highest growth of the immigrant population increased by 61 percent during the same period.<sup>44</sup> These ten states, with the rate of growth ranging from 135 to 274 percent, are Kentucky, Colorado, Arizona, Nebraska, Tennessee, Utah, Arkansas, Nevada, Georgia, and North Carolina. Moreover, the immigrant population in these new-growth states is disproportionately made up of recent arrivals, with almost 60 percent arriving since 1990.<sup>45</sup> These high-growth communities have limited experience and infrastructure, such as bilingual staff and culturally competent services, for settling newcomer families. In addition, many of the institutions that can assist in the integration of immigrants, such as community-based organizations and government agencies, are still being developed to address new or growing needs.<sup>46</sup>

The Building New American Communities project final report identifies the myriad of partners involved in comprehensive integration efforts:

Engaging the resources of several levels of government and their agencies, businesses, private organizations and a broad spectrum of community-based partners is an intensive and demanding way to build social policy, but it is one that will be tied to local conditions and needs. It is also one that by its very nature demands a tolerance for variation in policy objectives, program development and delivery across the nation. Such a collaborative policy approach, if differentiated, is absolutely essential in this period of high and highly diverse immigration.<sup>47</sup>

Reflecting this community-wide approach, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees recommends to funders that they support workforce development programs that forge “multi-sector partnerships among employers, unions, community groups, faith-based organizations, and government.”<sup>48</sup>

### ***The Question of Competition Between New Arrivals and Native Born***

The economic effects of immigration on the U.S. economy and its consumers, workers, and businesses is complicated and is affected both the numbers and characteristics of the immigrants, as well as the complex ways in which labor and product markets adjust to immigration. The economic effects on different groups of natives and different regions also vary greatly.<sup>49</sup>

Citing a vast array of empirical studies on the wage effect of migration, Dustman et al. find that the common consensus of most regarding this work is that “the impact of immigration on wages and employment in local labor markets is, if at

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<sup>44</sup> Fix and Passel 2003

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>47</sup> Ray 2004

<sup>48</sup> Moran and Petsod 2004

<sup>49</sup> Committee for Economic Development 2001



all, modest.”<sup>50</sup> Lalonde and Topel (1991) found that “increased immigration reduces the wages and earnings of immigrants and their close substitutes, though in our view the effects are not large” and that “Labor market effects on non-immigrants appear to be quantitatively unimportant.”<sup>51</sup>

The Committee for Economic Development *Reforming Immigration: Helping Meet America's Need for a Skilled Workforce* finds that on the whole, immigration provides a net economic benefit to U.S. natives because the contribution of immigrant labor to U.S. output and income is greater than just the earnings of the immigrants themselves; this additional income accrues to the U.S. economy in the form of lower prices to consumers, higher wages to workers with complementary skills, and/or higher returns to land and capital.<sup>52</sup>

However, the Committee for Economic Development (CED) report also points out that “Immigration produces both economic winners and losers, and their total gains and losses are substantially larger than the small net benefit found by combining them.” It further states that “[t]hese gains and losses can be quite important to particular groups of workers, consumers, industries, and regions, even though they also are small in relation to the economy as a whole.” The report cites differences in the impact of highly skilled versus lower skilled immigrants.

### *Highly skilled workers*

The Committee for Economic Development report argues that highly skilled workers improve the U.S. economy and encourage the allure of the U.S. as a center for research and development that attracts entrepreneurs who can make large economic contributions. The authors note two reservations to the generally positive impacts of skilled immigrants. The first is their potential to hold in check the wages of native workers with similar skills. In weaker labor markets, such restraining effects on the wages of skilled workers could be problematic, although they also tend to mitigate the recent national increase in earnings inequality. The second concern is the incentive provided to employers to seek new employees, including immigrants, rather than retrain other native workers. The report cites that although this view has only anecdotal support, it is held and expressed forcefully by many advocates of IT workers.<sup>53</sup>

### *Lower skilled workers*

Countering the point that immigrants willing to work for lower wages reduces the costs of goods and services, CED reports that these results “come at the very considerable cost of reducing wages for unskilled workers generally in the U.S. economy, thereby adding to the downward pressure on the earnings of low-income Americans that has become a prominent and problematic feature of a labor market increasingly demanding more skills.” Any downward influence on

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<sup>50</sup> See Borjas 1994, 1999, or Friedberg and Hunt 1995 for an overview. Most of these studies relate to the US. See for example, Altonji and Card 1991; Borjas, Freeman and Katz 1996; Card 1990, Card 2001; Kuhn and Wooton 1991; Lalonde and Topel 1991 (in Dustman et al)

<sup>51</sup> In Dustman et al.

<sup>52</sup> Committee for Economic Development 2001

<sup>53</sup> CED 2001

wages however is difficult to determine due to the wide dispersal of immigrant workers and the geographical movement of labor and capital. These changes diffuse the economic effects of immigration from high-immigration localities across the national economy, making them difficult to measure directly.

The wage effect of low-skilled immigrant workers seems most detrimental to those without a high school diploma<sup>54</sup> or equivalent and on areas with a high concentration of earlier immigrants.<sup>55</sup> The CED report points to the long-term benefit of immigrants in that “[a]s immigrants assimilate they earn more, pay more in taxes, and draw less heavily on some public services. Expenditures on immigrant children are investments in human capital that can produce future benefits, both in higher productivity and wages and in social assimilation.” The writers are careful to note that the return on investment to human capital depends largely on educational attainment of immigrant children. The ratio of return on investment is likely to be greater for the national economy versus the state and local due to proportional costs of education and public benefit provision.

### *Mexicans in Chicago*

Examining the progress of US-born children of immigrants, while important, was beyond the scope of this project.<sup>56</sup> However, certain findings related to Mexican immigrants and next generations in Chicago warrant reporting in this context. Paral and Ready in 2005 report that US-born Mexican Americans in metro Chicago who lack a high school degree have lost ground in real terms and in comparison to Mexican immigrants with a similar level of education. The median household income for US-born persons of Mexican origin who have not completed high school fell during the 1990s, so much so that by the end of the decade it was 20 percent lower than that of households headed by comparably educated Mexican-born residents of the area. Over a quarter of US-born Mexican Americans have less than a high school education.<sup>57</sup>

Another recent study that examined Mexicans in Chicago found that educated Mexicans eventually converge in occupational status with U.S.-born Hispanic counterparts and non-Hispanic Whites with the same level of education. However, less-educated Mexican immigrants will never reach the occupational status of U.S.-born Hispanics or non-Hispanic Whites. This group is likely to start and remain in occupations that are distinct from those of U.S.-born Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites. Toussaint-Comeau suggests that recent proposals to provide legal admission status to Mexican immigrants would therefore not harm non-Hispanic Whites, particularly from an occupational status perspective. The fact that Hispanic immigrants tend to be occupationally segregated into a distinct set of occupations likely mutes the effect of increased immigration on the wages

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<sup>54</sup> Borjas, Freeman, and Katz (1997) found that immigration increased the wage differential between high school dropouts and other workers by 3-6 percentage points during 1980–1995, accounting for roughly one-quarter to one-half of the large increase in that gap from 30 percent to 41 percent during that period.

<sup>55</sup> Greenwood and Tienda 1997

<sup>56</sup> See the following report for a comprehensive overview of policies and practices in serving immigrant youth: Morse, Ann. A Look at Immigrant Youth: Prospects and Promising Practices (March 2005). Children’s Policy Initiative – A Collaborative Project on Children and Family Issues. National Conference of State Legislatures.

<sup>57</sup> Paral and Ready 2005

of natives.<sup>58</sup> While this mitigates the potential for negative wage effects, it does pose serious questions as to what roadblocks prevent less educated Mexicans from ever ‘catching up’ economically or educationally.

### *Immigrant clusters*

The potential for a downward push on wages caused by clustering of immigrants in certain occupations is highlighted in a recent report from the Pew Hispanic Center. According to the Latino Labor Report, 2004, Hispanic<sup>59</sup> workers enjoyed significant gains in employment in 2004. But the concentration of Latinos in relatively low-skill occupations contributed to reduced earnings for them for the second year in a row. No other major group of workers has suffered a two-year decline in wages. Recently arrived Hispanic immigrants were a leading source of new workers to the economy but also among the principal recipients of wage cuts in 2004. The report explains that while the economic recovery in 2004 added many new jobs for Latinos and non-Latinos alike, it did little to reduce the differences between them in their occupational distributions. In furthering the divergent paths of the low and high wage economies, the report points out that “Job growth for Hispanics and whites, the two largest groups of workers in the economy, occurred mostly in different occupational clusters and they appeared to be on separate paths in the labor market.”<sup>60</sup>

The vast majority of new jobs for Hispanic workers were in relatively low-skill occupations calling for little other than a high school education. In contrast, non-Hispanic workers secured large increases in employment in higher-skill occupations requiring at least some college education. This polarization contributed to a growing gap in earnings between Hispanic and non-Hispanic workers. Kochhar finds that the fall in wages for Latinos was greatest among immigrants who arrived in the United States in the past five years. Thus, the new immigrants who are enjoying significant growth in employment are doing so at the expense of lower wages, with seemingly no upward mobility. Thus, despite strong demand for immigrant workers, their growing supply and concentration in certain occupations suggests that the newest arrivals are competing with each other in the labor market to their own detriment.<sup>61</sup> Card in 2001 reported, however, that “even for workers in the bottom of the skill distribution, I find relatively modest employment effects of recent immigrant inflows in all but a few high - immigrant cities.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Toussaint-Comeau 2004

<sup>59</sup> Note: “Hispanic” is a term referring to an ethnic group and does not imply, when left unmodified, a country of origin (e.g., United States, Mexico, Argentina, etc.).

<sup>60</sup> Kochhar 2005

<sup>61</sup> Kochhar 2005

<sup>62</sup> Dustman et al 2003

## ***Unauthorized Immigrants***<sup>63</sup>

Unauthorized immigration has an effect on communities in that it undermines the ‘rule of law’ that is a necessary component of our society. The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations “Keeping the Promise” Task Force believes that there is an increasing disconnect between law and reality in immigration:

When many otherwise law-abiding individuals are breaking the law because legal mechanisms are insufficient or delayed, when there is little fear of retribution for doing so, and when many who are eligible to become fully incorporated into society are not doing so, then, as a country based on the rule of law, policymakers and the American public must revisit whether the laws themselves make sense. Only by realigning immigration laws and policies can the system regain its integrity and also become a tool for responding to changing social, economic, and security realities. While some of the challenges are not new, the combination of security challenges, economic imperatives, and the growing credibility gap differentiate this period from others and argue urgently for change.

### *Facts and figures*

- Following several years of steady growth, the number of unauthorized residents reached an estimated 10.3 million in March 2004 with unauthorized Mexicans numbering 5.9 million or 57 percent of the total
- About 80 to 85 percent of the migration from Mexico in recent years has been unauthorized
- Since the mid-1990s, arrivals of unauthorized migrants have exceeded arrivals of legal immigrants
- Since the mid-1990s, the most rapid growth in the number of unauthorized migrants has been in states that previously had relatively small foreign-born populations
- Almost two-thirds (68 percent) of the unauthorized population lives in just eight states: California (24 percent), Texas (14 percent), Florida (9 percent), New York (7 percent), Arizona (5 percent), Illinois (4 percent), New Jersey (4 percent), and North Carolina (3 percent). The appearance of Arizona and

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<sup>63</sup> Fix and Passel define "Undocumented immigrants" as those who do not fall into legal categories of Legal permanent residents, refugees, asylees and parolees, or legal temporary residents. Two groups account for most undocumented immigrants: (a) those who entered the country without valid documents, including people crossing the Southwestern border clandestinely; and (b) those who entered with valid visas but overstayed their visas' expiration or otherwise violated the terms of their admission. Fix and Passel use the term "undocumented immigrants" but they are also referred to elsewhere as unauthorized migrants, illegal immigrants, illegal aliens, and undocumented aliens. In his June 2005 report, Passel uses the term "unauthorized migrant" to mean a person who resides in the United States, but who is not a U.S. citizen, has not been admitted for permanent residence, and is not in a set of specific authorized temporary statuses permitting longer-term residence and work. He explains that the term "unauthorized migrant" best encompasses the population in his data because many migrants now enter the country or work using counterfeit documents and thus are not really "undocumented," in the sense that they have documents, but not completely legal documents. While many will stay permanently in the United States, unauthorized migrants are more likely to leave the country than other groups, thus the term "migrant" rather than "immigrant" to highlight this distinction.

North Carolina on this list highlights another recent trend. In the past, the foreign-born population, both legal and unauthorized, was highly concentrated. But, since the mid-1990s, the most rapid growth in the immigrant population in general and the unauthorized population in particular has taken place in new settlement areas where the foreign-born had previously been a relatively small presence<sup>64</sup>

- The rapid growth and spreading of the unauthorized population has been the principal driver of growth in the geographic diversification for the total immigrant population into the new settlement states such as Arizona, North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee.

### *Chicago*

Lewis and Paral's 2004 survey of the unauthorized in Chicago found that the unauthorized comprise 30 to 39 percent of all foreign-born in Illinois, and 5 percent of the Chicago labor market. The 400,000 unauthorized immigrants in Illinois account for 6 percent of the nation's illegal immigrant population. There is a 96 percent labor force participation rate for unauthorized immigrant men, which is higher than legal immigrants and native-born workers. Two thirds of unauthorized immigrants earn less than twice the minimum wage compared with one-third of all workers. The study found that 30 percent of unauthorized workers work in restaurant-related, hand-packing and assembly, and janitorial and cleaning jobs, with an average median hourly wage of \$7.00.<sup>65</sup> The University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Urban Economic Development study further found that the consumer expenditures of unauthorized immigrants in the Chicago MSA generate more than 31,000 jobs in the local economy and add \$5.45 billion annually to the gross regional product. Their survey results indicate that 70 percent of unauthorized workers pay taxes.

### *Educational attainment*

Immigrants in general, but especially the unauthorized are considerably more likely than natives to have very low levels of education. For example, fewer than 2 percent of natives have less than a 9th grade education, but 15 percent of legal immigrants and 32 percent of unauthorized migrants have this little education. Fifteen percent of the unauthorized population has at least a college degree and another 10 percent have some college.<sup>66</sup>

### *Limited economic progress*

Unauthorized workers are conspicuously sparse in white-collar occupations compared with natives. "Management, business, and professional occupations" and "sales and administrative support occupations" account for over half of native workers (52 percent) but less than one-quarter of unauthorized workers (23 percent). On the other hand, unauthorized migrants are much more likely to be in broad occupation groups that require little education or do not have licensing

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<sup>64</sup> Passel 2005

<sup>65</sup> Lewis and Paral 2004

<sup>66</sup> Passel 2005

requirements. The share of unauthorized who work in agricultural occupations and construction and extractive occupations is about three times the share of native workers in these types of jobs.<sup>67</sup>

Unauthorized immigrants are ineligible for most federally funded training programs and must depend on a patchwork of local and state-funded adult education programs for English acquisition and vocational training. Their limited access to such programs is troubling given that unauthorized immigrant adults are more likely than other immigrants to lack English proficiency and educational attainment.<sup>68</sup> Because many unauthorized immigrants live in “mixed-status families,” which have at least one immigrant parent and one U.S. citizen child, these restrictive eligibility requirements have broad and harmful consequences for a significant number of family members who either have legal permanent status or U.S. citizenship. Such families, for example, will be more reluctant to seek health services or report crimes, fearful of the potential impact on their unauthorized members.<sup>69</sup>

Immigration status plays a central role in keeping many unauthorized workers in poverty. Without legal status, they have little choice but to remain in jobs that pay minimum wage or below, with few or no benefits such as health insurance or pensions. These jobs are frequently part-time or seasonal, forcing immigrants to string together several jobs at one time to support their families. And working conditions are often dangerous or unhealthy.<sup>70</sup> Compounding these issues is the factor that their legal status may make it hard for unauthorized workers to take part in workplace actions such as unionization drives.<sup>71</sup>

### *Immigrant safety*

Both legal and non-legal immigrants face exploitation in the workplace, particularly if they cannot speak English well or at all, including: workplace health and safety problems; violation of overtime, wage and hour regulations, requirements for scheduling of breaks; and violation of anti-discrimination and anti-retaliation rules. Additionally, immigrants often fear governmental institutions and may hesitate to report violations even when they can.

Lacking knowledge of the American workplace, immigrants can often fall victim to unsafe work conditions. Immigrants often lack the personal security and knowledge to report workplace violations to proper authorities. Temporary agencies also turn increasingly to immigrants to fill low-wage temporary jobs. While these agencies provide opportunities for employment to unskilled immigrants lacking in English skills, that employment rarely leads directly to full-time work and working conditions can be unhealthy.<sup>72</sup>

Methods to increase the safety of unauthorized immigrants include the use of the matricula consular. The governor of Illinois recently signed into law a measure

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Capps, Fix et. al., 2003

<sup>69</sup> Martinez and Wang 2005

<sup>70</sup> Moran and Petsod 2004

<sup>71</sup> Lewis and Paral 2001

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

requiring state and local governments to officially recognize these identification cards issued by foreign consulates and used by immigrants.<sup>73</sup> Often, but not exclusively, unauthorized immigrant Mexicans use the cards. They can be used to open bank accounts, establish credit or help prove identity.

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Address barriers preventing proper enforcement of federal labor laws
- ✓ Support continued research on the full range of effects of all immigrants on national, state and local economies and labor markets

State

- ✓ Address barriers preventing proper enforcement of federal and state labor laws
- ✓ Support continued research on the full range of effects of all immigrants on state and local economies and labor markets

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Develop and support initiatives promoting proper enforcement of federal and state labor laws
- ✓ Support continued research on the full range of effects of all immigrants on local economies and labor markets
- ✓ Support the development of leadership within immigrant groups and involve the leadership in efforts supporting the proper enforcement of federal and state labor laws

Business, community and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Support continued research on the full range of effects of all immigrants on national, state and local economies and labor markets
- ✓ Promote community awareness of the adverse economic and social consequences of employment discrimination experienced by immigrants
- ✓ Support the development of leadership within immigrant groups and of new models for advancing achievements in immigrant rights

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<sup>73</sup> Associated Press 2005

## **Lesson 6: Effective Immigrant Integration Policies and Programs are Fundamentally Local and State Based and Must Engage All Parts of the Workforce System**

Unless and until there is a clear resolution on a comprehensive immigration policy, and in light of the fact that there is no comprehensive *immigrant* policy (except to the extent that there are resettlement programs for refugees and asylees), states and communities will carry a large portion of the burden for developing their own policies, practices and programs for successfully integrating immigrant workers in the community. This will create an especially challenging time for the public workforce system inasmuch as it will have to develop significant resources beyond that which are available through the federal system. Even if there is improved flexibility on the use of federal money, an expansion on the uses of these resources may cause new conflicts especially when it is perceived to lead to a diminution of services to non-immigrant workers. Consequently, the demand for new and flexible resources at all levels for ESOL, basic literacy and occupational training programs will compel the public systems at the state and local levels to develop novel ways for funding and delivering needed services.

Inasmuch as the solutions are local, communities must develop their own expert understanding of the conditions driving changes in the local labor market. Outside experts offer perspective and an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who are addressing similar issues. However, local areas must develop their own experts who understand local economic conditions, the area culture and history, and community decision-making processes. This may be accomplished by engaging local applied research institutions to examine the economic and demographic profile of the community and of the immigrants settling in the area. This is essential in bridging misunderstandings that are created by virtue of the absence of hard information. For example, the University of North Carolina was able to provide an initial calculation on the economic impact of “the Hispanic population on the State of North Carolina.” This study was especially interesting in that it balanced perceived costs in social support services against the economic contributions made by the community as a whole.

There are several key elements that will lead to the development of successful immigrant integration policies and programs:

### ***Identify new untapped resources and develop new ones***

In light of static or declining funding in traditional workforce development programs, workforce systems at the local, regional and state levels are facing the unenviable task of serving more people with fewer dollars. This is especially true in communities that continue to face economic dislocations in manufacturing and other globally challenged industries. States and municipalities however have it in their power to allocate resources of their own to support training, a portion of which may be used to support the development of immigrants residing in the jurisdiction. In addition, private givers and foundations may be interested in targeted programs that focus on integration – addressing a long-standing



reluctance of many organizations to target special groups. The argument here is that integration is aimed at incorporating a group in the general population.

### ***Encourage development of immigrant leadership***

One of the more provocative statements made at a community forum was that of a local business owner citing the need for more leaders in the suburban Mexican community. He reasoned that improved leadership would lead to more effective advocacy in behalf of the community, better living and working conditions, improved wages, and a more effective voice on immigrant and immigration issues. It appears that ethnic neighborhoods in traditional gateway cities have well-established systems for growing leaders within the community. These systems either do not exist or are now just being established in new gateway areas, the suburbs and in rural areas. Efforts such as those by Enlaces America to train emerging leaders should be supported. In addition, community organizations, unions and civic and educational institutions should expand their own community leadership development initiatives to include immigrants.

### ***Improve access to transportation, housing, banking and daycare***

We heard from workforce professionals, immigrant-serving organizations, businesses operating within immigrant communities, and from immigrants and refugees themselves that housing, banking, transportation and daycare each pose formidable challenges. This is consistent with the experiences of all low income workers, but made more difficult because of such factors as: the lack of familiarity of housing markets; cultural differences (including distrust of banks); problems in obtaining drivers' licenses, motor vehicles, automobile insurance; problems in obtaining credit at reasonable rates; difficulty in finding affordable daycare that is available during second or third work shifts (often the least desirable work times, and therefore the times that many immigrants find available work).

There have been significant new efforts aimed at addressing some of these issues. In May 2003 in Chicago, the New Alliance Task Force under the leadership of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Mexican consulate have opened a broad array of banking services and products to recent immigrants. As a result of the work of the task force, many banks now accept alternative forms of identification such as the matricula consular and the individual tax identification number. The resulting services include such things as financial education programs, dual ATM cards, wire transfers, stored value cards, other remittances services and mortgages.

Some community organizations have initiated efforts to open access to essential services. For example, the Latin Community Organization (LCO) in Malvern, Arkansas, is offering membership photo identification cards to area Latino immigrants. Prospective members may join the LCO for a \$10 fee and upon attending orientation and civic responsibility classes. Once their identities are verified, they are issued a photo i.d. that carries the endorsement of local police and fire agencies as well as the Arkansas New Americans Resource Network. The i.d. also displays the logos of sponsoring businesses and banks and is accepted by

these and other organizations as identification of the bearer, although it is clearly stated that it is not a government issued identification card. As a result, the card has opened access to a variety of key services to immigrant residents. It is also important to note that this identification card initiative was in part the result of a tragic circumstance wherein local officials were frustrated in their efforts to notify the next of kin of the death of an unidentified immigrant found in the community.

### ***Encourage the development of immigrant entrepreneurs***

One avenue into work for skilled immigrants may be entrepreneurship. However, Aronson in “Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Research Perspectives on Migration” explains that little is known about the immigrant entrepreneur and what is known, is widely debated. Consequently it is difficult to determine how many jobs are actually created and of what sort.

Lewis and Paral find that entrepreneurship is a key factor in the economic development of immigrants and their communities in Illinois. The number of Asian-owned businesses in Illinois grew by 353 percent between 1982 and 1997, and the number of Latino-owned businesses increased by 528 percent. By 1997 there were approximately 37,000 Asian-owned and 31,000 Latino-owned businesses in the state.<sup>74</sup> In the U.S. in every decennial census from 1880 to 1990, immigrants were more likely to be self-employed than natives<sup>75</sup>.

There are great variations in the self-employment rates of different immigrant and ethnic groups. Researchers disagree about the reasons for this variation, with some proposing that it is the result of the human or financial capital of individual immigrants, and others suggesting that immigrant communities are themselves differential sources of entrepreneurial energy.<sup>76</sup> In her report on immigrant entrepreneurs in Chicago, Tienda states that “the proliferation of immigrant-owned business enterprises spawned a plethora of studies to address why rates of self-employment are higher among foreign-born compared to non-immigrant co-ethnics, and why some groups (e.g. Koreans and Cubans) are more successful establishing small businesses than others (e.g. Mexicans and Filipinos), including African Americans (Light and Sanchez, 1987; Waldinger and Aldrich, 1990; Light and Rosenstein, 1995; Rajjman, 1996).” It may be difficult to capture adequately the extent to which ethnic groups are involved in entrepreneurship as many begin and continue their establishments in the informal sector and thus under the radar. Tienda recommends that policy might play a role in formalizing this work by providing information about how to establish a business, how to obtain necessary financing, how to arrange for legal transactions, and further to provide economic supports that enhance the longevity of ethnic business concerns.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Lewis and Paral 2001

<sup>75</sup> Aronson 1997

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Tienda 2001

### *Functions of immigrant business*

Light claims that the income derived from ‘ethnic economies’ is “especially valuable for those otherwise most disadvantaged in the general labor market by dint of low education, poor health, lack of English language skill, lack of child care, exclusion from mainstream social networks, ethno-religious discrimination, or racism.”<sup>78</sup>

In addition, the ethnic economies support the acquisition of co-ethnics’ future income by training participants in workplace skills. Ethnic economies strengthen the human capital of immigrants and low-income ethnic minorities in two ways.

- First, ethnic economies educate future ethnic entrepreneurs. Large ethnic economies generate many people who may later develop a business of their own, but small enterprises also teach future entrepreneurs their trade
- Second, ethnic economies offer a second-tier labor market in which co-ethnics disadvantaged in the general labor market can acquire employment skills. Once these skills are acquired, they can find employment in the mainstream, presumably at higher wages.

As a result, it appears that the process of acquiring valuable work skills in the first place requires foreign workers to access an ethnic economy, often thanks to informal social ties and foreign language skills.<sup>79</sup>

In order to support immigrant entrepreneurship, the government, local chambers of commerce, and business assistance centers can provide additional targeted information to immigrant communities about how to establish a business, how to obtain necessary financing, and how to arrange for legal transactions. Marketing can help make immigrant businesses more aware of programs that already exist. Lewis and Paral further suggest that the government should provide additional technical assistance to immigrant-owned businesses, particularly in the areas of dealing with zoning, licensing, marketing and financing.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Light 2001

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Lewis and Paral 2001

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Support the development of a comprehensive federal immigrant workforce integration policy
- ✓ Support initiatives addressing access to transportation, housing, banking and daycare
- ✓ Encourage entrepreneurship by immigrants and minorities

State

- ✓ Support the development of a comprehensive state immigrant workforce integration policy
- ✓ Identify and support the application and expansion of state workforce development resources that lead to the successful integration of immigrants in the workplace
- ✓ Support the development of integrated services supporting all workers while recognizing the special needs of immigrants with respect to ESL/VESL and basic skills
- ✓ Support initiatives addressing access to transportation, housing, banking and daycare
- ✓ Encourage entrepreneurship by immigrants and minorities

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Engage the community in the development of a comprehensive local immigrant workforce integration policy
- ✓ Engage local foundations, corporate givers and local governments in the development of new and expanded resources in workforce development and supporting the integration of immigrants in the workplace
- ✓ Support the development of integrated services supporting all workers while recognizing the special needs of immigrants with respect to ESL/VESL and basic skills
- ✓ Support initiatives addressing access to transportation, housing, banking and daycare
- ✓ Encourage entrepreneurship by immigrants and minorities

Business, community and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Increase foundation and corporate giver support for immigrant workforce integration initiatives
- ✓ Business and unions: Support community giving to community and faith-based initiatives that are tied to immigrant workforce integration
- ✓ Support initiatives addressing access to transportation, housing, banking and daycare
- ✓ Encourage entrepreneurship by immigrants and minorities

Education and training

- ✓ Expand training and technical assistance services on entrepreneurship

## **Lesson 7: Integration is a Long-term Process Requiring Continuous Measurement and Improvement**

Finally, there is no short-term solution or quick fix to the challenges of successful workplace integration. Differences in skills, languages, customs, culture, the availability of human and financial resources, the attitudes of the receiving community, the policies and practices of employing businesses, and the capacity of public institutions and the education system all contribute to the long-term nature of the process. It is this issue of long-term engagement that also undermines effective public policies and programs. The public's desire for immediate results, two-year and four-year election cycles, shifting demands for limited resources, and changes in public priorities all work against effective long-term programs and policies. The only effective way for countering these tendencies and to build long-term support and investment is to develop fair and understandable metrics that will help to mark progress.

Although program level measures are necessary, they are insufficient. They provide good information on system throughput (e.g., the number of individuals successfully completing an ESOL class per quarter), capacity (e.g., students per instructor), and short-term outcomes (e.g., successful engagement in work and 90 continuous employment).

The policy questions that need to be answered are at the macro-level. Are businesses growing profitably? Is worker productivity and safety improving? Are workers wages increasing and is the wealth of the community growing? Are families starting in low-wage work reaching self-sufficiency? While these are all questions with profound implications for businesses and residents of a community, the metrics used to measure these effects are less well developed than program level measures. However, they are not out of the question, either.

Illinois asserted its leadership with respect to measurement of its workforce development efforts when, in 2003 it passed Public Act 093-0331 which required of its Workforce Board the following:

(b-5) The Board shall implement a method for measuring the progress of the State's workforce development system by using specified benchmarks. Those benchmarks are: (i) the educational level of working adults; (ii) the percentage of the adult workforce in education and training; (iii) adult literacy; (iv) the percentage of high school graduates transitioning to education or training; (v) the high school dropout rate; (vi) the number of youth transitioning from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9th grade; (vii) the percentage of individuals and families at economic self-sufficiency; (viii) the average growth in pay; (ix) net job growth; and (x) productivity per employee.

The Board shall identify the most significant early indicators for each benchmark, establish a mechanism to collect data and track the benchmarks on an annual basis, and then use the results to set

goals for each benchmark, to inform planning, and to ensure the effective use of State resources. (Effective January 2004.)

Although these are not easy measures, the Board recognized that the workforce system needed to be focused on these results. The same holds true with respect to the question of immigrant integration. The path towards a constructive discussion on whether integration is successful requires that appropriate measures are in place and routinely examined with respect to both results and adequacy.

There are a several measures that communities may implement in the early going. The choice as to which measure should be used will depend on the policy objectives determined by the community. One is to monitor wage growth beyond the usual 90 days for wage earners within immigrant households that receive workforce services. This will provide a rough gauge as to whether families are earning enough income to achieve self-sufficiency. Other indicators are the rate of home ownership in immigrant neighborhoods (a measure of accumulated wealth), changes in sales tax receipts within an immigrant community (a measure of consumption), changes in profits or retained earnings by businesses employing immigrants (employer surveys), changes in rework or return products by businesses employing immigrants (improved quality), etc. In addition, it is possible to also monitor the growth of businesses that cater to immigrant populations, changes in the mix of businesses serving all populations within the community, changes in educational performance of immigrant children and first generation Americans.

*Ideas for Action Items*

Federal

- ✓ Initiate development of data collection methods and metrics for determining the success of workforce initiatives at the levels of the employer, workers and communities

State

- ✓ Support development of data collection methods and metrics for determining the success of workforce initiatives at the levels of the employer, workers and communities

Local WIB/Workforce Agencies

- ✓ Convene open conversations with members of the immigrant community, employers, unions, educators, community organizations, immigrant-serving groups, and policy makers on the economic and social goals and objectives of the community
- ✓ Develop quantitative and qualitative measures that may be used to assess progress towards community goals and objectives

Business, community and faith-based groups, unions

- ✓ Support and convene open conversations with members of the immigrant community, employers, unions, educators, community organizations, immigrant-serving groups, and policy makers on the economic and social goals and objectives of the community

## **Final Observation**

This exploration on the integration of immigrants in the workplace is a beginning. Although each of the lessons learned from this project are supported by research and experience, there remain huge gaps in both knowledge and practice that can be addressed by only further, systematic work in the field. Although large-scale national and regional initiatives can help bridge this gap, the bulk of work must be done locally through consortia of community organizations, educational and training institutions, businesses, union, ethnic-serving organizations, government policy makers and research institutions. In addition to providing local leadership with a guide on what steps they may take in launching effective workplace integration efforts, we want all to use this work in the development of innovative solutions based on their own independent examination of the challenges.

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