



WORKFORCE COLLABORATIONS BUILD A SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Examples from
THE NETWORKS FOR INTEGRATING NEW AMERICANS INITIATIVE

How can workforce development agencies and adult education programs work together to strengthen each other's services to immigrant language learners? This fact sheet describes how community networks in three different parts of the country answered this question. Each one received support to build its collaborative work through the Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative.

THE ROLE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Immigrants and their children will account for 85% of the net growth in the U.S. workforce over the next 20 years; by 2030, nearly one in five U.S. workers will be immigrant (Myers, Levy & Pitkin, 2013). In light of an increasing demand for skilled workers, ensuring that immigrants can capitalize on their current education and experience while acquiring additional and necessary education and training is paramount to the nation's prosperity. This workforce development system, which includes federally-funded employment services and an array of education and training providers, is responsible for ensuring that supports are in place to make such services accessible to language learners. This system includes adult education and is coordinated by employer-driven workforce development boards. As adult educators and workforce development providers collaborate more closely, the latter are able to better understand the capacity and needs of the newcomer labor pool and to communicate the basic requirements of current and future jobs.

THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION

The federally-funded adult education system serves the language, academic, and work readiness needs of the country's adult residents. Among these are immigrants and refugees who vary by level of formal education, age, learning goals, and length of time in the United States. Adult English programs are among the first entities that orient immigrants to their new home community and provide a pathway to economic integration through education and training. While even the least educated immigrants have a high rate of participation in the labor force, their poverty rate is roughly 30 percent higher than that of the U.S.-born adults (National Academy of Sciences, 2015). In the short-term, immigrants need English instruction, work readiness skills preparation, and job placement assistance. To move ahead beyond their first job in the U.S., most immigrants need further education and training, an understanding of the local labor market, and knowledge of how to pursue the most viable career pathway. Collaboration with the workforce development system positions adult education to become a stronger partner in that system. It enables adult education programs to understand employer needs and develop programming that most effectively prepares immigrant job seekers for living-wage jobs.

NETWORKS FOR INTEGRATING NEW AMERICANS

The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) funded the Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative to advance the capacity of local networks to support the civic, linguistic, and economic integration of immigrants and refugees. The networks in this initiative tapped into further support from the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to help workforce development providers, libraries, and federally-funded adult education programs enhance skills, literacy, employability, and quality of life for low-skilled immigrants and refugees. The three examples in this fact sheet illustrate the potential of such networks to advance the economic integration of immigrants by engaging employers and other workforce partners.



*Pharmacist, Rasha Alzaidi,
Global Talent Idaho graduate.*

THE NETWORKS

The Neighbors United Network helps refugees successfully integrate and thrive in Boise, Idaho. Many of these refugees are highly skilled degree holders who arrived with credentials and training but with limited English proficiency and no clear path to reclaim their careers. Because Boise already has well-established systems for placing refugees with limited formal education in entry-level jobs, the network decided to focus its attention on the growing percentage of educated refugees for whom job placement needs to be more specialized. Global Talent Idaho (GTI) was launched to facilitate the economic integration of such high-skilled immigrants and refugees by getting them on paths related to their fields of expertise.

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The We Rhode Island Network (WeRIN) focuses its efforts on addressing the economic integration needs of lower skilled immigrant adults who are looking for entry-level work. The network uses the public library system as a hub for services that build job readiness, digital literacy, and the English language skills needed for employment. The network brings together adult education providers with the Providence Public Library to host a Jobs Club for adult language learners.

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The Lancaster County Refugee Coalition (LCRC) in Pennsylvania was established to ensure that refugees successfully integrate with dignity and respect, and to build career pathways for them whether they have limited education or college degrees. The network focused on building relationships among adult education providers, workforce development agencies, one-stop career centers, and employers in order to address gaps in local career pathways for immigrants.

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“Be visible and build name recognition. Use social media to get the word out about what you’re doing and share data to build awareness.”
(Tim Shenk, IU13 Adult Education)

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The networks found that their cross-agency collaboration improved the system of services available to adult students and also benefited their respective organizations. Adult education providers and workforce partners found that:

- 1. Education and employment services need to be contextualized and customized to the needs of immigrants and refugees with a wide range of formal education.** One of the factors that distinguishes groups of language learners, and around which English programs need to differentiate instruction, is an immigrant’s level of formal education. In contrast with earlier waves of immigrants, over one quarter of today’s newcomers are college-educated in their home countries (National Academy of Sciences, 2015). Highly-educated language learners need instruction focused on the academic or career-related language that prepares them for higher education and training, recertification, or jobs in their field. Learners with more limited schooling need a different set of supports that enable them to step onto a career pathway that provides on-ramps to credential-bearing job training and a broader range of jobs (Wrigley, et al., 2003; National Research Council, 2012).

Focused on college-educated immigrants and refugees, **Global Talent Idaho (GTI)**:

- Partners with adult education programs to offer accelerated academic and sector-specific English classes. These programs supplement their general ESL classes with independent, self-paced activities to increase the intensity of instruction, and with new courses on English for Professional Purposes.
- Helps immigrants prepare for a U.S. job search. Job seekers first complete an online course in navigating a professional job search. This is followed by a “career summit” where the lessons that were learned online are practiced with local professionals through mock interviews and networking. Job seekers practice how to describe their skills, experience, and ambitions in a way that is culturally appropriate and resonates with U.S. employers.
- Provides intensive case management to help job seekers understand the employment landscape for their field, explore ways to address any skill gaps, complete a professional resume, and practice for specific interviews. In addition, all interested job seekers are matched with a mentor who has local knowledge and experience. In the target professions, GTI also facilitates a peer support group, where job seekers compare experiences, exchange resources, and provide mutual encouragement.

Serving immigrants with more limited education, the **We Rhode Island Network** offers a Jobs Club class where immigrant job seekers:

- Are oriented to entry-level employment options in different sectors.
- Receive group and individualized assistance with resume preparation and interview practice.
- Practice the language and digital literacy skills needed for online job searches (researching job openings and completing online applications).
- Go on worksite tours where they hear from Human Resources representatives about workplace supports and expectations, and about the education and training requirements of various jobs.
- Are referred to additional training as appropriate for their interests and work experience.

- 2. Engaging employers requires practical strategies that build long-term relationships as they address employers’ immediate goals.** Collaboration between employers and providers of English language and work-readiness skills achieves several important goals. It enables education programs to develop programming that effectively prepares immigrant job seekers for real jobs, enables employers to better understand the capacity of the newcomer workforce, and supports a system of mutual referrals (companies send job announcements or refer workers for English instruction and education providers refer job candidates to employers).

Networks implement a variety of strategies to build relationships with and keep employers engaged in timely, purposeful activities.

“Be prepared. There is not much room to goof up (when approaching employers). Know what you have to offer and don’t overpromise.”

(Tara Wolfson, Neighbors United)

Global Talent Idaho (GTI):

- Provides information about GTI services and access to its job seeker database to help employers find well-matched job candidates.
- Conducts outreach events such as employer breakfasts that raise employer awareness of immigrant job seekers with professional training and invite discussion of companies’ hiring needs and opportunities.
- Makes small but concrete “asks” of the employers, inviting them to speak to a class, attend a networking event, participate in mock interviews, mentor a job seeker, or be part of a panel discussion about their profession.
- Engages employers and employer-based organizations, such as the local Chamber of Commerce, on an Employer Advisory Council that promotes GTI events, provides internships, volunteers staff time, and seeks GTI’s counsel on refugee employment and workforce diversity.
- Offers media coverage and branding opportunities for businesses through sponsorships, community service projects, and other opportunities for visibility.
- Provided three months of full-time, paid internships at no cost to the employer that gave immigrants work experience and a potential job placement. These internships, funded by an Idaho Department of Labor grant, introduced employers to many qualified refugee job candidates. Eleven of 19 internships resulted in permanent hires at the host company.

The Lancaster County Refugee Coalition:

- Presented to employers and the workforce development board about language acquisition, the range of skills and experience among local refugees, and their desired career pathways.
- Identified where their students worked and met with several of those employers to find out what it takes for English learners to get hired, keep the job, and be promoted within the company.
- Serve as a resource for employers, providing training on how to work with, support, and manage limited-English-proficient employees.

Nawid Mohammad Mousa, a college-educated refugee, at work in Boise.



“English learners need follow-up support to library-offered workshops (on writing cover letters, resumes, etc.) in order to refine their products and build skills.”
(Karisa Tashjian, Providence Public Library)

3. Coordinating services across adult education and workforce development agencies helps build a comprehensive system of supports that connect immigrants and refugees to employment. This coordination relies on strong channels of communication among partners – adult education programs, job training entities, and local one-stop career centers. These partners need to understand each other’s priorities and mandates, and the role that each will play as they work together to evaluate current career pathway services for English language learners and plan for improvements.

The Lancaster County Refugee Coalition:

- Investigated what educational services and related career pathways immigrant students were accessing, what work and career opportunities are available along that pathway, and the English language-specific considerations that need attention in order to access each step along the way.
- Invited the CareerLink (the local one-stop career center) administrator to attend network meetings to describe the CareerLink’s resources and services and to hear about the challenges facing refugee clients.
- Met at the CareerLink so that network members could listen to the needs of employers and tour the programs and services available for job seekers.
- Invited CareerLink staff to provide input on the strategic plan of the adult education provider, Intermediate Unit 13 (IU13).
- Collaborated in stationing an IU13 adult education transitions counselor at the CareerLink to assist English language learners in applying and qualifying for training, and to assess the language supports needed in training program classes. The IU13 and CareerLink contracted for an exchange of services whereby the CareerLink provides job readiness training for adult education students and IU13 provides math and reading classes for the CareerLink clients.
- Began planning with local job training providers to collaboratively develop integrated, short-term, certificate trainings for welding, tow-motor operation, warehouse work, and Certified Nursing Assistants.
- Participated in local workforce development board-led planning for adult education and workforce partners to implement joint orientations for job seekers who would then be referred to the appropriate education or training services.

4. Collaboration builds awareness of the role adult education plays in immigrant integration and increases access to funding. Public and private funders are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of coordinated networks, which gives such networks a competitive edge over single organizations. Collaboration with employers, one-stops, and training providers demonstrates to funders the role and value of adult education partners. The three networks featured here were able to leverage their network strength to increase the visibility of adult education and secure additional funding and support for their efforts.

Neighbors United focused its collaboration specifically on immigrant professionals in order to compete successfully for a National Emergency Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor that resulted in a \$320,000 subcontract over two years. This funding names foreign-trained, dislocated workers as one of three priority job seeker groups, which enabled Global Talent Idaho to expand its employment services and fund full-time internships.

The **We Rhode Island Network (WeRIN)** sponsored a series of workshops to rally adult education and workforce development providers around the common message that adult learners are an important asset to the Rhode Island workforce. This launched an ongoing collaboration with the Rhode Island Governor’s Workforce Board that is likely to lead to new workforce education partnerships.

In Lancaster, the adult education programs in the **Lancaster County Refugee Coalition (LCRC)** are engaged in continuous education and relationship building with local workforce partners. Their commitment to long-term collaboration has yielded contracts for workplace classes, management coaching, and support services for immigrant clients of the one-stop career center.

The Networks for Integrating New Americas initiative was led by World Education and its partners: Community Science, IMPRINT, National Partnership for New Americans, Network Impact, Inc., and Welcoming America. See the report on [lessons learned](#) from the initiative and related project resources, such as webinars and additional fact sheets, at www.worlded.org/us.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

STRATEGY	EXAMPLES
Reach out to individual employers, Chambers of Commerce, business and trade associations, and workforce development boards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate what the adult education program does, what services are available. • Discuss skills needed for particular jobs. • Communicate the strengths and capacities of immigrant workers. • Make direct presentations of candidates to hiring managers. • Educate employers about how to evaluate foreign degrees and how to elicit relevant experience from an interview or resume. • Educate employers about unconscious bias in the hiring process and how to address it.
Solicit employer input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite input on curriculum and work-related teaching materials. • Invite input on program (or network) strategic plans. • Organize an employer advisory council. • Cultivate executive champions.
Introduce job seekers to the workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize worksite visits with HR manager talks. • Negotiate job shadowing and internships.
Recruit employers to volunteer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize mock interviews. • Secure professional mentoring in target professions. • Provide networking practice.
Build collaborations with American Job Centers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-train students with job center staff. • Have job center and adult education staff train each other. • Co-locate classes and/or transition counselors at the job center.
Recognize employers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize appreciation events and give awards. • Recognize employers in newsletters and other communications that reach the wider community and boost their reputation.

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